



Dellinger's replacements appointed; admin stands by decision

By Hannah Newman

SEAN McCarther, a musical theater professor and voice coordinator, was appointed interim performing arts department chair in place of Todd Dellinger, who was put on unpaid leave for the spring 2025 semester following an offensive gesture made at a department meeting that appeared to imitate a Nazi salute, according to the college dean.

Dellinger was scheduled to teach three courses for spring 2025. Three different people have been assigned to teach each of these courses: performing arts professor Linda Lorence-Critelli, who created the arts and entertainment industries major with Dellinger, associate director of performance management and a graduate of the AEIM program Leandra Acosta and director of performance management Kristen Rodgers, according to Dean of The College of Arts and Science Kelly Bidle.

"Sean has actually served as an interim chair in the department before, so he was a logical choice to step in during this time," said Bidle. "We had a real issue of time, because we're in the middle of the semester, so it really was all hands on deck. Speaking with professor Critelli, Dr. McCarthy, Dean [Jason] Vodicka, we basically huddled to figure out who would best serve these needs... we were just very lucky that right in our own house, we had two experts [Acosta and Rodgers] in these areas, so luckily, they were both very willing to step in during this time."

Maintaining a quality experience for students remains a priority, according to McCarther.

"Regardless of whether I am working as a full-time faculty member, as interim chair or in any other administrative capacity, I always try to support my

colleagues so that they can offer the best experience possible for our students," said McCarther.

Critelli, with over 25 years of executive experience in the New York City music industry, will be taking over the senior capstone class, New York Arts Networking, a course dedicated to giving students the opportunity to go into New York City and meet industry professionals.

"[Dellinger] is truly irreplaceable, given his years of professional experience and his role as the founder of the AEIM program. However, we have brought in two highly qualified adjuncts who happen to be graduates of the program, and who are well-prepared to step in this semester," said Critelli in an email to The Rider News. "I am fully committed to ensuring our students continue to receive an outstanding education and hands-on industry experience."

Senior musical theater major Juliette Maners, who is enrolled in New York Arts Networking, believes that Critelli is most qualified given the niche experience needed to teach the class.

"[Critelli] has so much experience in the field and knows what she's talking about, her expertise is in the music industry but she always makes an effort to include all other areas of interest so everyone gets something out of the lessons," said Maners.

In the midst of searching for Dellinger's replacements, parents of the performing arts community sent an email to the university expressing their disapproval with the actions taken to Dellinger's position, however, Rider President Gregory Dell'Omo stayed persistent in his decision.

Parents of the performing arts community sent an email to Dell'Omo, Provost DonnaJean Fredeen, the Board of Trustees and Contract Administrator

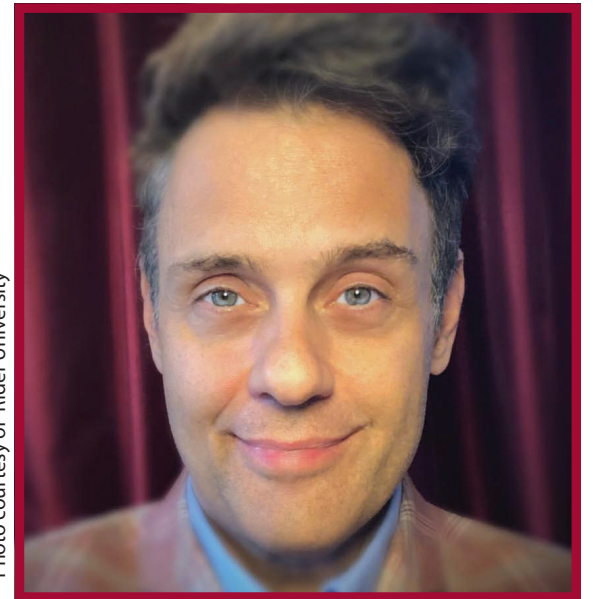


Photo courtesy of Rider University

Todd Dellinger's vacant positions have been filled.

and Chief Negotiating Officer of the American Association of University Professors at Rider Jeffrey Halpern on Feb. 3, requesting that Dellinger's release be reconsidered.

Dell'Omo responded on Feb. 4 insisting their decision is the right fit at this time.

Dell'Omo wrote, "All classes and scheduled performances will continue to run as expected, and an interim chair has been appointed to lead the department. The much-anticipated senior showcase for our graduating students is fully funded and will



Amid DEI's uncertain future, Rider plans course of action

By Jake Tiger

AS universities nationwide face political scrutiny for inclusive initiatives, Rider Provost DonnaJean Fredeen said the idea of being called a diversity hire "hits home."

In 1984, Fredeen was finishing up her doctorate in chemistry at Texas A&M University. She had just been interviewed for a job in a research development laboratory in Illinois.

One of her peers, a man, told her she had only been interviewed because she was a woman.

"It's infuriating," Fredeen said, "to be told that I didn't have the same intellectual capacity that he did and that I didn't bring something to the table other than my gender."

Today, diversity, equity and inclusion, and the hiring practices associated with them, have moved to the forefront of political discourse with President Donald Trump's recent executive orders seeking to reduce DEI initiatives at higher education institutions, possibly leading to change at Rider, which has spent years building up DEI as a pillar of its identity.

An executive order signed by Trump on Jan. 21, titled, "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity," states that modern DEI hiring practices violate civil-rights laws and undermine traditional American values or hard work, excellence and individual achievement. Later in the executive order, higher education is specifically mentioned, with it claiming that race- and sex-based preferences at

institutions are "dangerous, demeaning and immoral."

Federal government and corporate organizations have already rolled back DEI initiatives after the order was signed. On Jan. 22, a day after Trump signed the order, the State Department's Office of Diversity and Inclusion closed with nearly everything stripped from its webpage. Only a mission statement, photo and social media links remain.

"It is a very chaotic time right now," said Fredeen. "There is so much happening and so much coming out of Washington, D.C., that some of these organizations that are making decisions are really just saying, 'What's best for us?'"

The order directs the federal government, including the Department of Education, to abide by the new terms, which could eventually lead to change at Rider and other American institutions.

For now, according to Fredeen, Rider has not made any changes in response to the executive order and is planning its course of action if it is required to amend its DEI offerings, with the provost saying it is too early to tell what the university will need to change.

"From a higher education perspective, and particularly from Rider's perspective, our commitment is to our students' success," said Fredeen. "We need to make certain that they feel they are in a welcoming and safe space. ... Whether you call it DEI or belonging, it's about trying to create that space where you can be the person you're meant to be without fear."



Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion, located in the Bart Luedeke Center, serves as a space for all students on campus.

Fredeen said Rider has spent about a decade honing its DEI efforts, beginning when the administration began to notice a shift in the demographics of its student body. Since then, Rider established the Center for Diversity and Inclusion in the Bart Luedeke Center and the chief diversity officer position was created.

Fredeen said she meets with Chief Diversity Officer Heeyoung Kim on a weekly basis, and they began discussing the possibility of federal DEI changes last summer.

Kim and CDI Director Jasmine Johnson declined interviews with



INSIDE **TAHATA AND TURCO**
A duo of La Salle Explorers made their way to Rider together.



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AVOIDING VALENTINE'S CLICHES
Roses are red, violets are blue, how about trying something new?



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VALENTINE'S DRAG SHOW
The 'Love is a Drag' show celebrated the season of romance!



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SECURITY BRIEFS

BY JASMINE WHITE

Undiscovered odors

Untraceable reports. On Feb. 5, at 8:11 p.m., Public Safety was dispatched to Hill Residence Hall for the odor of marijuana. Public Safety arrived and checked the building, but did not locate any source of marijuana. While conducting a park, walk and talk of Hill Hall, Public Safety detected the odor of marijuana again, this time coming from the C-wing Lounge. Public Safety checked the lounge, but did not find any indicators that someone had been smoking marijuana inside or outside of the area.



Suspicious graffiti

Grimy graffiti. On Feb. 6, at 11:20 a.m., Public Safety was dispatched to Bierenbaum Fisher Hall for the report of vandalism. Upon their arrival, Public Safety met with Facilities Staff who reported graffiti in the second-floor men's restroom. Upon further investigation, graffiti was found on the third-floor men's restroom as well. All images were documented and C&W Services called to clean the graffiti off the walls.



Malicious mischief

Damaged ceramics. On Feb. 6, at 1:15 p.m., Public Safety was dispatched to Ziegler Residence Hall for the report of vandalism. Upon their arrival, Public Safety met with Facilities Staff who reported damage to one of the shower stalls. Public Safety checked the first-floor men's restroom and found parts of the tile and the soap tray damaged. Facilities were made aware to make the repair.



Jay Roberson/The Rider News

Associate professor-librarian **Sharon Whitfield** (left) and professor-librarian **Melissa Hofmann** (right) browse the web. They felt the new vision for Rider's library might be difficult to see through with a new president stepping in.

CDO Heeyoung Kim named dean of libraries

By Jay Roberson

HEYOUNG Kim, chief diversity officer and director of the Teaching and Learning Center, has taken on her third role as Rider's dean of libraries, which was previously held by Provost DonnaJean Fredeen as interim dean following Jason Barr's departure in October 2023.

"It was very obvious to me that the best person on campus to ask would be [Kim]. She's a strong leader and she has worked with the librarians in the past and built a strong relationship with them," said Fredeen.

Melissa Hofmann, a professor-librarian and Sharon Whitfield, an associate professor-librarian, look forward to initiatives put forth by Kim and Fredeen, but still look to the future with some uncertainty.

Hofmann said, "This is our fourth dean that doesn't have library experience ... so they don't really know what our roles are. And to have to explain that again and again, it gets a little exhausting."

With Kim taking over as dean of libraries, Fredeen hopes the library will become a learning commons, a student-centered space offering tutoring, technology labs and maker spaces.

Whitfield said, "The vision is important, but I think that it is going to be added work. ... We want our services to be a success, so we will do pretty much anything in order to get something to be successful."

In the next few weeks, the library staff and Academic Success Center will be running trial sessions for students to come and receive support from tutors and librarians in the learning commons.

Fredeen said, "The Academic Success Center is going to be doing drop-in tutoring with a research librarian sitting there helping students."

On top of tutoring services, Hofmann hopes to offer lessons on information literacy, AI literacy and media literacy.

Both Hofmann and Whitfield look forward to seeing a learning commons in the library, but hope to see a more unique perspective on it.

Whitfield said, "What can we do in order to really engage the community, be innovative and really think about what the library can do to really meet students' needs? That's the vision for the library I would like to hear articulated. If that's the learning commons, perfect, but how can we make the learning commons unique to meet the Rider students' needs?"

Though Kim comes with a background in instructional technologies, Hofmann noted that her new role as dean of libraries will be a tough position to move into.

"I think if we are going to be a learning commons, it's going to require a lot of vision, a lot of movement, a lot, I mean a lot of labor, in order to get it going. And you're really going to have to touch base with everybody on campus," said Hofmann.

Whitfield also has concerns with implementing a learning commons amid a period of transition between university president and budget cuts.

"I appreciate the direction and I appreciate the vision, but it's tough during a transition period," said Whitfield.

Despite the librarian's concerns, Whitfield and Hofmann both have positive outlooks on Kim's new position.

"We've all had good working relationships with Heeyoung in the past, and so we're looking forward to seeing what can come to fruition with her as our dean."



Jake Tiger/The Rider News

Provost **DonnaJean Fredeen** said Rider is preparing a plan for its DEI programs given the recent executive orders.

Fredeen, Rider stay patient amid change

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The Rider News, both responding with identical email statements: "We are still reviewing the executive order and discussing with our peers how this may impact DEI efforts at colleges and universities throughout the country. The order is targeted at the federal government currently, which — through the Department of Education — provides guidance on legal compliance for institutions of higher education. I would prefer to hold off on discussing plans until we have more information and time to comprehend the scope of this order."

Trump also signed executive orders pertaining to DEI on Jan. 20 that call for federal policy to state that there are only two genders, change the way transgender athletes can participate in sports and seek to end the government's DEI programs and preferencing.

In her time at Rider, Fredeen said that it has always been her goal to hire people who are the most qualified for the position.

In 2004, 20 years after her incident with her peer at Texas A&M, Fredeen was working at Southern Connecticut State University, which had just hired a woman president for the first time.

She recalled a line from the SCSU president's inaugural speech that she still finds herself thinking about: "I can't wait until we get to the point where it's no longer a big deal that you hired a woman."

Plans in place for fall 2025 campus updates

By **Caroline Haviland**

STUDENTS returning to campus for the fall 2025 semester will be welcomed back by a plethora of upgrades intended to improve their overall experience at Rider.

Students can expect to see new places for recreational activities such as a patio outside of P.J. Ciambelli Hall to provide additional places for seating and outdoor basketball courts, courtesy of the Student Government Association

Mike Reca, vice president of university operations, will handle the renovations coming to the numerous parts of campus, including updates to campus roads and parking, dorm halls and extra recreational space.

The projects are brought before the presidential cabinet, residence life and facilities management, according to Reca. The multiple divisions choose what is of highest priority and what they can currently fund.

“We do what we can fund, that’s how it comes together. ... Everything is subject to change. Anything can happen. Anything can change,” said Reca. “While they’re not set in stone, we’re running down this path right now.”

SGA has continued to work with Reca and his team to discuss recommendations to upgrade campus life, including where to allocate the funding from the recent parking permit fee.

“We met with SGA last week to take their recommendations on where we should invest the dollars, whether it’s roadways, parking or parking configuration. They’re taking it back to the student body and trying to come up with ideas,” said Reca.

Reca said Rider will pin down these decisions in March depending on how much money the university has for the projects. The operations will begin in July or August.

A budget has not yet been determined since the overall planning of spaces is not complete, according to Reca.

The current plans involve Centennial House being transformed into housing for students in the College of Arts and Sciences. Some of the upgrades include air conditioning, new flooring, upgraded bathrooms, new study spaces and a multi-use space for artistic endeavors.

The residence hall has been occupied by the Office of University Marketing and Communications since 2019, and was a sorority house in prior years. Staff members from the Westminster Choir College and Enrollment Management have also utilized the space.

“We like to say everyone has their own dorm room as offices. ... It’s been a great space for us to build our teams,” said Kristine Brown, vice president of external affairs. “However, it was always built as a residence hall, and it was always meant to return as a residence hall.”

Other residence halls getting upgrades include Conover Hall, University House and Ziegler Hall with improvements consisting of new air conditioning units, flooring, lighting fixtures and painting jobs.

To further enhance the housing experience, a new room decorating contest will be taking place in fall 2025, according to Director of Residence Life Sean Killion. The objective is to create friendly



Jay Roberson/The Rider News

Centennial House will revert back to a residence hall after serving as an office space for the university’s marketing department since 2019.

competition amongst the communities in each residential building while also serving the marketing aspect for potential students to choose living at Rider.

“What I love about those types of programs is that we’re involving the students and their creativity in the process,” said Killion. “In my experience the students get really competitive and they want the bragging rights of who’s going to have the best decorated room on campus. I’m hoping we’ll be able to have some sort of prize to be associated with it.”

All plans are subject to change regarding any funding or spacing issues.

Parents critical of Dellinger’s administrative leave

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take place this spring as usual. ... Our response took the full record into account. There is nothing further to investigate as this particular incident occurred at a department-wide event, and is not in dispute.”

Gabrielle Clissold, a parent from the performing arts community explained that the parents of the performing arts community formed a coalition to raise funds for the entire department on their own a few years back.

In 2024, \$33,000 was raised and this year, close to \$15,000. Clissold explained that the parent’s passion against Dellinger’s removal stems from their close relationship in building the performance arts program with Dellinger, as the chairperson and professor who put the raised funds toward producing a strong experience for students.

Last year was the first time in several years that a New York senior showcase was made possible, courtesy of the raised funds and Dellinger’s leadership, according to Clissold.

“Many of the parents have given, really thousands of dollars. All the parents made this happen with leadership... because Professor Dellinger has been so really there for the kids,” said Clissold. “I’ve never met

a person in academia more devoted to the kids.”

Clissold said she is a Jewish leader in her synagogue and stressed that Dellinger’s character should not be defined by his salute, which Dellinger later apologized for and said was intended to mock Elon Musk.

“I’m one of the clergy who run my synagogue, and I’ve been at my synagogue for 23 years... I am 100% positive that Professor Dellinger is the furthest thing from an antisemite.”

Following Dellinger’s removal as department chair, he became part of Rider’s chapter of the AAUP bargaining unit, however the dispute on Dellinger’s discipline has yet to be settled.

Halpern said, “We’re in dispute with the administration over the degree to which the AAUP can represent Professor Dellinger in the discipline applied while he was chair. They hold that nothing that was done in terms of that discipline can be questioned... Our position is that once he returns to the bargaining unit, any of his rights that would come from being a bargaining unit fall under our control, under our view, to see if those rights were violated.”



Photo courtesy of Rider University

Sean McArthur became the interim department chair for performing arts after Todd Dellinger’s departure.

Scan the QR code to hear this week’s top headlines!



THE RIDER NEWS
ROUNDUP

Love at first sight with Valentine's drag show

By Sarah F. Griffin, Jay Roberson and Maggie Kleiner

THE show may have been drag, but the atmosphere in the room was anything but. The Bart Luedeke Center Theater was packed in anticipation of the Student Entertainment Council's "Love is a Drag" show on Feb. 7.

Students were decked out in glow-in-the-dark glasses and bracelets, while jamming out to classic and contemporary pop hits that made the room shake.

The audience erupted into applause as the host, VinChelle, strolled onstage to Mariah Carey's "We Belong Together." Her classy performance was matched by her dazzling metallic gown, which later converted into a bodysuit. VinChelle vocalized the importance of supporting Black drag queens like herself, especially during Black History Month.

Up next was Stefani Steel, who emerged wearing a star-studded coat and bedazzled hat, holding a prop cane. She strutted to Lady Gaga's new song "Abracadabra."

Drag queens Tastic, Morgan Wells, Victoria Courtez, Freeda Kulo and Jolina Jasmine followed, each with their own spin on musical numbers and costume changes.

Each queen performed twice: once in act one and again in act two. In between the two acts, there was a short intermission. Students were given the opportunity to compete for tickets to see VinChelle, performed as Lola in Haddon Township's Ritz Theater Company's production of Kinky Boots.

"I really love the outfits of the drag queens," said senior psychology major Michelle Velasquez.

Morgan Wells handmade her elaborate outfits, notably her full rainbow ensemble fit with a complex

headpiece, spiked shoulders and dangling sequins.

She promoted her online shop "Morgan Wells Drag Closet" to any future drag queens in the audience, where she sells her handmade costume pieces.

"I believe it's really important to have drag races at universities to not only give a safe space for people to express [themselves], but also [for others to] have an open mind [and] be open to different communities," Velasquez said.

Freeda Kulo, the reigning "Miss Paradise 2024" from Paradise Nightclub in Asbury Park, brought variety with her mix of music and comedy. She lip synced to comedian Anjelah Johnson's standup routine about Latino hierarchy, occasionally breaking through the routine by dancing to Jennifer Lopez's "Let's Get Loud" and Selena's "Como la Flor."

After what the audience's applause deemed a phenomenal show, two of the drag queens reflected on the meaning of the performance.

"I can't believe how receptive this crowd was, because we don't get this all the time," said Wells. "It's unbelievable how receptive they were."

Victoria Courtez, another one of the queens that performed during the event, said, "Performing drag is liberation. I've been performing in the industry for about 20 years. It started off as a hobby, it turned into a passion and now it's a statement."

Courtez said she loves using drag to inspire others: "As a trans woman, I find that I have a duty to my public audience to show everybody that they can express themselves freely and not have to worry about outside judgement."



Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

Drag queen **Tastic** performed a triple-feature of Chappell Roan songs: "Super Graphic Ultra Modern Girl," "Hot To Go" and "Pink Pony Club."



Scan for the photo gallery of the 'Love is a Drag' show!

Shining Light on Black Excellence: Jasmine Johnson

By Madison Lewis

JASMINE Johnson lines her office walls with uplifting messages, symbolic of her history of implementing diversity and inclusion within educational institutions – a sign that says "educated, motivated, elevated and melanated," and another that says "Black girl magic."

Johnson has been the director of the Center for Diversity and Inclusion since June 2024, taking the position because she was looking to be involved in higher private school education.

She fell in love with Rider's "at-home" feeling, its close-knit community and because the campus has a dedicated space for DEI.

Johnson's position at Rider catalogs the trajectory of her college career at Seton Hall University and her extensive work in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives over time.

In college, she created a living-learning community called Queens Unapologetically Educated, Empowered and Noble, for first-year and female-identifying people of Black descent. According to Johnson, the students in the cohort took two courses taught by a Black woman faculty member – university life and a course called journey of transformation.

Johnson found it imperative that the students would see someone in the classroom that looked like them.

Johnson also implemented programs with speakers that discussed niche and nuanced issues for the female and Black population at a predominately white institution; imposter syndrome and self-expression being some of the topics.

The living-learning community members went on field trips and received mentorship by a staff or faculty member that identified as a Black woman.

Johnson continued to provide support to those around her, especially on Rider's campus. Namely, she defined the fundamental purpose of CDI in higher and private school education.

"One of [the CDI's] roles is to support students, faculty and staff in any way that [it] possibly can. Giving students a safe space to be themselves. To learn new things. To celebrate difference[s]," said Johnson.

Junior game and interactive media design major Michael Nelson, who is a student assistant at the CDI, works closely with Johnson to spread DEI initiatives and coordinate events.

"She has redefined CDI. ... In comparison to my

sophomore year, I have seen great improvement when she entered Rider as CDI's director," said Nelson.

Johnson took note of the foundational structures that Rider upholds are meant to bolster DEI efforts and that the physical space for CDI shows dedication to the cause.

The CDI sector of the Bart Luedeke Center is multifaceted, according to Johnson. It serves as a place to advocate change at Rider, a meeting place for the identity-based student organizations to gather, a space for SafeZone training and a location to coordinate history and heritage months.

She divulged that faculty, staff and students coming together to execute diverse celebrations, for religions, cultures and backgrounds, demonstrates an institutional commitment to DEI.

Johnson mentioned the Feb. 1 roller skating event, Groove and Glide, as an example of collaboration between clubs to highlight cultural diversity and celebrate Black History Month. The Student Entertainment Council worked alongside the CDI and recreation programs.

In addition to skating on the Student Recreation Center courts, 180 students had the chance to learn about the historical significance of skating rinks and the Black community during the Civil Rights era.

She believes that Black History Month is invaluable because people get to celebrate their own culture, and others that do not identify as Black can take it as an opportunity to educate themselves on trailblazers that paved the way for modern day.

"Representation matters," said Johnson.

Johnson encouraged students to go to other events for Black History Month such as Gospel Fest.

"I really have great faith in CDI, especially with ... Johnson holding the torch," said Nelson. "She is doing a very spectacular job."

To Johnson, it is essential for students to feel a sense of belonging and be encouraged to embrace their authentic selves, as she promotes that strong sense of self in her own life.

"I am not afraid to embrace that I am a Black woman," said Johnson. "I am educated, motivated and I can do literally whatever I put my mind to."

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



Photo courtesy Jasmine Johnson

Jasmine Johnson joined the CDI in fall 2024 and has been vocal about her passion for DEI initiatives.



Photo courtesy Jasmine Johnson

Jasmine Johnson at Grounds for Sculpture this summer with the All Broncs BELONG Alliance.

Pesky plants: a mission to remove Multiflora Rose

By Sofia Santiago

AMID the winding trails of Silver Lake Nature Center, grows a thicket of ever-climbing arching canes and thorny bushes, a parasite to the native species living there. Left unchecked, its spread would completely take over the area.

The responsibility falls on SLNC staff and volunteers to battle this aggressive plant and keep biodiversity safe.

On Feb. 8 at 10 a.m., the Invasive Plants Removal Team, consisting of volunteers of all ages, including Rider students, organized to deal with multiflora rose. Before heading into the forest to tackle a thicket of the invasive species, volunteers gathered under the park's pavilion and signed themselves in. They were provided with gloves and debriefed about the rose and how they would remove it.

The group led by Raymie Barry, assistant director-naturalist and volunteer coordinator of SLNC, learned about the history of the plant.

Multiflora rose was brought to the United States from Asia during the 1860s as a rootstock for roses. At the time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture promoted it as a living fence for cattle and livestock, perfect for farmers who wanted to save on fence-building costs. It was used for wildlife purposes and erosion control, especially in the Northeast and Midwest and it was soon planted in the designated area. The USDA soon realized that it was a mistake.

"Multiflora rose has no predators here, some people see that as a good thing but in a natural setting you want to encourage biodiversity. Insects don't really use multiflora rose for anything. The deer don't eat it," Barry explained.

The lack of natural predators allowed the plant to spread quickly and overpower native plants.

At the end of the demonstration, a stalk of multiflora rose was passed around so volunteers could identify its thorns and color. A stalk of Greenbrier, a native plant, was also passed around for comparison. In the winter, both plants look green and have thorns; however, the thorns are different shapes and point in different directions.

Armed with pruning shears, root wrenches and shovels, the team walked to the site of a sprawling

multiflora rose bush. Intertwined with now flopping trees, the thicket was dense and harmful to the life around it.

In an effort to rescue the trees, the removal process began. Volunteers trimmed it into little sections, got to the root and pulled the root ball out of the ground.

The disposal of multiflora rose was described by Barry, saying, "We bag [the multiflora rose] because just one of the little canes can grow a whole new plant. So if you leave a little cane on the ground, and it gets the right conditions, it isn't that hard for a new one to regrow."

She shared that in the last year, almost 4,000 pounds of about 30 different species were removed from the park, mostly done by volunteers. SLNC has a volunteer work day once a month, which consists of trail maintenance, cleanups and the public invasive plant removal. Barry remarked, "We are out there all year round, even in the snow!"

Apart from conservation and preservation, SLNC's goals are focused around education. They host a variety of different programs, from free to charged, they host crafts, walks, garden clubs and citizen science projects.

SLNC was established because Bucks County, Pennsylvania saw a need for something like it in the community. The park's land used to be a farm and remnants of its past can still be seen.

"The people who come out here weekly, or even daily, see value in it and in their community," Barry said about the volunteers. "Being out in nature is very healing, and it makes you feel better, even if it's just watching some birds or taking a walk."

Senior human resource management major Hao Kin Chong agreed.

"The air is fresh, you get to learn more about plants and it's like being a kid again in a sandbox, but with actual plants. It's fun when you get into it," Chong said.

As the seven bags full of multiflora rose were tied up and set aside, the volunteers looked proud of the dent they made in the thicket, though much of it remained.

Barry noted, "It will always be an issue, it will always be here, I can't imagine it ever going away. We do our best to remove it manually, which is why we have so many volunteer opportunities because there is plenty to go around."



Sofia Santiago/The Rider News

RU Serving offered volunteer work for students and faculty to remove invasive plant species at Silver Lake Nature Center.



Sofia Santiago/The Rider News

Students worked together to remove multiflora rose that were placing animals in the area at risk.



Sofia Santiago/The Rider News

Senior human resource management major **Hao Kin Chong** and junior game design major **Julian Jackson** disposing of the invasive multiflora rose.

Rider professor advocates for Ukrainians with autism

By Grace Bertrand

WHEN the Russo-Ukrainian War began in 2014, many civilians were impacted on different fronts. The war started making headlines in the west in 2022; however, Ukrainians with autism were primarily forgotten by the majority of the public. Rider psychology professor Chrystina Dolyniuk was not one of them.

As a Ukrainian-American and autism specialist, Dolyniuk has taken initiative to ensure autistic Ukrainian children are not neglected during the war through her rigorous research and hands-on work.

"Russia has to be accountable for the war crimes that they're causing when it comes to Ukrainians with autism in particular," said Dolyniuk. "Some of them don't have a voice and can't speak up for themselves, so I think that it's important for us to advocate on their behalf."

In 2011 and 2014, Dolyniuk was awarded two Fulbright Specialist grants to travel to Ukraine to study the support and services Ukrainians with autism are offered. Her work allowed her to help with these Ukrainians' community integration. When Dolyniuk left Ukraine in 2014, she did not anticipate how drastically the lives of these children would change.

"We're talking about people with autism who thrive in routine and structure," said Dolyniuk. "To be surprised by these things [war] unexpectedly adds a whole new level of preparation when it comes to intervention."

Dolyniuk's determination to help these children is what led her to travel to Poland in the 2024 spring semester to help displaced Ukrainian families and engage with the autistic children's caregivers. She quickly learned about Poland's shortage of autism specialists, primarily ones that speak Ukrainian.

Dolyniuk recalled the times when she observed these professionals speaking Russian with Ukrainian families,



Photo courtesy Chrystina Dolyniuk

Chrystina Dolyniuk witnessed protests taking place in the streets of Krakow, Poland.

which she described as "traumatizing" to the families under their care.

In January, Dolyniuk wrote an article in the *Transmitter*, an online neuroscience publication, stating her hope for Ukrainian families with autistic children is that they are "appreciated in their host countries as the genuine informants of their children's needs."

Dolyniuk explained that what she witnessed in Poland was in contrast to that hope. To Dolyniuk, it is imperative for these families to be provided support in their native language. She calls for these families to receive direct support in addition to the shelter, food and housing other families are receiving who are enduring the war.

As a psychology professor, Dolyniuk feels it is one of her duties to share her passion with her students. She is firm in making sure the trauma of these families is understood by anyone willing to be educated.

"Professors should not only be teaching what's in

the book, but you need to be able to translate that information into applications that are meaningful for our global community and our local communities," said Dolyniuk.

Dolyniuk teaches three courses surrounding disabilities at Rider: disabilities across cultures, autism spectrum disorder and cognitive disabilities. For her, these courses give her the opportunity to be a voice for Ukrainians, especially those with autism.

Even in her courses outside of these topics, Dolyniuk's sentiment about Ukrainian-Americans is still evident to her students.

Jilian Lukasiewicz, junior psychology major, took Dolyniuk's course of professional development in psychology in 2022, when the Ukrainian invasion came into full force.

"I could always tell that she was really passionate about it [the invasion]," said Lukasiewicz. "I had her around the time of the invasion and she would always wear a Ukrainian flag pin to class."

Lukasiewicz explained that Dolyniuk's advocacy about her research and career experiences only added to her teachings. Learning about the work she does with Ukrainians with autism was helpful to students who were simply taking the course to learn about obtaining a career in the psychology field.

As the three-year anniversary of the full-scale invasion approaches on Feb. 24, Dolyniuk is adamant about making sure people are still willing to learn and help. The way she sees it, displaced Ukrainians, especially those with autism, need to still be on the minds of the Western world just as much as it is for Ukrainians.

"This war will not end quickly, despite what some people may think," said Dolyniuk. "It didn't end three years ago. It's not going to end in a few days."

Beyond the roses: avoiding Valentine's Day cliches

FEBRUARY: a month filled with heart-shaped decorations, chocolate boxes and love letters. All of this is done in the name of Valentine's Day. Whether you celebrate the holiday for its meaning or because of the discounted sweets on Feb. 15, it is easy to be immersed in all the classic symbolism. Among these are the iconic red roses that are displayed in flower shops all month. However, I believe the idea of giving out red roses to your significant other is overly cliché and needs to be put to rest.

Flowers are a timeless gift — gifting a bouquet for Valentine's Day is a classic move for a reason. However, I do not see a reason why roses should be the go-to option. A 2022 survey by the Society of American Florists showed that 83% of consumers bought roses for Valentine's Day. Of that percentage, red roses were the most popular. With everyone buying the same bouquets, the gift can come off as impersonal.

There are so many different kinds of flowers. Be unique.

The easiest way to pick out the perfect bouquet is to simply know your partner. If you have not been together long or it is a first date, red roses may still work. However, why not opt for a different color? If you know their favorite color, choose flowers or roses that incorporate that color. If you have been together for a while, though, there are certain flowers and colors that have special meanings.

Picking flowers with a message you want to tell your partner adds a sense of love and personality to the gift. Even a small amount of research can help to piece together the perfect bouquet. Some of the best flowers to give are ones that have a particular meaning associated with them, such as daisies (loyal love), white carnations (pure love), orchids (love and beauty), yellow poppies (success) and peonies (happy life), according to an article from Iowa State University.

If you are instead doing "Galentine's Day" or celebrating with a friend, there are flowers for that, too. Cattails (peace and prosperity), lavender heathers (admiration), iris and ivy (friendship) and magenta zinnias (lasting affection) are all great contenders. Whoever you are giving these flowers to will definitely appreciate the extra step taken into showing how much you care for them.

There is still one good reason why red roses may be worth it. They are nontoxic to animals. As someone with two cats, I am always worried about what they eat, and some common flowers are harmful if consumed by pets. Choosing nontoxic flowers is a great way to show you care not only about your partner, but their furry friends too. However, roses are not the only safe bet: sunflowers, snapdragons, stock and Madagascar jasmine are all beautiful and pet-friendly options. Orchids are as well and combined with their meaning, should become a popular choice.

In short, red roses are boring. They are overdone and way too cliché. Even with all of the aforementioned flowers, there are still many more out there. Try something new! This Valentine's Day, surprise your significant other with a bouquet personalized to them that shows how you feel. You do not need to be an expert on botany to do that. Any display of effort will always yield good results. Good luck to all the lovers — platonic and romantic — this year!

Jenna Munswami
sophomore communication studies major

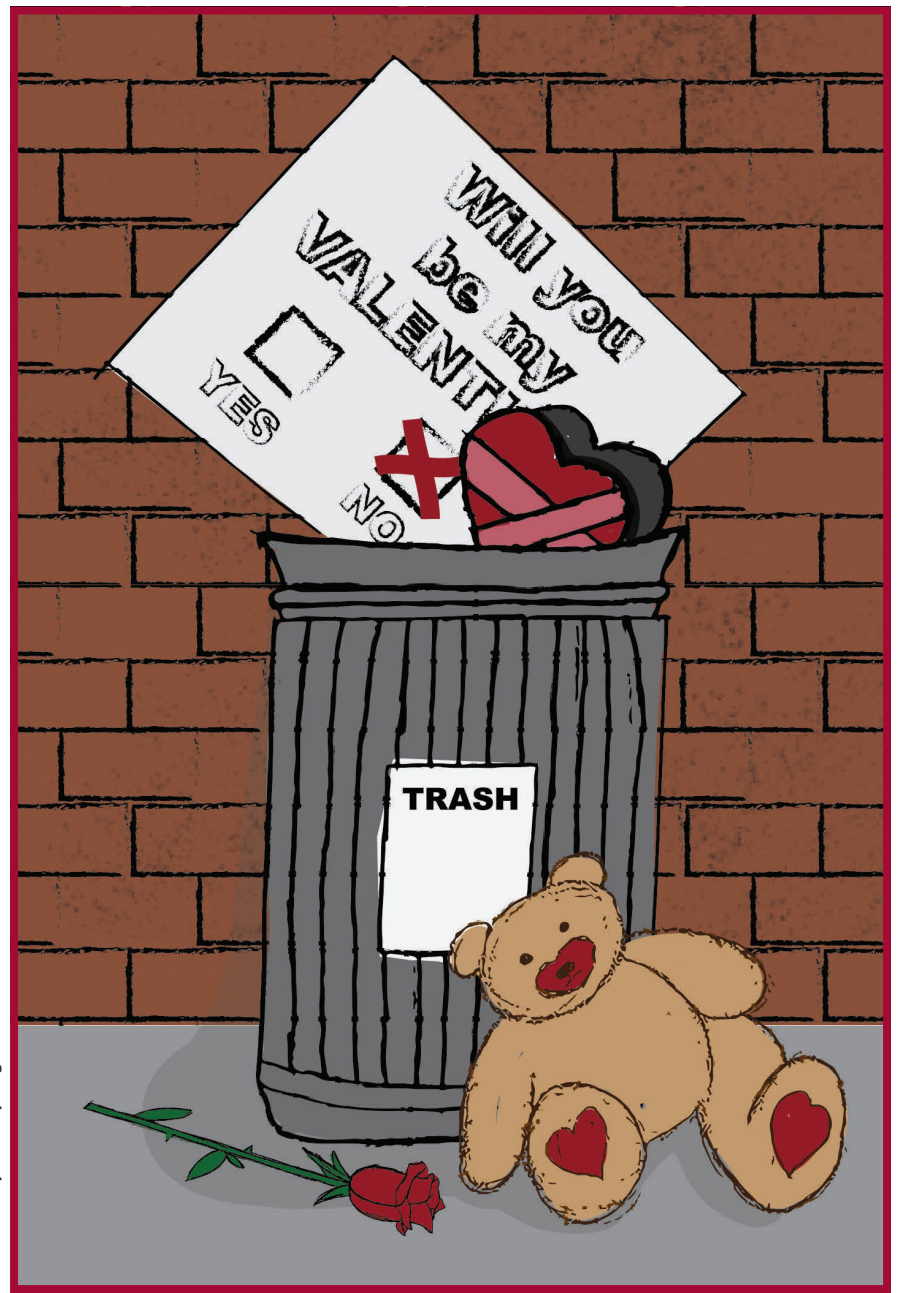


Illustration by Destiny Pagan/The Rider News

Valentine's Day is full of cliché gifts. Personalized gifts and flowers with a deeper meaning could make for a more romantic and thoughtful holiday.

DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

Lamar makes up for lack of flair with potent message

By Jake Tiger

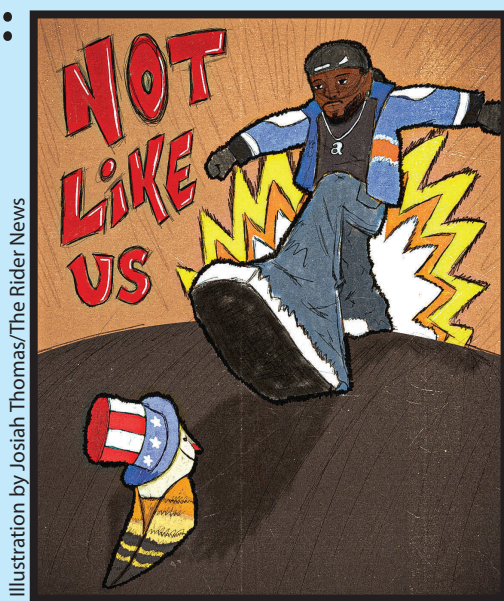


Illustration by Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

BOOK REVIEW:
Loneliness is not lost in translation — but character development is

By Libby D'Orvilliers



Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

Byard, Broncs snatch 5th MAAC victory at buzzer

By Benjamin Shinault

RIDER men's basketball heard the waves crashing in Atlantic City, New Jersey, but still have work to do to lock up its spot in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference Tournament at the shore. On Feb. 6, The Broncs lost some ground in the tournament race with a 89-77 loss to the Sacred Heart Pioneers but bounced back big with a 61-59 buzzer-beater victory over Siena on Feb. 8.

Early struggles

Rider, only four days removed from a tight loss to Merrimack at home, took a bus trip to Fairfield, Connecticut, to take on Sacred Heart.

The Broncs opened up the scoring with a layup from graduate student forward Tariq Ingraham. But following the layup, Sacred Heart returned the favor with a 11-0 run to get it out to a commanding 13-2 lead to start the game.

Down 13-2, the Broncs fought hard to try to knot the game back up. Some leading surges in the comeback effort were freshman guard Flash Burton and senior forward Tank Byard.

Burton, in the first half, supplied 10 points on 3-of-8 shooting from the floor and had six rebounds and five assists.

In the first half of action, the Broncs closed the gap to six multiple times, but could never creep any closer to the Pioneers as they ended the half down 44-36. A critical piece to the Broncs downfall in the first half were their troubles with turnovers as they turned the ball over to the defense 10 times which Sacred Heart would turn into 17 points.

To go along with their turnover troubles, the Broncs had a rough time with fouling as they fouled the Pioneers 17 times, giving them a free 19 points from the charity stripe.

With just 15 minutes left to go in the matchup, the Pioneers had a large lead over the Broncs at 15. The Broncs closed the gap, once again to five when they trailed 68-63 with eight minutes left to go but the Broncs ran out of gas and the Pioneers defended their home court and won the game, 89-77.

Rider's offense played well, having a shooting percentage of 51% from the field but it was the



Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

Senior forward **Tank Byard** hit the game-winner against Siena on Feb. 8. turnover struggles and the foul mishaps that saw the Broncs suffer their eighth MAAC loss of the year.

'Thank God'

Offense was tough to come by in a defensive Siena and Rider matchup on Feb. 8. The Broncs, building off the cuffs of a loss to Sacred Heart where the team shot 51% from the field and had 77 total points, had some struggles in their latest matchup getting the ball rolling on the offensive side of the floor.

With just under 10 minutes left to go in the first half, Siena took their first significant lead of the game when they went up seven, 18-11. Rider crept back into the lead with just under two minutes left to go in the first half thanks to a layup from Burton to make the score 28-27.

Weeks took it upon himself to close out the first half with a dunk and a jumper to give Rider a narrow lead entering the locker room. Weeks, with his 23 points, recorded a new season-high. Weeks also added seven rebounds and three assists.

Coming out of the break, the Broncs started out ice cold, scoring zero points through the first three minutes of the game while Siena hopped out to a 38-32 lead.

Down six, with 16 minutes remaining in the game, the Broncs closed the gap to one a few minutes later

down the line in the game thanks to a layup from senior guard Jay Alvarez.

The Broncs, still searching to take back their lead for the first time since the beginning of the second half, got it back with a jumper from none other than Weeks to put the Broncs up, 52-51.

After that, the Broncs offense began to boil at the right time as well as their defense as they skipped off to a 59-53 lead with 1:11 left on the clock. But, following the free throws from Burton to give Rider the six-point lead, Siena emerged with vengeance and tied it up 59-59 after three straight layups down low. By the looks of it, it was looking more and more like another late-game collapse by the Broncs.

Rider, with possession with under 20 seconds to go and the shot clock unplugged, saw the ball in possession of Burton. Burton dribbled the ball with his right hand, drove to the hoop, threw it off the glass, but no bucket.

Grabbing the rebound with his shooting hand while in the air was Byard, who then sent the shot back up to the net. At the same time as the buzzer sounded at Alumni Gym, was a sound of pure jubilation from Rider fans as the ball nestled into the bottom of the net.

"I just so happened to be in the right spot at the right time," Byard said.

Rider has been on the receiving end of tragic, last-second buzzer beaters this season and the team was happy to be on the other side of the miracle.

"Finally good to be on the side where we have a buzzer beater and someone doesn't have one against us," Head Coach Kevin Baggett said.

It's February and the Broncs need to start stacking up some conference wins if they want a chance to head down to the sandy wooden planks of the Atlantic City boardwalk.

"Whatever we did today, whatever led up to today, carry that into the last seven games," Weeks said.

Rider looks to continue the momentum from the buzzer beating victory into their matchup on Feb. 14 as they take a drive to New Rochelle, New York, to take on the Iona Gaels. Tip-off is set for 7 p.m. and the game will be broadcast on ESPN+.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Rider winning streak ends with loss at Siena

By Kadie DiGiuseppe and Samantha Clark

COMING off its first win streak of the season, Rider women's basketball split its weekend matchups, getting another home win over Sacred Heart 72-57 on Feb. 6, but losing to Siena, 68-49 on Feb. 8, bringing its conference record to 4-9 and sitting one game outside of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference tournament.

Dominant win

Freshman guard Camryn Collins got the first layup and steal for the Broncs, setting up senior guard Mariona Cos-Morales for an open basket, giving Rider the lead just 30 seconds in on Breast Cancer Awareness night.

Sacred Heart responded with a 3-pointer and a made layup but Collins and Cos-Morales were not finished and both obtained their fourth points of the game on the next two sequences.

Senior guard Gabby Turco knocked down her first 3-pointer of the night shortly after and was followed by a layup from senior guard Sanaa Redmond.



Josiah Thomas/The Rider News

Freshman guard **Camryn Collins** recorded 15 points against Sacred Heart.

Sophomore center Kaylan Deveney's 3-pointer extended Rider's lead to 14, ending the first quarter on top 23-8.

Sacred Heart went on a 6-0 run to open up the second quarter, with Rider's defensive efforts slipping away.

Freshman forward Winner Bartholomew sank a free throw and hit two field goals shortly after to gain her first points of the game and the Broncs' first of the quarter.

Sacred Heart broke the lead with back-to-back successful shots, however, Turco quickly tied the game with two layups.

Collins hit the final shot of the quarter, making her the leading scorer of the two quarters, and bringing the Broncs up 35-32 at the half.

Rider began the third quarter strong, holding Sacred Heart scoreless for the first four minutes and continuing on an 18-3 run.

A series of lay-ups by Bartholomew widened the gap, allowing the Broncs to strengthen and hold on to their lead.

This strong performance later got lost in transition with Sacred Heart going on a 10-0 run for two minutes deep in the third.

Sophomore guard Aliya McIver ended the Broncs' scoring drought with her layup at the 12-second mark, giving Rider a slight five-point lead.

The Broncs started the final quarter with two wide open layups by Cos-Morales and Collins, who tied her career high with 13 points.

"We had said in the locker room that we were going to need to value each possession and just make sure we get good looks and stops," said Collins.

Bartholomew also tied her career high of 17

points with a layup, bringing the Broncs up by 16. She was awarded Metro Atlantic Conference rookie of the week for her efforts.

A trio of layups by Rider ended the game, making the final score, 72-57.

"You always want to be peaking in February," Head Coach Lynn Milligan said, "We're still learning. We're still growing. There's still things we got to clean up."

Stopping the stampede

Fresh off three wins, the Broncs traveled to Loudonville, New York, to take on the Siena Saints who started off the game with a 9-3 run.

The Broncs worked up the score to 9-9 with contributions from Bartholomew and Turco.

However, the Saint Bernards responded with a run of their own, bringing the end of the first quarter to 21-11.

The runs did not stop from there. Junior forward Emilee Tahata scored the only two points of the first seven minutes of the second quarter while Siena extended its lead to 21 points.

Cos-Morales finished off the first half adding four more points to end the second half trailing 35-19.

In the third quarter, the Saints extended its lead to 23 and the Broncs found it hard to come back from the lengthy lead.

Siena kept the lead over 18 points the whole quarter which ended with a layup by freshman guard Amany Lopez.

Bartholomew and Cos-Morales combined for 23 while Turco added nine of her own including the only 3-pointer for the Broncs.

Rider will return home on Feb. 13 at 6 p.m. to take on the Iona Gaels. The game will be broadcast on ESPN+.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Turco and Tahata: La Salle to Lawrenceville

By Kadie DiGiuseppe

OVER the last few seasons, Rider women's basketball has welcomed new Broncs through the transfer portal who instantly affected the program. Last season, it was Taylor Langan from Millersville University, who made second team All-Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

This season, Head Coach Lynn Milligan and her coaching crew welcomed a pair of former La Salle Explorers, junior forward Emilee Tahata and her former roommate, senior guard Gabby Turco.

'The game just came to her'

Both Tahata and Turco came to Rider after the 2023-24 season playing for the La Salle Explorers in Philadelphia.

The New Zealand native, Tahata played in 28 games with the Explorers over three seasons but missed the 2021-22 season with an injury. During the 2023-24 season she faced multiple concussions, playing only 14 of 26 games. Though Tahata had been in Philadelphia since her freshman season, it was not until that season that Turco joined the squad with her.

Milligan said she had been scouting Turco since she had been in high school, playing on local AAU teams. However, when Turco was making the switch from Division I basketball after the 2022-23 season, she chose La Salle.

"We recruited her pretty hard," said Milligan. "Things come full circle and we were fortunate enough to get her the second time around."

The next season, Turco committed to Rider less than a month after her junior season at La Salle ended. At the time of the 2023-24 academic year, Turco was interning in Philadelphia and explained that was the reason she chose La Salle, despite Rider's efforts to make her a Bronc.

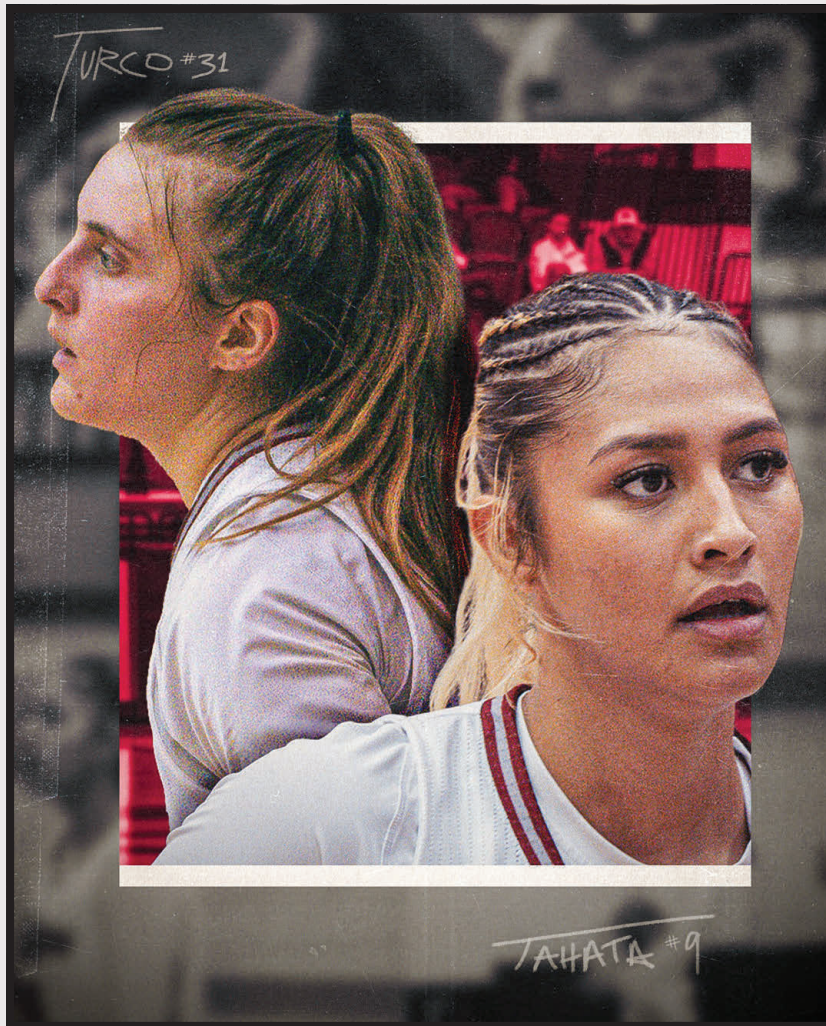
Turco described her first visit at La Salle and mentioned that she did not meet any of her teammates. After that, she did an overnight visit where she met her teammates, including Tahata.

Tahata instantly thought Turco was cool and liked her vibe from the jump. Tahata even noted that she and her former La Salle teammate said that Turco was one of their favorite recruits when she was welcomed to La Salle. Most of all, Tahata said she knew at the start that Turco would fit right in.

"I loved playing with Gab at La Salle. She's one of my favorite players to play with, for sure," said Tahata. "I just loved how composed she was and how the game just came to her."

Turco played in 29 games as a junior where she averaged 5.4 points per game and 2.8 rebounds. She had multiple double-digit games including her season high of 17.

Tahata averaged 5.2 points per game along with 3.1 rebounds which was up from her 2.9 points per game and 1.9 rebounds from 2020-21. Before she came to play in the United States, Tahata played



Senior guard **Gabby Turco** (left) and junior forward **Emilee Tahata** (right) take their talents to Rider.

for the New Zealand Youth National Team and appeared in four games of the FIBA U17 Women's Basketball World Cup in 2018.

This season for the Broncs, Tahata, or "Hata" as Milligan calls her is averaging 5.5 points per game including her career-high 16 points against Bryant.

Tahata explained that even off the court, her and Turco click on all cylinders. "She's just a genuine person," said Tahata.

Turco also was known for checking up on players while at La Salle. Tahata explained that she was constantly checking up on her while Tahata was concussed.

Turco lived downstairs in their apartment while Tahata lived upstairs. Whenever the two crossed paths, even at the weirdest hours of the night, they would chat about anything.

Even though Turco likes her alone time, she knows when she needs someone, Tahata is there. "Obviously, Emilee [Tahata] is outgoing, she's an ear to listen when you have things going on," said Turco.

'It just seemed right'

Turco, the Wildwood, New Jersey, native explained that she had been committed to come to Rider "early," since she visited the year before. For the Broncs, Turco now leads the team and averages 14.1 points per game including her 24 points against Niagara, four points less than her career high.

Tahata on the other hand, was not committed when she visited Rider with Turco. Tahata visited

Rider on March 26, 2024 with Turco and her parents, which was also the day of 107.7 The Bronc's Eggcellent Egg Hunt.

"It was a perfect day. It was sunny, everybody was out on campus, there was so much going on and it just seemed right," Turco said.

Milligan said she had never had two girls from the same school transfer into her program the same year before the duo. She also said that she thinks the duo found comfort in coming from the same school and already being close friends.

Tahata recalled being nervous when going through the transfer portal but her nerves were eased when she found out she could be with Turco.

Assistant Head Coach and Recruiting Coordinator MyNeshia McKenzie and Milligan called Tahata on many occasions after her visit to check in on her. When recalling those phone calls, Tahata said they were "personable."

Tahata expressed that she would have not been as comfortable if it was not for Turco. She said that she was so thankful to have someone like Turco who she "genuinely trusts," transfer schools with her.

When asked about how rare she thought it was to go through NIL with one of your teammates and end up at the same school, Tahata said, "It really is," and even described it as a "once in a lifetime opportunity."

Being an international student, Tahata explained that she is also thankful she got to go through the process with Turco so she did not have to go through the process of relearning a team, coaches and campus alone.

After visiting campus, it did not take Tahata long to commit to Milligan and her program along with Turco. According to Tahata, it took less than a week.

"I was really lucky to be able to go on a visit with someone who I already had played with. I honestly couldn't have asked for anything better," said Tahata.

All love

Milligan described Tahata and Turco as "terrific young women." She commented that both girls came into the program as talented basketball players but Milligan has seen them grow as a Rider basketball player. Not only that, Milligan loves having them represent what Rider women's basketball is all about.

Being on a team together, Milligan believes that is the key to their friendship's growth. "They hang out with each other and their teammates in different atmospheres. From bus rides to hotels to all those other 'remember when' moments," said Milligan.

Not only are they great contributors on the court but Milligan is most thankful for the example they set as young women. She believes her young and newer players get a "really good" example that is led by Tahata and Turco.

ONLINE



Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

WOMEN'S LACROSSE IS BACK!

Check out *The Rider News'* coverage from the first Rider lacrosse game against FDU!

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