One copy per person

THE Rider News

THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF THE RIDER COMMUNITY SINCE 1930

Vol. 94, No. 15 | Wednesday, February 21, 2024 | theridernews.com

Students host candidates after Rebovich debate controversy

Jay Roberson/The Rider News

Attendees support Senate candidates **Lawrence Hamm** and **Patricia Campos-Medina** despite their absence from the debate.

By **Jake Tiger**

As part of the university's Black History Month program, an anti-voter-suppression discussion took place in Daly Dining Hall's Mercer Room on Feb. 18, serving as a response to a Rider-sponsored debate not featuring U.S. Senate candidates Patricia Campos-Medina and Lawrence Hamm.

The debate, which occurred just after the anti-voter-suppression event, was the first New Jersey Senate debate and was between Rep. Andy Kim and New Jersey First Lady Tammy Murphy, who are the leading candidates for Senate in the New Jersey Democratic primary election, according to recent polls.

Despite being candidates in the same Senate race, Hamm and Campos-Medina, who are Black and Latina, respectively, could not participate in the debate because they failed to meet certain criteria established by the debate's organizers, one of whom was Rider's Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics.

As candidates representing New Jersey's Black and Latino communities, Hamm and Campos-Medina argued that their "exclusion" from the debate and the strict qualification criteria were emblematic of America's longstanding problem with voter suppression in minority groups.

Voter suppression is the act of discouraging or preventing certain groups of people from voting in order to alter the outcome of an election.

"Our communities need to see us," said Campos-Medina during the event. "We need to energize our [voter] base. The Democratic Party cannot win without Black and Latino working-class voters, yet they never let us choose our candidates."

The event lasted from 6:30-7:30 p.m., and it was organized by Hamm and Campos-Medina's campaign teams in collaboration with Rider's Black Student Union, Rider's NAACP chapter and Rider Latinas Unidas.

"We really need candidates who represent who we are," said Student Government Association President Naa'san Carr, who is the president of Rider's NAACP chapter and a member of BSU.

The debate that followed, sponsored by the Rebovich Institute, the New Jersey Globe and On New Jersey, was a virtual debate between Kim and Murphy that took place from 8-9:30 p.m., just after the anti-voter-suppression event.

Multiple Rider students posed questions to the candidates during the debate via pre-recorded videos.

One student asked from her dorm room, "What can you do in the Senate to help students and graduates with crippling student debt?"

Candidate qualification criteria

The three sponsors were heavily involved in organizing the debate, which included outlining the controversial candidate qualification criteria.

Other Senate candidates, like Campos-Medina and Hamm, could have qualified for the debate if they met certain requirements before the debate's qualification deadline, but no other candidates were added.

One of the ways candidates could qualify was by raising at least $750,000 for their campaign and receiving "a public endorsement by Democratic elected officials and municipal/county party chairs from at least five municipalities," according to the New Jersey Globe.

According to Micah Rasmussen, the director of the Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics and a moderator for the debate, these types of qualifications are common at all levels of politics, and when it comes to planning a debate, the choice between having every candidate participate or only the two most popular ones is "always a tough call."

"We have to be realistic here: most voters are thinking about, 'Am I voting for Andy Kim, or am I voting for Tammy Murphy?'" said Rasmussen. "The choices that [voters] are facing at this point are probably not Larry [Hamm] and Patricia [Campos-Medina]."

There are obvious benefits to hearing every candidate's perspective on issues, but Rasmussen pointed out that having a head-to-head discussion makes it easier for the audience to compare and contrast the two candidates, while a more "dispersed" debate makes those comparisons harder and gives each candidate less time to explain their position.

"We were looking for a debate between the competitive candidates in the race," said Rasmussen. "We were not looking for a debate in which we were giving exposure to candidates who might eventually be competitive … It was a question of hearing from the candidates who most voters were considering at that point."

Hamm and Campos-Medina claimed that financial barriers like the $750,000 fundraising requirement are a threat to democracy because they limit the number of people who can be viable in an election and further strengthen the belief that money equates to power in America.

"My feeling is that $750,000 is the minimum that it's going to take to get your message out," said Rasmussen. "Whether we like it or not, if they don't have the ability to drive their message, then they're not going to win their race."

Campos-Medina, who had only been campaigning for about six weeks when she visited Rider, said she should not be punished for not having the time or wealthy connections that other candidates may have.

"Money makes a campaign easy, and this is the problem in New Jersey politics," said Campos-Medina.

Kim, who has been a New Jersey representative for six years, and Murphy, the wife of New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, were both personally invited to the debate, according to the New Jersey Globe.

During the debate later that night, Tammy Murphy said, "The amount of money in politics is really disgusting. I will be the first to say that."

Candidates also had a chance to qualify for the debate by receiving at least 10% of votes at the Feb. 10 Monmouth County Democratic convention, but no candidates beside Kim and Tammy Murphy met the threshold.

SEE BSU PAGE 2

Jay Roberson/The Rider News

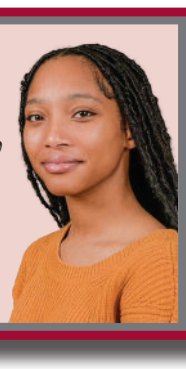
Lawrence Hamm (left) and **Patricia Campos-Medina** (right) talk voter suppression.

INSIDE

RIDER LOOKS TO COMPETE
Softball has a new pack of Broncs eager to turn heads.
PAGE 12

POWER OF PERSISTENCE
Students Press Freedom Day celebrates the dedication of student journalists.
PAGE 8

SHINING LIGHT ON BLACK EXCELLENCE
Corrine Walton-Macaulay discusses her experience as a STEM major.
PAGE 7



SECURITY BRIEFS

BY MADISON LEWIS

Switlik's stolen signs

Readily replaced. On Feb. 14 at 9:11 a.m., Public Safety was dispatched to Switlik Residence Hall, for the report of damaged exit signs. When they arrived on location, Public Safety met with facilities management staff who discovered that multiple exit signs were damaged and stolen throughout the building. Public Safety worked with facilities management to identify that 13 signs had been damaged or stolen and replaced them. Public Safety was investigating.

Unauthorized off-roader

Damaging drive. On Feb. 19 at 11:13 a.m., Public Safety was in the Fine Arts Lot when they observed a vehicle drive through the Fine Arts gate arm and into the lot. The officer identified the driver and they were not authorized to be in the lot. The matter was referred to the Office of Community Standards.

-Information provided by Public Safety Capt. Matthew Babcock

CORRECTIONS

In the print and original digital version of The Rider News, an article incorrectly described a billboard featuring Israeli hostages with the hashtag #BringThemHome. The Rider News regrets the error.

In the print and original digital version of The Rider News, an article incorrectly stated the date for 107.7 The Bronc's Eggscellent Egg Hunt, which will be held on March 26, 2024. The Rider News regrets this error.

What 2024 enrollment looks like after FAFSA setbacks

By **Grace Bertrand**

IN light of the U.S. Department of Education's launch of a revamped Free Application for Federal Student Aid in December 2023, technical glitches and issues have rolled out, causing university student enrollment across the nation to suffer.

FAFSA setbacks

Rider Vice President of Enrollment Management Drew Aromando announced in expectation for fall 2024 that deposits from current undergraduates are down 24%. This trend is occurring for colleges all across the nation. The question is: why?

Promising an easier way for students to access additional money for college, the new FAFSA has been anything but.

Many families who have completed the FAFSA have reported inaccurate aid estimates due to the organization's incorrect formula and delayed data processing.

This data is how schools like Rider calculate how much financial aid they can offer to families paying for schooling.

After many delays, the USDOE released a statement announcing that financial aid offices will not receive FAFSA data until at least mid-March, with families not receiving financial aid packages until at least April.

According to Assistant Vice President for Academic Success and Student Financial Services James Conlon, it takes about six weeks just to take the data FAFSA provides and produce award letters for families.

As a result, most schools have waived or extended their deadlines to accommodate for the delayed financial aid results.

Rider has extended its FAFSA filing priority deadline to March 1 and temporarily suspended its May 1 deposit deadline, waiting to set a new one until they have more information.

"It's sort of a give and take between, 'We're gonna be here for you' and 'No matter what we're gonna help you navigate through the process, but we still have to hold you to timelines,'" Aromando explained.

2024 enrollment

Despite the FAFSA setbacks, Aromando reported that new-student recruitment has remained strong, with the final January term enrollment achieving 103.6% of the university's Path Forward Plan, a multiyear initiative intended to pull Rider out of its financial crisis.

Turning to the upcoming school year, undergraduate applications have jumped 13%, equaling 1,042 applications as of Feb. 9. Admitted students are also up 11%, totaling 610 students.

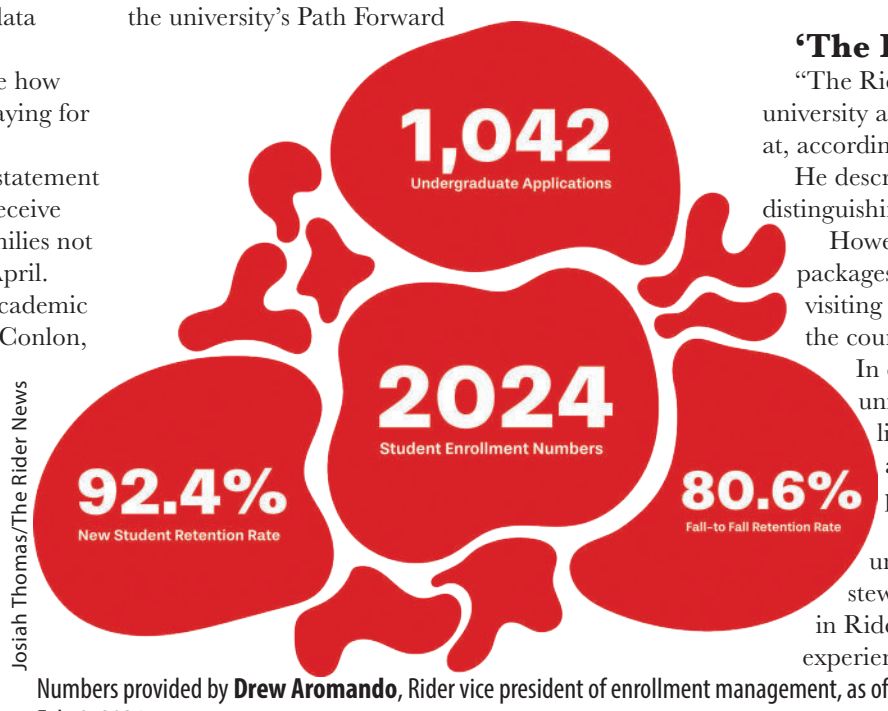
Last semester, in an interview with The Rider News about 2023 enrollment, Aromando reported that Rider's fall-to-fall retention rate was 80.6%, surpassing the university's Path Forward goal of 80.1% and breaking the record for retention rates at Rider.

In the recent fall-to-spring report, the new-student retention rate is on target at 92.4%, aiming at a goal of 92.5%.

This spring semester, student enrollment was close to meeting its goal by 99.3%, with graduate enrollment exceeding its goal and undergraduate enrollment falling just short of it.

Looking ahead to what the fall-to-fall retention rate will look like for next year, Aromando and Conlon are hopeful that Rider will remain on par with its goal.

In an interview with The Rider News last month, Rider President Gregory Dell'Omo disclosed: "It's still early in the process for next year's freshman class, first-year students – freshmen and transfers – but all the indicators right now are very strong."



Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

Numbers provided by **Drew Aromando**, Rider vice president of enrollment management, as of Feb. 9, 2024.

'The Rider experience'

"The Rider experience" is what undoubtedly sets the university apart from other colleges students are looking at, according to Aromando.

He described it as the "very strong and unique distinguishing selling point from other institutions."

However, not having access to financial aid packages has greatly impacted students' interest in visiting and attending any college campuses across the country, including Rider.

In efforts to attract more students, the university has encouraged student life events like Admitted Students Days, open houses and Financial Aid Fridays as a means of persuading them to enroll.

"We really truly need the rest of the university to be good partners and good stewards and keep those families interested in Rider while we navigate this challenging experience for them," Aromando said.

BSU, NAACP plan to address voter suppression in letter to state

CONT'D FROM PAGE 1

The convention's voting results were as follows: Kim with 57%, Murphy with 39% and Campos-Medina with 4%. Hamm was on the ballot, but withdrew shortly before voting began and received zero votes, according to the New Jersey Globe.

While the two candidates did not meet the 10% threshold, Campos-Medina argued that simply having them in the debate could have gotten Black and brown people excited about voting, potentially boosting their numbers to the point of being a viable candidate.

"Do not allow them to tell you that there is no choice other than Andy Kim and Tammy Murphy," said Campos-Medina. "There are two more choices in this election."

'Very undemocratic'

During the discussion, Hamm and Campos-Medina said there was hypocrisy in excluding them from the debate, as politicians often vie for the votes of Black and brown people, while simultaneously overlooking candidates from those communities.

According to Hamm, voter suppression dates back to the founding of the U.S., when only white, property-owning men could vote.

Campos-Medina mentioned that her mother went to a polling center to vote in the 2016 presidential election but was turned away because of her ethnicity and "broken English," despite being a registered voter and having lived in the U.S. for over 30 years.

Hamm claimed that many voter-registration procedures can be considered forms of voter suppression because they make it more difficult for people to become voters, specifically in Black and brown communities that lack voter education and resources.

"All of that is designed to keep you from voting," said Hamm. "If we ever get a situation where the masses of people could freely vote … [the people in power] would be swept away. … Our system, which is called 'democratic,' is very undemocratic."

Hamm suggested that implementing same-day registration would be a feasible step toward ending voter suppression, meaning people could show up to polling sites, register and vote all at once without the extra steps and deadlines. Currently, voters must register at least 21 days prior to elections.

According to a 2021 study from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, same-day registration can increase Black and Latino voter turnout by as much as 17%.

Hamm specifically encouraged Rider's NAACP chapter and BSU to fight for same-day registration.

"We're going to do what Mr. Hamm said and send a letter to our state," said Carr, who moderated the discussion.

New Jersey's primary elections will take place on June 4, where parties will select a candidate to run for Senate in the general election on Nov. 5.

Voter registration resources can be found on Rider's website by searching, "NJ Voter Registration."

NAACP President **Naa'san Carr** moderates the anti-voter-suppression discussion.

Jay Roberson/The Rider News

Counseling center creates space for underrepresented students

By **Julia Train**

IN July, Rider received a $200,000 state-funded grant to use toward mental health resources for underrepresented students. During the fall semester, the counseling center began creating ways to use the funds to support those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community, athletes and students with autism.

This semester, the Rider community gets to see those initiatives in action.

In an Oct. 13 interview with The Rider News, Anissa Moody, interim director of the counseling center and staff psychologist, mentioned that the center has teamed up with local partners and added support groups, mentors and counselors.

Along with a partnership with The PRIDE Center in Ewing, specialized counselors, a peer education program, new and renamed support groups and a revamped sensory room were all added to the counseling center's offerings.

While larger colleges, like Rutgers, have a team of therapists who specialize in specific topics, smaller schools like Rider typically don't.

"It's not possible for one therapist to be trained in every single possible need that somebody could have," said Jonah Friedman, the new counselor specializing LGBTQIA+ related issues. "Our goal is to get people the services that they deserve and that they need, and we can do that much better when we have these community partnerships where you can get that specific tailored treatment."

New counselors

Friedman, who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community himself, is one of the specialized counselors added through the grant.

According to 2022 research conducted and published by The Trevor Project, a nonprofit organization that focuses on suicide prevention in the LGBTQIA+ community, "LGBTQ college students with access to mental health services through their college had 84% lower odds of attempting suicide in the past year compared to LGBTQ college students without access."

Photo courtesy of Kristen Kreutzberg

Four of the five PEPers (from left to right) **Jasmine Paredes, Kirsten Mackney, Zyon Howell and Jeremy Saviano.** Missing from the photo is **Kayla Ailey.**

Along with being a counselor, Friedman also hosts a support group, Roy. G. Biv, for queer students every Friday at 11 a.m. in the counseling center.

According to Friedman, the purpose is "to provide community and support and information for queer students in a safe space."

Along with Friedman, a trauma counselor was hired for Womanspace, who will be on campus for several hours a week to provide specific trauma therapy for students who have experienced sexual assault or domestic violence.

The PEPers

The Peer Education Program, also referred to as the "PEP team" or "PEPers," is made up of five undergraduate students who are interested in a career in psychology in one way or another. They're trained to work with the outreach team to connect with their peers and provide support in a way that graduate assistants or counselors might not be able to.

Within five weeks of the program, Moody said the counseling center has already seen an uptick in student engagement.

She said there's less of a stigma around meeting up with a fellow student to talk about what's going on in their life than going to the counseling center.

Friedman added that the program helps the counseling center become more accessible for students.

"Part of that is having undergrads, or PEPers, that are just able to relate and integrate into these events in a way that is supplemental to what we're already doing," said Friedman.

He said that the goal is to meet "Students where they are," meaning that everyone is at a different place in their lives and therapeutic journeys, so therapists don't want to push their patients to open up about topics they're not ready to discuss.

At the end of the fall semester, interviews were conducted to fill the team. Over winter break, the PEPers made a commitment to participate in a training course from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Throughout January, they learned about a wide range of topics relevant to college campuses that may arise, such as confidentiality, health promotion and primary prevention.

Moody said that the grant has allowed the counseling center to give students more time and more specific help in order to help them heal and come to know themselves.

"One of the things that I love about Rider [is] we have such an open and welcoming kind of community. … Students can be themselves," Moody said. "We really want students to know that now we have more specialized services to support them."

Black Business Expo returns for third year

By **Benjamin Shinault**

FOR the third consecutive year, the Black Student Union hosted a Black Business Expo to help promote locally-owned Black businesses. On Feb. 20, Rider welcomed students and potential customers to take a stroll through the expo to see the various businesses.

"This is their chance to bring in some college kids and expose them to their businesses and it's good for us to work with our community," said Student Government Association President Naa'san Carr as students filed into the Student Recreation Center.

The event was hosted by the Black Student Union from 4-7 p.m., and while students wrapped up their late afternoon classes, they were able to stop by and take a gander at Black-owned businesses displayed in the Student Recreation Center's atrium.

Within the SRC, local Black-owned businesses and their owners sat at tables with their products displayed. The brands featured professional headshots, handmade accessories as well as personalized clothing and products.

One business that was featured is run by two Rider freshmen: data analytics major Jaliah James and film and television major Adama Dieme. Displayed on their table were homemade beaded bracelets and other assorted items.

"In Africa, it is very popular to wear these waist beads to ground and discipline you, and as stylish as it is, it's just as spiritual and cultural as well," Dieme said. "Bringing that into this community and into this space … it's extremely important because it represents us as a people."

James and Dieme discussed both of their backgrounds and how they combined their cultures to build one conjoined accessory.

"Me and Jaliah come from different backgrounds. I'm African from West Africa-Senegal, and she is African American, so we blended our cultures and our similarities and came up with a beautiful jewelry line and something that is shared in both of our communities," Dieme explained.

A good portion of the businesses that were on display were owned locally. The hope for the expo, held annually by the BSU, was for the university to give Black businesses a platform. "I'm grateful for every opportunity to go out there and spread the word, spread awareness around Black and brown culture in any shape or form," said Dante Alston, the creator of Just Black Productions, a visual production company. "Being able to do it here at Rider is a full circle moment."

Gayle Bruney, the owner of HealNGo, a hair growth and skin care company, also touched on what it meant to come to Rider and gain some more traction.

"I love it, I'm very excited about this … I've been coming to Rider every year since, so I really appreciate it and it's a great event," Bruney said with a smile.

The expo brings exposure to these small Black-owned businesses, but Carr thinks that it can be taken to another level.

"I would love to do this on a bigger scale sometime during the year and just have small businesses come and have an expo where we just bring our community here on campus," Carr said. According to Carr, this event would connect the Rider community with small businesses where they can make profits and students can get products.

The next Black History Month programming event will be a Social Justice and Equity Symposium about prison, purpose and policing held by the BSU and the Equal Opportunity Program on Feb. 21 in the Mercer Room in Daly Dining Hall from 6-8 p.m.

Maggie Kleiner/ The Rider News

Adama Dieme (left) and **Jaliah James** (right) display their handmade jewelry.

‘What sets him apart’: Druckenbrod’s journey to Rider

By **Caroline Haviland**

WITHIN his office on the third floor of the Science and Technology Center, which feels more like a walk-in closet, professor Daniel Druckenbrod surrounds himself with his environmental studies: a painting above his desk showing the seasonal progression of different native trees and his computer screen monitoring the forecast for a windy February morning.

From an outside perspective, some might say work is his life, but studying the environment captivated Druckenbrod long before it became his job.

Growing up in rural Pennsylvania instilled in Druckenbrod, a professor of earth and chemical sciences, a lifelong interest in observing nature from a young age.

“I always enjoyed being outdoors, playing in the woods and going on hikes,” said Druckenbrod. “It led me to recognize that a lot of the explanation for why our environment looks the way it does has to do with our history of human use of the environment, which led me to ask myself scientific questions.”

He brought this curiosity to the University of Notre Dame as an undergraduate in biological sciences, where he conducted research on wetlands in Wisconsin. Afterward, he received a master’s degree and Ph.D. in environmental sciences from the University of Virginia.

Following his education, Druckenbrod became a research associate in the environmental sciences division of Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, one of the secret cities where atomic weapons were developed during World War II.

The production of these weapons in the 1940s led to serious environmental pollution, and the laboratory remains a preeminent research institution for environmental scientists.

After working at Sweet Briar College and Longwood University, Druckenbrod came to Rider in 2009.

“I was drawn to Rider because we have an environmental sciences major, plus I had the opportunity to come here and work with students in small class settings,” said Druckenbrod. “Especially in an environment where I can continue to do my research and do research with students is really an appeal.”

Photo courtesy of Matt Reeves

Students in **Daniel Druckenbrod’s** (second from right) Environmental Fiel Methods and Data Analysis class spend time collecting data at James Madison’s Montpelier plantation.

A hands-on experience

Throughout his time at Rider, Druckenbrod has prioritized hands-on learning in both nature and the classroom.

He recently arranged a class trip to James Madison’s Montepelier plantation to practice research skills on a newly discovered burial ground of enslaved people. The surrounding land of these well-known grounds have been studied less, however, which motivates Druckenbrod to learn more.

“Studying these sites that are important to U.S. history, like James Madison’s Montpelier and Washington’s Mount Vernon, has been a very fortunate experience for me,” said Druckenbrod. “But the landscapes around them have not been studied, which is the next layer. They tell the complete story for not only the environment but for those who worked on the environment.”

Through a partnership with facilities and the Office of Sustainability Management, Druckenbrod has been able to create walking trails to let his students study the woods on Rider’s campus. This allows him to show his classes tree rings, his main source of research since they display a tree’s age and how an environment has changed over time.

His environmental science students also get the opportunity in his lab to study tree rings from the Himalayas through a grant with Columbia University, where they get to reanalyze tree rings from thousands of years ago.

“Hands-on experience is great for students because it’s really the best way to learn whether you’re in a geology class or getting to do tree ring research,” said Druckenbrod. “There is nothing better than getting the experience and learning it for yourself.”

A ‘down to earth kind of guy’

Reed Schwimmer, a professor of earth and chemical sciences, has worked with Druckenbrod at Rider since his arrival in 2009. The pair, as well as the rest of the department, has worked closely together.

“He’s really good at involving students in his research, and I can’t overemphasize how important that is. I know the students enjoy it,” said Schwimmer. “That’s what sets him apart from other professors on campus.”

Last semester, the marine science and geology major fell victim to major departmental cuts across the university. The Department of Earth and Chemical Sciences had to reconstitute their courses and add new concentrations to their remaining majors.

Druckenbrod helped spearhead the vision of providing an environmental science focus. His passion for the job overlaps into his personal life, as Druckenbrod’s spare time is filled with simple joys like still going on hikes to admire the nature around him.

Schwimmer summarized Druckenbrod: “He is just a very down to earth kind of guy.”

Game design lab keeps up with evolving technology

By **Hannah Newman**

WHEN walking into the game design classroom on the second floor of Fine Arts, new, rainbow-radiating PC setups crowd the desks, much different than the older Macs there last semester.

Over winter break, Rider’s Office of Information Technologies installed state-of-the-art computers built for the creation of virtual worlds, each of the 19 towers costing the university $64,000, according to Vice President for Facilities and University Operations Mike Reca.

“To keep up with game design, we have to keep up with technology,” said Reca.

The lab inhabits not only game designers, but film and television majors and other multimedia students, with a plethora of classes offered in the space.

Faculty found that the old Mac desktops took too long to render, or create student projects, according to Chief Information Officer Moe Rahman.

As a result, the administration focused on having the proper technology for what they need to complete in the classroom.

Rahman and Wil Lindsay, program director of game and interactive media design, decided to look into improving the program that was newly launched at Rider in 2019.

“We started looking at it and realized that the Mac machines were not fit for the kind of tasks that [game design majors] are asked to do,” said Rahman.

Rahman commended OIT’s resource manager, who he explained was instrumental in the effort. He researched what other universities are doing for their game design lab and what platforms they’re using, which was when it was recommended to move to PC instead of Mac.

“We took a test route rather than trying to invent something that doesn’t need to be invented,” said Rahman.

The new machines required a lot more power than the Macs, which meant that the lab needed an electrical update.

The PCs took up all of the room’s electrical output, leaving no space for students to charge their phones and laptops, according to Reca.

“We had to increase the electrical capacity in a number of amps and put a subpanel in which is a panel run from the main panel in the building just for the space [the lab] itself,” said Reca. “This was an enhancement of not only the equipment but of the capacity of power to better serve the students.”

According to professor Stephen Gonzalez, Macs were never built with game design in mind, which is why making games for platforms like Nintendo and PlayStation is easiest on PC.

“Even when Steve Jobs was creating Apple, he never really liked video games. That culture still exists which is why when you go on a Mac there aren’t really games on it, a lot of them are limited to the iOS software,” said Gonzalez.

The improvements toward game design education has already enhanced the student experience, according to sophomore game design major Alexander Falcone.

“The computers allow us to use programs that are actually used in the industry,” said Falcone. “We can use software that is just more powerful, even some that are used in Xbox.”

Maggie Kleiner/ The Rider News

When students pass the game design lab, they can see colorful rings on the backs of the new monitors.

Maggie Kleiner/ The Rider News

New PC desktops replace the Macs in Fine Arts 249.

Freshman class performs "Curtain Up: Arrival"

By **Tristan E. M. Leach**

WAITING excitedly in the wings of the stage, the first-year musical theater majors held their props. As the lights went down and the audience cheered, the feeling of anticipation ran through the theater. The piano began to play and in a rush of excitement the cast made their way to the stage. It was time for "Curtain Up: Arrival."

On Feb. 17 and 18, the freshman class of the musical theater department presented a showcase of their best work. Directed by Louis F. Goldberg, an adjunct assistant professor, and choreographed by several current Rider students, the show featured powerful duets and electric dance performances that evoked joy and passion.

The showcase is designed to give first-year students an opportunity on stage, and the most recent showing was the department's third consecutive performance.

"We decided to offer our first-year students and our second-year students an opportunity to have a showcase of their own," said Goldberg. "They would have some additional performing opportunities early in their careers."

So far the themes of this showcase have been "Rebirth" in 2022, "Momentum" in 2023 and this year's theme "Curtain Up: Arrival." Each theme correlates to the class that got to put on the showcase.

"Rebirth" represented the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of live performances. "Momentum" represented moving forward and allowing for the rebuilding of skills.

"Curtain Up: Arrival" represented the returning to the type of normalcy that existed before COVID-19 and the first-year students arriving at a new chapter in their lives. This was evident in the song choices for this year's performance.

The opening number, "Just Arrived" from the musical Copacabana, featured the ensemble cast sporting Rider merch and using carry-on suitcases as props. Though the stage was jam packed, each performer made the number their own. From personal acting choices to exaggerated dance moves, there was no shortage of talent.

Both acts of the show consisted of group numbers and featured song and dance with soloists being highlighted as their peers danced behind them.

Lincoln Funderburk, a senior musical theater major, was an assistant choreographer for the show. Funderburk worked with two alumni, Catrina Contini '21 and John Viggiano '22, and other current musical theater majors to choreograph. Funderburk was the choreographer for the "Dreamgirls" number, "I Am Changing."

Funderburk said, "I had my hands on, giving notes about 'this leg here and this arm here,' everything trickled out throughout."

Funderburk assisted in cleaning up other numbers that were also guest choreographed. This not only gave Funderburk an opportunity to collaborate with other dancers, but also allowed first-year students to learn from an upperclassman.

As the show carried on, it was clear that the passion and excitement for this new chapter was overwhelming amongst the performers. Dancers whooped and cheered and singers smiled fondly at each other as their peers showed off their talents.

Each student was given the opportunity to showcase their talents. Goldberg ensured that the student-dancers got to dance and the student-singers got to sing. It was important to Goldberg that every performer got their moment in the spotlight.

To end the show, students performed "This is Me," from the movie, "The Greatest Showman." The inspirational song had the audience cheering, applauding and dancing in their seats. At the end of the song, the cast struck their final poses and applause filled the theater. Each student was given a chance to take an individual bow, a nod to the power of their performance.

Photo courtesy of Gavin Wright

Freshmen perform the opening number "Just Arrived" from Copacabana.

Photo courtesy of Gavin Wright

The cast of the first-year showcase "Curtain Up: Arrival" strikes a pose as they sing about their dream of being on Broadway.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY 22 — **Thursday**
Cavalla Room
11 a.m.
Accounting and Finance Career Fair

FEBRUARY 22 — **Thursday**
Alumni gym
7 p.m.
Rider Women's Basketball vs. Saint Peter's

FEBRUARY 23 — **Friday**
Yvonne Theater
7:30 p.m.
Rider Theater Presents 'Radium Girls'

FEBRUARY 25 — **Sunday**
Cavalla Room
5 p.m.
Gospel Fest

Tristan E. M. Leach and Eric Buckwalter/The Rider News

Photo courtesy of Dwight Pulliam

Current sophomores of the Educational Opportunity Program pose for a photo in the Cavalla Room.

The evolving empowerment of EOP

By **Hannah Newman**

THE vision of a college education is clear for some students; for others, the lack of structure, financial stability and lifestyle adversity create static between that vision and reality.

The Educational Opportunity Program has made that vision possible for students who face financial roadblocks.

In addition to financial assistance, the program offers structure in the form of mentorship, leadership and academic guidance for all students in the program.

One student in the program is sophomore criminal justice major Jasmine Garcia, who said she wouldn't be at Rider without it.

"My life was a constant struggle in a crowded home where education was vital but financially burdensome," said Garcia. "They stick up for you, they're there for you and they want to succeed."

Applying for EOP is an option on Rider's admission application. Those that are selected begin their journey almost immediately, transitioning into a structured schedule with mentors that prepare them for their upcoming college routine. In 2023, 40 students entered the summer program.

The Director of EOP, Reggie Walker '05, is not only a Rider alum, but a former EOP student himself.

"It's a life changing student support services program," Walker said. "We're providing students with personal and vocational counseling, financial planning and counseling, and help with everything that may occur in their lives."

After having been accepted into the EOP, students attend a mandatory six week summer program where students take two courses: Race Class and Gender, along with Ethics. Students start their classes at 8 a.m. and are provided with other educational benefits like workshops and guest speakers.

In addition to starting their first semester with six credits, EOP students find support in each other.

"We bring back former EOP students who share their testimonies along with additional speakers and empowerment workshops where students open up and share [their stories]," said Walker. "By the time they leave the summer program, they already know that they're not alone in whatever it is that they're dealing with."

After students complete the summer program, they are assigned responsibilities depending on their grade level. The program requires students to meet with their assigned counselors for check-ins, complete study hours in the EOP office and participate in EOP-led leadership workshops throughout the year.

Students not only develop themselves as young leaders, but are also given the chance to plan toward their future.

Walker, a Trenton, New Jersey, native who received all three of his degrees from Rider, explained that college was not a possibility for his family prior to discovering EOP.

"I'm a walking billboard for the program. I took advantage of the opportunity and experienced that transformation for myself," said Walker. "The resources provided showed me that the world is bigger than the seven square mile town that I grew up in."

Sophomore data analytics major Dwight Pulliam shared a similar story. Pulliam, who is from Camden, New Jersey, worked hard before college to secure his bright future.

"Before college I would just repeatedly go to work and come home trying to make money to keep myself happy. I didn't want to be involved in all the negative things going on in the streets," said Pulliam. "EOP gave me people that wanted to see me be the best version of myself and prepare students for the real world."

Not only did Walker meet his wife during his time in EOP, he described the culture of the program as a family away from home.

"These were the people who weren't afraid to tell me to straighten up and sharpen up and get it together," said Walker.

After graduation, EOP students are recognized as alumni in the EOP Hall of Fame every year, where they share their stories, experience and accomplishments.

"When everyone that goes up to accept an award and share their testimony, there's never a dry eye in the room," said Walker.

Walker said that so many students have been forever grateful for the program— from providing housing if a student was homeless, to EOP coaches teaching them how to drive if needed.

Through the efforts of the program and alumni that work with incoming students, people from all different backgrounds and circumstances are able to find the missing pieces to their lives.

When asked to give incoming students a word of advice regarding the program, Garcia said: "Fight for your education, there's always something you can do. Fight for what you think you're worth."

Photo courtesy of Dontae Miller

Junior sports media major **Dontae Miller** is a student of EOP.

Shining Light on Black Excellence: Corrine Walton-Macaulay

By **Madison Lewis**

EVEN though senior health science major Corrine Walton-Macaulay called herself a "pretty shy person," she flourishes when lending a voice to underserved communities on and off campus.

As she is currently the vice president of the Black Student Union and the treasurer of the Rider African Student Association she is anything but shy about being an activist and leader.

Healthcare aspirations

She pursued healthcare as a career with the hopes of working closely with minority groups and providing aid along with education.

"I see myself working with people from underrepresented communities. … Being able to navigate spaces where people … face discrimination on a regular basis or they don't have access to certain healthcare," said Walton-Macaulay. "Or they are not too knowledgeable about what might be the best route to keep themselves healthy."

Walton-Macaulay relayed that since third grade, she knew she was a runner. She was always very active, taking on a multitude of injuries.

Despite her mother being in higher education and in the Oregon judicial system, and her father being a professor and civil engineer, she envisioned herself tending to wounds in the same way healthcare professionals did for her in the past.

Walton-Macaulay fostered her interest last January through an observation-based internship with Capital Health, where she shadowed nurses on a 12-hour shift.

Walton-Macaulay's resume is littered with leadership positions and volunteer work related to her major, with another being the student director of scholar engagement for Making Connections.

A grant-funded initiative, the Making Connections Program is a partnership with Johnson & Johnson that gives historically marginalized groups financial and networking opportunities.

Her role entails designing, planning and organizing activities and events. She engages students by interacting with them, making meaningful connections and supporting the retention rate of specific educational programs.

Photo courtesy of Corrine Walton-Macaulay

Corrine Walton-Macaulay is a senior health science major who hopes to one day work with underrepresented communities.

On-campus contributor

Walton-Macaulay's advocacy for historically oppressed groups translates to her leadership positions at Rider.

"I am willing to get involved wherever I am needed, especially when the work has to do with supporting people that I see in myself," Walton-Macaulay said.

Walton-Macaulay has organized culturally significant events held on campus, one being last February's "Taste of Africa Banquet," an invite-only celebration that featured samples of cuisine from several African cultures and education on the diaspora of African people.

She also mentioned an upcoming fashion show in the works, which will also be organized by RASA.

On Feb. 1, Walton-Macaulay spoke at Rider's flag raising that marked the beginning of Black History Month.

Every year, the BSU raises a Black Lives Matter flag in front of the Bart Luedeke Center, which remains raised for the entire month of February. The organization also presents speeches incorporating minority perspectives and insightful anecdotes about the significance of Black culture during the annual flag raising.

Speaking to her involvement on campus, Kyle Houser, coordinator of STEM Student Success and Walton-Macaulay's supervisor, was confident in her ability to accomplish her goals and provide exceptional care.

"I know that she is destined for great things when she leaves Rider and graduates," said Houser. "I am looking forward to seeing what those things are."

Rider students can rest assured that they have a magnetic force on campus that is willing to provide a safe space for students of color who need support.

"I have chosen to try and use my experience as a Black woman and as a student here to connect with other students of color," said Walton-Macaulay. "My goal is to be [an] … anchorperson that I wish I had … to be living proof that there are successful Black women [at Rider]."

This article is part of the Shedding Light on Black Excellence series by The Rider News to showcase impactful Black figures on campus during Black History Month.

Photo courtesy of Corrine Walton-Macaulay

Corrine Walton-Macaulay is on several e-boards on campus including the Black Student Union.

Photo courtesy of Corrine Walton-Macaulay

Corrine Walton-Macaulay (right) with J&J scholars at the end of a Making Connections event.

Student Press Freedom Day and why it matters

THE power of persistence is far bigger than we can imagine.

As Student Press Freedom Day celebrates its sixth year under the theme 'Powerfully Persistent,' I reflect on all the work I have done as a journalist during my time in college.

Since I have started at my school newspaper "The Rider News," we have broken stories on some of the most important topics to our campus community: university wrongdoings, student struggles, historical moments and so much more.

How did we do this?

The power of persistence and its role in journalism. I always tell my peers, continue persisting, despite hurdles. Those are where the powerful stories lie.

If it were easy, I say, everyone would do it.

The role of student press at universities is unrecognizable at times. It seeps into our student life and holds the university accountable for what students, just like you and me, are paying for.

However, there are times when its importance is painfully obvious.

College newspapers across the country have had to cover some of the hardest-hitting journalism there is: school shootings, on-campus protests, sex-crime scandals, massive fund mismanagement, the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on higher education and more.

Student journalists do this all while reaping the disadvantages, alongside their peers. They do this while attending school full-time. Many also have jobs.

All that we strive for is accountability amongst our university, and doing that may be some of the hardest work we do in our journalistic careers.

Student press freedom and the Supreme Court

In 1965, Mary Beth Tinker, John Tinker and Chris Eckhardt, three Iowa students, wore armbands to school to protest the Vietnam War.

After their school suspension for wearing the armbands, the students took the district to court with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union. It wasn't until Feb. 24, 1969 when the Supreme Court heard the case after multiple lower court dismissals that it was ruled: students do not shed their constitutional rights, including freedom of speech or expression, when they go to school.

This year's Student Press Freedom Day takes place on Feb. 22, two days before the 55th anniversary of the ruling Tinker v. Des Moines.

However, in 1988, in the Supreme Court ruling Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier, certain student press rights were affected after it was ruled that student expression could be censored "where school officials demonstrated a reasonable educational justification and where their censorship viewpoint was neutral," according to the Student Press Law Center.

Here at Rider, we are relatively lucky with the treatment we receive from our university as student journalists, especially at a private institution.

Other universities, however, have attempted to silence student journalists, even when the community needs the reporting the most.

The oppression of student voices can be incredibly damaging, and is shown throughout history to be a defunct practice.

Here's why you should care: the freedom of the press is one of the most important strongholds in the United States, and student journalists are no exception to that.

In order for others to be free, journalists must also be.

This Student Press Freedom Day, all that I ask for is that student journalists are respected and recognized for their work.

I ask that we be taken seriously, and are given the opportunity to do our job without hurdles that make it increasingly difficult.

I ask that you treat student journalists with kindness, because sometimes, we aren't.

We are first and foremost students — young people gathering information for the greater good of our community, and learning along the way.

Lastly, I ask for all student journalists, and everyone reading, to know their rights — it's the most empowering thing you can do. Advocate for yourself, for your fellow reporters and for your newsroom.

Sometimes, you may be the only one.

Amethyst Martinez
senior journalism major

Rashe Mishra/The Rider News

Student press freedom helps student journalists across the country.

THE Rider News
CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!

THE Rider News
Longstreet House, 2083 Lawrenceville Road, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
©2024 General Meetings: Wednesdays at 4:30 p.m.

Executive Editor
Amethyst Martinez
Managing Editor
Jake Tiger
News Editors
Julia Train
Jay Roberson
Features and Arts & Entertainment Editors
Tristan E. M. Leach
Hannah Newman
Opinion Editor
Felicia Roehm
Sports Editors
Logan K. VanDine
Benjamin Shinault
Photography Editor
Maggie Kleiner
Video Editor
Josiah Thomas
Copy Editors
Asha Burtin
Madison Lewis
Caroline Haviland
Bridget Hoyt
Social Media Editor
Kaitlyn Seawood
Design Manager
Eric Buckwalter
Circulation Manager
Libby D'Orvilliers
Faculty Adviser
Dr. Jackie Incollingo

The Rider News serves as a public forum for student expression and welcomes letters to the editor from all members of the university community. Letters must include the writer's telephone number and email address for verification. Letters that constitute personal attacks on individuals or groups are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters to the editor for length, clarity, accuracy, grammar and libel. Letters must be appropriate in terms of taste and civility. Brevity is encouraged. All decisions are at the sole discretion of the editorial board, which may reject any letter. Send to The Rider News via email at ridernews@rider.edu. Letters must be received by midnight on the Monday preceding publication. Any tips or suggestions can be sent to ridernews@rider.edu.

@theridernews
@theridernews
www.theridernews.com
@theridernews
facebook.com/theridernews
ridernews@rider.edu

One copy per person, bulk copies available for purchase at $1 each

JUNIOR JOURNALS

Where are the women late-night hosts?

WILL television networks ever let women host late-night shows?

On Jan. 24, Showtime and MTV Entertainment Studios announced that Jon Stewart would return to host the Comedy Central classic, "The Daily Show."

Stewart, who had previously been the longtime host of the show from 1999 to 2015, returned as part-time host on Feb. 12 to much anticipation of how he would cover the upcoming presidential election.

While I'm a huge fan of Stewart and enjoyed his Apple TV show "The Problem with Jon Stewart," which ran from 2021 to 2023, I have to wonder: why did Comedy Central take the easy route and hire a familiar man, rather than taking a risk and asking a woman to host?

Think about it for a second: all of the most famous late-night talk shows have been hosted by men: Letterman, Lenno, Conan, Colbert, Maher, Stewart, Kimmel, Fallon, Oliver, Corden, Noah and now Stewart again.

Now, I admit: over the years, I have tuned into all of these shows and found most of the aforementioned hosts to be entertaining. Maher has never been my cup of tea, and I lost interest with Corden after the allegations of a hostile work environment came out; however, I am disappointed that a woman had never been given the opportunity to host a late-night talk show on a major network until the late 2010s. "The Daily Show" alum Samantha Bee hosted "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" on TBS from 2016 to 2022, Lilly Singh hosted "A Little Late with Lilly Singh" on NBC from 2019 to 2021 and Amber Ruffin, a writer on "Late Night with Seth Meyers," has hosted "The Amber Ruffin Show" since 2020 on Peacock.

These three shows were super funny to me, but they pale in comparison to their male-hosted counterparts in terms of publicity, advertising, longevity and critical attention.

Even the new "After Midnight with Taylor Tomlinson" on CBS, produced by late-night legend Stephen Colbert and his production company, keeps women on the outskirts in terms of late-night political commentary. The new show, which aired its first episode in January, is more like a game show than a late-night talk show.

Like it or not, late-night shows contribute a lot to the political discourse in this country. I believe that our voices should be heard more on late-night television. That means having more than two women late-night hosts on television at a time!

Women have so much value in terms of our unique perspectives on politics, and there is no reason to think that more women can't host late-night shows that talk about politics.

Networks and audiences just have to be willing to let them.

Sarah F. Griffin
junior journalism major

Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Throughout history, there have been fewer women late-night television than men.

JUNIOR JOURNALS

More seating options are needed on campus

PICTURE yourself in Cranberry's during lunch hours. You order your favorite food: a burrito from Sono's. You look to find a seat, a beautiful open booth and sit down to enjoy a meal with your friends.

Just kidding, Cranberry's is full. Instead, you go outside and enjoy the fresh air at an outdoor seat. Still kidding, those seats are pushed aside. You then walk to Sweigart Hall to sit outside Saxbys. Again, kidding. Those seats are full too. Next, you trek across campus to the Student Recreation Center. Surely there are available seats, right?

Wrong, the SRC is full of people and the only tables available sit two people at most. At this point you give up, you and your friends stand around for a while waiting for somebody to give up one of their tables so you can finally enjoy a meal.

The previous sequence of events may have been exaggerated for dramatic effect, but I think every Rider student can relate in some way or another. It is often difficult to find an open table on campus, especially during these colder months when outdoor seating is scaled back.

The recent weather has been tumultuous and inconsistent. In between the snowy days and strong gusts of wind, there have been some nice days where I enjoyed being outside, and where I may have wanted to enjoy my meals in the winter air.

While I understand that there is only so much space inside of Cranberry's, the lack of outdoor seating has never made sense. While one could argue that the current positioning of the patio is due to the turbulent weather, it does not explain the empty balcony space that overlooks the patio.

Within the last year we have seen the addition of new seating on the balcony: some stools and couches. There are a few problems with this area, however. For one, the couch cushions absorb a lot of water, and do not seem to ever dry. Any time I sit on the patio couches, I elect to remove the cushions to avoid sitting on what is essentially a giant wet sponge.

The second problem is that the couches all face each other. Instead of individual areas to bring a rationally-sized group of people, there are enough couches for a crowd of 20. It feels awkward to see somebody in that corner and wish to sit there too, even though there is room. At times it feels invasive to share the area with fellow students.

Another area on campus with a similar problem is the patio in front of Lynch Adler Hall. During my first year at Rider, there was a tent in this area with a lot of covered seating. This was amazing, because even when the weather was harsh there was still a comfortable way to enjoy fresh air. However, this tent is no longer there.

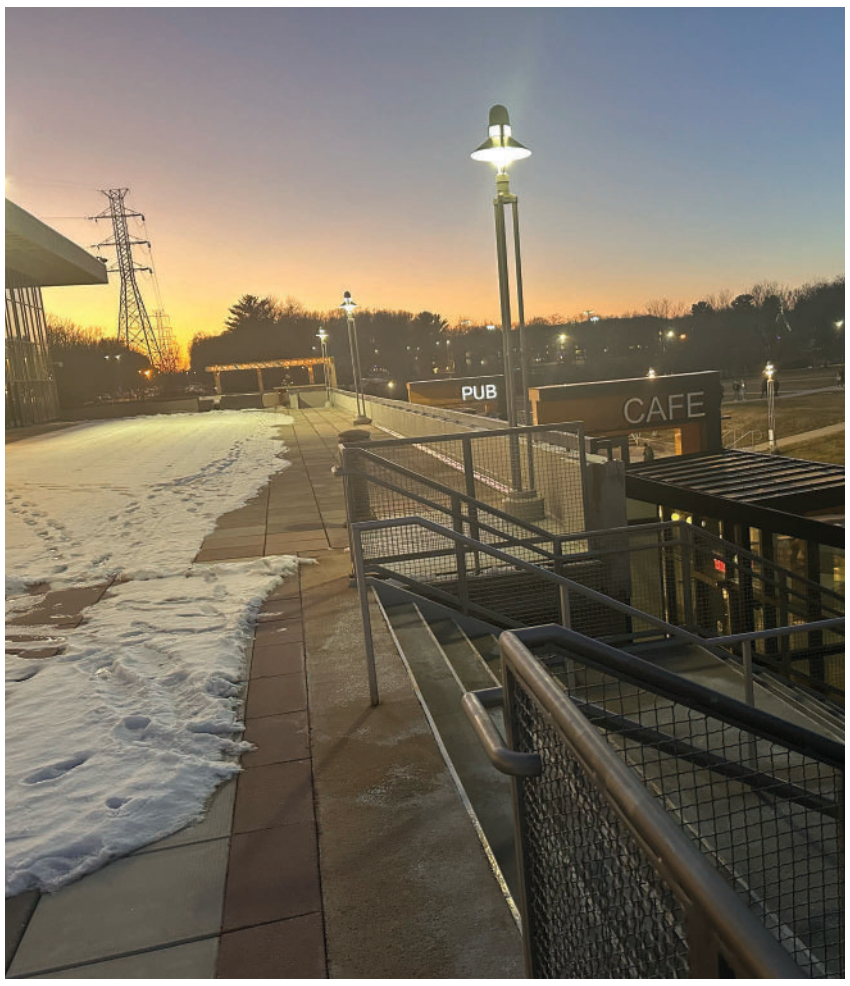
While some chairs and tables remain in the area, they are pushed to the perimeter of the patio. The area in front of Lynch Adler Hall is such prime real estate, and it could easily feel full of life if these tables were spread out better. Instead, the area feels empty and lonely despite having multiple seating options.

When outdoor seating is insufficient, people look toward academic buildings for a place to lounge. These places fill up fast, simply because there is not infinite space inside these buildings.

It's important to have adequate outdoor and indoor space for students to gather comfortably.

While things are not perfect now, Rider is improving its outdoor seating. The previously mentioned Bart Luedeke Center patio couches are a great addition to campus, and the recently built hammocks and picnic tables near dorm buildings are amazing. There have also been indoor spaces added, too, such as the Zen Den. I hope to see more improvements like this, so that comfortable seating is easy to find at Rider.

Elijah Nevlin
junior marketing major



Elijah Nevlin/The Rider News

The lack of spaces on campus is limited for places to eat and hang out with friends.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Broncs win the weekend, earns historic win

By **Richard Saile**

RIDER men's basketball finds itself deep within Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference competition, needing all the wins it can get.

Rider did just that this weekend as they took down the Mount St. Mary's Mountaineers in a nail-biter, 61-57 and the Manhattan College Jaspers in a historic beat down, 104-62.

Freshmen lead comeback

On Feb. 16, Rider hosted the Mountaineers, hoping to avoid a four-game losing streak.

The Broncs started the game off strong for the first couple of minutes with senior guard Allen Powell hitting a pair of 3-pointers and senior forward Mervin James providing another, but the Mountaineers hung around in the early minutes of the game.

With the Broncs up three in the first 10 minutes of action, the Mountaineers got rolling on both ends of the court as they went on a 16-3 run. They went up 26-16 with just under three minutes left in the half.

Senior guard Corey McKeithan had the only bucket for the Broncs during the Mountaineers' 16-3 run with a 3-pointer, as the crowd in Alumni Gym jumped to its feet. The Broncs got points before halftime thanks to a 3-pointer by James and a layup by freshman forward Ife West-Ingram to cut the Mountaineers' lead to five at halftime.

The Broncs entered the second half flat as Mount St. Mary's opened on a 12-4 run that increased the deficit to 13. Rider was searching for answers as it crawled its way back in the game with senior forward Tariq Ingraham making a layup while fouled and three free throws on back-to-back possessions.

The Broncs' bench erupted and the crowd of Alumni Gym roared as the deficit shrunk down to eight. Freshman guard DJ Dudley helped the Broncs attack the Mountaineers' defense by scoring twice and splashing home a pair of free throws to cut the Broncs' deficit to two with less than eight minutes to play.

Rider kept its foot on the gas by attacking the paint and getting to the free-throw line, with Dudley and Ingraham making free throws to cut the Mountaineers' lead to just one point. Freshman guard Ruben Rodriguez hit a jumper to help the Broncs retake the lead and put them up a point with less than six minutes left in the game.

Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

Senior guard **Corey McKeithan** takes a seat during a timeout as Rider battled the Mountaineers.

The Broncs' lead increased to five with a pair of layups from Dudley and Ingraham, but the Mountaineers did not leave without a fight. Mount Saint Mary's answered with a 3-pointer to go up 57-55 with 52 seconds left in the game.

Powell attacked the paint and got to the free throw line, making a pair of shots to tie the game at 57 apiece. On the next possession, Rodriguez stole the ball from Mount St. Mary's and made a free throw to give the Broncs a one-point lead with 23 seconds left.

Rider's defense swarmed the Mountaineers on back-to-back possessions as Ingraham and James made the winning free throws to help the Broncs survive a scare at home and win 61-57.

"This one felt good," Dudley said after the game. "We almost lost it after a turnover at the end, but we made it up … so it was good to get this win after trailing."

Manhattan masterpiece

Building off its close win against the Mountaineers, Rider traveled to New York to take on the Jaspers. The Broncs started the game with graduate student guard T.J. Weeks being fouled on a made 3-pointer and sinking the free throw to open the game with a 4-point play.

Rider didn't hold back on the Jaspers as they opened with a 17-2 run in the first six minutes. Their offense continued to overwhelm the Jaspers' defense as Manhattan was not able to defend any spot on the court.

The Jaspers eventually answered with seven points, attacking the Broncs' defense with a jumper, a 3-pointer and a dunk in a span of two minutes. The Broncs continued to heat up with jumpers both inside and beyond the arc as they increased the lead to 23. Rider went into the locker room with a 50-26 halftime lead and having success on both ends of the court.

The Broncs started to heat up again, led by senior forward Mervin James scoring seven points including a 3-pointer to increase their lead to 29. Rider went on an 18-2 run that lasted four minutes and increased their lead by 35 with 11 minutes left and never looked back as the Broncs manhandled Manhattan 104-62 to win their second straight game.

"I just saw it down the stretch in the last game. Start playing better, some guys off the bench started playing together and just, you're starting to see the fruits of your labor, so to speak. Some of the guys who hadn't been playing are starting to play and have gotten better. It's great to see," Head Coach Kevin Baggett said after the win.

The Broncs shot 77.8% from the floor, the highest percentage for any team against another Division I opponent since 2005.

With the win, Baggett earned his 187th win and moved into a tie for second all-time in career wins with Rider hall of fame coach Thomas Leyden.

The Broncs return on Feb. 23 to host Iona, broadcast on ESPN+ at 7 p.m.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Rider wins again off buzzer-beating shot

By **Kadie Digiuseppe**

COMING off a much-needed win last week, Rider women's basketball headed to New Rochelle, New York, on Feb. 15 to take on Iona, hoping to get another win against the Gaels.

The Broncs took the game down to the wire, but escaped with a 45-43 win after a buzzer-beating jumper from graduate student guard Taylor Langan.

The Broncs had a rough patch at the beginning of 2024 but have picked things up on both sides of the court.

During the first quarter, the Broncs outscored the Gaels 16-11 with help from senior guard Makayla Firebaugh, who had seven points during the quarter.

Last game against Iona, Firebaugh scored a career-high 24 points, and was just as dominant in the rematch, leading the Broncs with 15 points and going 4-for-4 on free throws.

When asked what she thinks contributes most to her strong performances against Iona, Firebaugh said, "It's all about my mentality when I'm playing against tough opponents like Iona. It's a challenge that I embrace, and it motivates me to bring my 'A' game. … Then, as well, just my teammates believing in me."

Rider offensively dominated the first half of the rematch, but both teams started to slip in scoring coming back from the locker room in the second half.

The two teams combined only scored 15 points in the third quarter, but by the time the fourth quarter rolled around, it was clear that it was anyone's game.

Rider led going into the last quarter but gave up the lead with less than seven minutes in regulation.

Down to the wire with less than two minutes left, junior guard Sanaa Redmond gave the Broncs a one-point lead.

With only a few seconds to go, Rider drew a foul to stop the clock and evened the score at 43 after the free throws.

Three seconds on the clock did not stop Langan from making the winning jumper at the buzzer.

Langan recalled what was going through her mind before she took the game-winning shot: "When the ball came off my fingertips, I wasn't sure it was gonna go in until after the first bounce at the rim and once it finally fell through the hoop I was so happy. I couldn't believe the last 10 seconds of the game and how it ended."

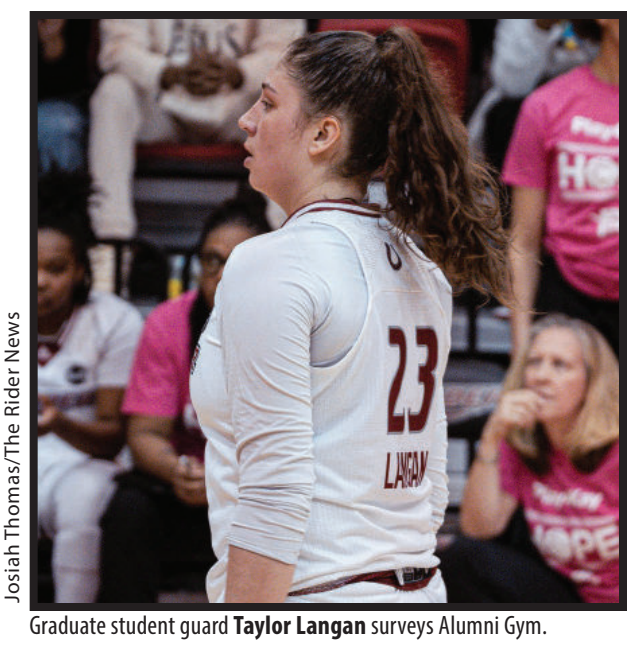
The Broncs ended the game with their second victory of the season over Iona 45-43.

Junior guard Mariona Cos-Morales had another solid game, helping the Broncs on both sides of the court with eight points, two steals and two blocks.

Graduate student guard Jessika Schiffer missed Rider's win last week at home but was 100% from the three-point line against Iona.

Head Coach Lynn Milligan described her thoughts about the game as "very positive."

"We played a strong defensive game for 40 minutes. That is the difference between our last two wins," she added. "Iona was a tough road win with a fantastic finish. We were able to put ourselves in a successful situation at the end of the game. Everyone did their jobs and Taylor was able to make a huge shot."



Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

Graduate student guard **Taylor Langan** surveys Alumni Gym.

Milligan said that the team "will be ready" for the next match against Saint Peter's.

The Broncs will be back home at Alumni Gym on Feb. 22 against the Peacocks looking for revenge from the last matchup.

BASEBALL

Broncs walk the plank, swept by ECU

By **Benjamin Shinault**

RIDER baseball had quite the challenging start to its 2024 season as they traveled down to Greenville, North Carolina, on Feb. 16 to face off against the No. 11 East Carolina Pirates.

In the three-game set, the Broncs were swept out of Clark-LeClair Stadium and were only able to score two runners the whole series.

The Pirates scored 30.

Andrew Xon/The Rider News

Graduate students **Luke Lesch** and **Jack Winsett** take the field. The Broncs were outscored 30-2 by ECU to open the season.

'It was good to get out'

While snow fell on Rider's campus, the baseball team was sporting short sleeves and sunglasses down in North Carolina, playing in 60-degree weather. It wasn't all sunshine, though, as the Broncs were dominated in most facets of their first game against East Carolina, losing 16-2.

To begin the season, Head Coach Barry Davis started junior left-handed pitcher Brian Young.

Young did not have his best performance on the mound, as the Pirates scored seven earned runs on five hits and two walks before Young could record a single out.

Davis took out Young in the first inning, turning to sophomore pitcher Christian Aiello. Aiello went six innings, allowing only three earned runs and recording five strikeouts to tie his career high.

"Aiello did an outstanding job. He gave us a chance with six innings, allowing only three runs. It was a quality outing," Davis said to Rider Athletics.

A positive did emerge from the tough loss: freshman outfielder Kyle Neri, a transfer from Bryant, had two home runs in the loss, one in the third inning and one in the eighth inning. Those were the only runs and hits for the Broncs.

"Kyle Neri's home runs made for a great debut for him," Davis said.

Neri, in his first game sporting the black and cranberry, made an immediate impact when he stepped to the plate for Rider.

"It was a very proud moment for myself, but myself isn't important when the team is down 7-1," Neri said.

Despite him being on the other team, an additional remarkable storyline is that of Parker Byrd, a sophomore infielder and pitcher for the Pirates. who is the first NCAA Division I baseball player to play with a prosthetic leg, according to the Associated Press.

Byrd missed all of last season for the Pirates while recovering from a boating accident that led to his right leg being amputated. In his at-bat, he was able to draw a walk.

'We need to be more consistent'

In the second game, the Broncs looked to try and steal a game from East Carolina, but it was more of the same for Rider, as they were shut out by the Pirates in a 7-0 plundering.

Sophomore right-hander PJ Craig got the start and gave the Broncs three innings, but got dismantled by the Pirates as he allowed seven earned runs, two home runs and three walks.

Similar to the first game, the Broncs' bullpen was able to put out the fire after some adjustments, with two fresh arms in graduate student pitcher Christian Coombes and sophomore pitcher Gavin Hawkes corralling East Carolina. They combined for four innings and only allowed three hits and three walks and both had two strikeouts each.

"Our bullpen was excellent. Coombes and Hawkes were very good," Davis said following the game to GoBroncs.

Offensively, the Broncs only got on base six times with five hits and one walk. Those five hits belonged to five different players.

A rough start

The Broncs experienced some deja vu in the final outing of the three-game set when they once again lost 7-0 to the Pirates. It was the first time since 2022 that the Broncs were swept in a series.

For the final game of the tough opening series, Davis gave the ball to freshman pitcher Jake Dorety, who had a quality collegiate start. He allowed five hits and four runs and had two strikeouts in three innings.

Once again, the Broncs' bullpen kept the game within striking distance, one of the few positives of the loss.

Rider will get the opportunity to bounce back when it heads to Johnson City, Tennessee, to face off against the East Tennessee State Tigers on Feb. 23-25.

WRESTLING

Rider wins home finale, dominates Clarion

By **Logan K. VanDine**

IN its last home match at Alumni Gym, Rider wrestling had to put on a strong showing in front of the home crowd, especially the seniors. The Broncs did just that as they cruised past the Clarion Golden Eagles 27-9 on Feb. 16 to move to 7-0 in Mid-American Conference play.

The first bout of the day set the tone of the entire match with senior Azeem Bell starting off with a dominating win by major decision.

Bell was followed by junior David Szuba, who picked up a win by decision to give Rider a quick 7-0.

"I've been doing this for 17 years and having the support system back at home that I was raised in, that my mother and father were teaching me hard work, taught me to believe in myself," Bell said. "I want to remind myself that I am a good enough wrestler like everyone else in the division."

The Broncs did not stop there, only losing two bouts with one being a forfeit at the very end of the match. This gave Rider its seventh win of the season.

Every outgoing wrestler picked up a win in their final bouts at Alumni Gym with Bell, graduate students Richie Koehler and Michael Wilson and senior Quinn Kinner.

After the match, Head Coach John Hangey said, "Their energy level is good and they're all involved in trying to help each other, and that was the first goal."

Koehler talked about how he thought he wrestled in his bout, which had some twists and turns throughout.

"I felt like I was fully in control, but I wasn't, so sometimes you have to roll with the punches. I know my cardio is good. We train really hard, and I felt confident, I felt comfortable, you just have to keep it building," said Koehler.

Koehler's bout saw his opponent seeming to hang on him in an awkward position while he was trying to escape him.

Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

Senior **Azeem Bell** celebrates as he wins his final home bout as a Bronc by major decision.

Koehler described it as a "peculiar situation."

"I don't want to run the kid off the mat, and I also don't want to slam the kid on the mat, because it's the end of the year and we are getting ready for March, getting ready for the MAC Tournament," said Koehler. "It definitely was a little questionable but something I can laugh about in 15 or 20 years."

With the Broncs only having two more regular season matches against Cleveland State and Pittsburgh, Bell described his confidence in his team.

"We are very confident, I'm very confident in all my teammates … We can beat Cleveland State and beat Pittsburgh, so I have the utmost confidence in my team and everyone around us," Bell said.

Hangey feels the same level of confidence as Bell.

"Cleveland State is a match I expect to win, and Pittsburgh is a match that we can win. … If we wrestle like we did today and we bring that fight to Pittsburgh, I like our chances."

The Broncs now move to 7-6 on the season and are scheduled to wrestle the Pittsburgh Panthers on Feb. 22 at 6 p.m., followed by Cleveland State on Feb. 23 at 2 p.m.

Sports

ONLINE

FOLLOW US ON TIKTOK

Be sure to follow The Rider News on TikTok to stay in the loop for all things Rider!

FIND MORE SPORTS COVERAGE ON THERIDERNEWS.COM

SOFTBALL

PREVIEW: Rider looking to turn heads in 2024

Rider softball is gearing up for their first game of the season on Feb. 23 against Towson.

Carolo Pascale/The Rider News

By **Kadie Digiuseppe**

SPRING is right around the corner, which means it's time for a new season of Rider softball. The team will begin their season on Feb. 23 in East Carolina for their weekend tournament.

Coming off of last year's 19-31 season and welcoming in eight freshmen and transfers, the Broncs are ready to get rolling with their new squad.

"Something our team is focusing on as [a] whole is our confidence in everything we do. We want to be the team that walks out on the field exemplifying that fine line between confidence and arrogance," said senior pitcher Anna-Marie Groskritz.

Baby Broncs

After Chaela Crowder graduated last year, Rider welcomed two freshmen catchers: Abby Cruz and Kendall Reda-Fehsal along with returning junior catcher Kristyn Gardner.

The catchers are also joined by three new freshmen infielders; Kayley York, Olivia Smith and Kiersten Buchanan and two freshmen outfielders, Shelby Dyer and Tristen Wren.

Junior infielders Olivia Burroughs commented on the new Broncs for this season, saying: "We have a lot of young talent this year and I'm super excited to see how they step up and contribute."

Returning Broncs

Along with all of the additions, the Broncs have many returners, including Head Coach Davon Ortega, who will coach her sixth season with the Broncs.

"We are most looking forward to seeing how the season unfolds as this team continues to grow together," said Ortega. "We have a lot of younger players competing for starting positions right now so it will be exciting to see how that youth can leverage our experienced returners."

However, all eyes are on two-time Preseason All MAAC First Team selection, senior pitcher Jessie Niegocki who has 255 strikeouts in 61 appearances.

Niegocki turned heads last season after her no-hitter into the seventh inning, before settling for a complete game, only giving up one hit shutout with 10 strikeouts in a win against Manhattan.

Niegocki also had a career high of 13 strikeouts in a game last season over Morgan State while scoring a run and going 2-for-3 at bat.

Not only was her pitching on fire, but so was her batting last season. Niegocki had the team's best average with a .333, 32 runs and a .413 on-base percentage.

Groskritz is ready to get back on the mound this season for the Broncs after missing last season due to injury.

"I'm most looking forward to the excitement of games. The energy this team brings during games is amazing," said Groskrtiz. "We all get so excited for each other's successes. It's a really fun environment to be around."

During her 2022 season, Groskritz was rolling. She pitched multiple complete game shutouts and had two games with a career high nine strikeouts.

The Broncs will also welcome back some of their most consistent power hitters in senior outfielder Laneya Wright and Burroughs.

"I'm most looking forward to just playing games with my teammates," said Burroughs.

"We have been practicing together since September, so I'm looking forward to seeing all the pieces come together once we're all able to be on the field competing together," she added.

'I feel the team is ready'

Wright had 10 multi-hit games last season including a two-run home run that scored the game tying run over Marist in game one.

"I'm most looking forward to getting on the field against other teams. We have put in a lot of work over the past few weeks and I'm excited to see how the team does this next weekend," Wright said. "I feel the team is ready to start playing games to see how we can improve from there."

Wright also commented on what the Broncs intend to improve on up at bat.

"Something individually and collectively we should improve in the most is doing our job at [the] plate. Having quality at bats to move runner and consistently score runs," she said.

Burroughs started all but one game for the Broncs last season and hit 19 doubles which tied for the most in NCAA Division I.

Graduate student outfielder Amanda Cooper is no stranger to playing for the Broncs since this will be her fifth season with the team. Though Cooper missed most of her freshman year due to COVID-19 and her sophomore year due to injury, she has been a consistent hitter for the Broncs during her junior and senior season.

The Broncs picked up junior outfielder Asiah Bell from Central Arizona over the offseason. Bell will bring another big bat to the team after slugging .557 and averaging .460 last season.

Back on the squad is one of the Broncs' closing pitchers, junior Kathryn Schmierer, who had 62 strikeouts last season.

Another returning pitcher for the Broncs is sophomore pitcher Jadeyn Merrill who not only pitches, but is dominant at the plate. Last season Merrill had eight multi-hit games, seven doubles, three home runs, 24 RBIs and 16 runs scored in 44 games played.

On the defensive side of things, sophomores Fallyn Stoeckel and Maddie Luedtke and Julia Harsche return in the outfield for Rider.

The upcoming season

Last season, Rider was 5-16 during away games but 9-11 in conference games and 9-6 at home.

"One thing I think we can improve on from last year is that competitive aspect that we have been developing through the fall and early this spring," said Burroughs. "This team and group of girls really loves to compete and win, so that aspect will be a big improvement from last year."

To start this season, the Broncs have three upcoming tournaments. They will travel to Greenville, North Carolina, to play against Towson, North Carolina Central University and East Carolina University from Feb. 23-25.