



Professor Zdan let go from Rider University

By Samantha Clark

Assistant Sociology Professor Richard Zdan is no longer employed at the university, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Kelly Bidle announced in an April 17 email to the professor's students.

Bidle did not disclose why Zdan is no longer employed.

Zdan refused to comment when he was contacted by The Rider News on April 19 and 21.

His departure from the university came after a recording surfaced that raised concern about Zdan's behavior involving another individual on campus.

Zdan, who has been employed by Rider since 2006, has been removed from the list of sociology and criminology faculty on the University's official website.

Zdan's classes were abruptly canceled on April 9, three weeks before finals are scheduled to begin, according to an email from Brooke Hunter, the senior associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. All office hours and scheduled meetings were also canceled.

Olivia Santa Croce, a junior psychology major said, "I have had four classes with Zdan throughout my three years at Rider. I have enjoyed every class I have had with him. ... He is passionate about teaching students, and that showed."

Santa Croce added, "It is honestly just really

disappointing," she said of the circumstances surrounding Zdan's departure, calling him a "great professor" who allegedly displayed "unacceptable" conduct.

Zdan also served as an adviser for sociology and criminal justice students, all of whom were set to be reassigned to a new faculty adviser, but were not included in Bidle's email to students.

In the April 17 email, Bidle also stated that "all students will receive a grade of P (passing) and 3 academic credits due to this unexpected situation."

When contacted by The Rider News for further explanation, Bidle wrote in an April 19 email, "When the administration was made aware of the situation, the University acted swiftly. Given this is a personnel issue, we are unable to further comment."

Bidle refused comment again on April 20 when contacted by The Rider News for additional explanation.

Zdan had been an at-large member on the executive committee of Rider's chapter of the Association of American University Professors. When asked for comment on his future representation from the chapter, Rider's AAUP President, Professor Maria Villalobos-Buehner, also declined to comment.



Photo courtesy of Richard Zdan

Assistant Sociology Professor **Richard Zdan** is no longer with the university.

Professor honored for community contributions

By Cal Sutton

Tyrone Clinton Jr., an adjunct professor for Westminster Choir College and conductor of Rider's chapel choir, was inducted into Morehouse College's Martin Luther King Jr. 2026 Collegium of Scholars on April 9.

The Morehouse College 41st MLK Jr. College of Ministers & Laity Program had 225 honorees and inductees across several categories for 2026, such as the Board of Preachers, Collegium of Scholars and Board of Sponsors, as well as individual honors.

Clinton, a Morehouse College alumnus, expressed how the distinguishment felt for him. "Personally, I felt really honored. It was a pivotal thing for me ... to be inducted into the Collegium of Scholars," Clinton said.

The award is granted to individuals selected by previously-inducted members of the Collegium of Scholars or faculty of Morehouse College, which is based on their contributions to scholarship, contributions to the community and their commitments to public service.

Leading to his induction, Clinton expressed that he hoped his contributions to the community through his nonprofit organization, The Unsung Collective, had helped make him stand out.

The Unsung Collective is a music collective based in Harlem, New York, devoted to celebrating Black music and the Black experience for people of all walks of life.

Clinton said that this was the last time Morehouse College will induct new members into the Collegium of Scholars, following the retirement of the school's

dean who pioneered the concept.

Benjamin Glick, a sophomore voice performance major, had Clinton as a conductor when he was in Rider's chapel choir.

Reflecting on his time in chapel choir, Glick expressed that Clinton cared about his students and wanted them to achieve great things.

"He does a very good job of setting high expectations, while also teaching very well and giving his students the tools to reach the expectations," Glick said.

These expectations were made easier to reach, due to Clinton's attentiveness to making sure students are using their voices properly and safely.

"In chapel choir, he gave me a strong foundation for what healthy choral singing is," Glick said. "Singing in chapel choir was the first time I really understood what healthy choral singing is, because it's very difficult, but he teaches it very well."

Clinton's perspective on life, which is based on who he is, helped inspire his deep commitment to advocacy and social justice. "[As a Black American, it is important to take] personal and professional responsibility to make sure that change is for the next generation that comes after," Clinton said.

Being Black in America at this time in history is something to be celebrated, and Clinton does just that with his musicianship and community service.

"The work that I have committed to do is work that is outside of myself. It was my dream, six years ago, to start a nonprofit that caters to other folks that is a reflection of other people," Clinton said.



Photo courtesy of Tyrone Clinton Jr.

Rider's **Tyrone Clinton Jr.** (right) was inducted into Morehouse College's Martin Luther King Jr. 2026 Collegium of Scholars.

Glick echoed a similar thought, he noticed Clinton making conscientious efforts to give a voice to composers of diverse backgrounds, unlike the backgrounds typically represented in choral music.

"It's really awesome what [Clinton] does — setting and picking great music by diverse composers and putting them in concert and setting them on [an] equal playing field to the classics," Glick said.

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Loyack's first ride: A year of 'survival'

By Grace Bertrand and Caroline Haviland

Coming into the first year of his term, Rider President John Loyack was faced with the challenges of climbing the university out of its \$21.8 million deficit, enforcing mass faculty layoffs and keeping the university afloat long enough to maintain its accreditation — a task not many university presidents have taken on.

In an exclusive interview with The Rider News on April 16, Loyack said, “Some days, it feels like my first year’s been eight minutes, and sometimes it feels like it’s been eight years. Just depends on the day you catch me.”

Taking the bull by the horns

After decades-worth of quick fixes from past administrations to overcome these obstacles, Loyack’s approach was to lay down a new foundation of sustainable measures, almost completely restructuring the university’s framework.

Four months into his appointment, Loyack announced his March to Sustainability Plan on Nov. 12, a detailed layout of the different steps Rider would have to take in order to get out of its debt, which required major cutbacks among faculty and students.

Five months later, Loyack said that most of the Plan has now been implemented and the results are far better than the projections originally made in November. According to a Jan. 12 version of the Plan, the projected cash deficit for fiscal 2026 was \$6.5 million, a halved amount from the \$12.6 million deficit in fiscal 2025.

One major effort outside of the Plan that aided in the climb out of Rider’s financial deficit was Mercer County’s purchase of two plots of land and its facilities and services agreement with the university, totalling to a \$10 million deal.

The landmark agreement allowed Mercer County to designate most of the purchased land as open space, specifically preserving the Big Woods located in the back of Rider’s campus.

Moving forward, Loyack said he anticipates more similar partnerships, calling it a “win-win-win.”

He added, “Frankly, we had \$10 million worth of debt that we couldn’t have repaid without that transaction. ... So, it was not only a good thing to be able to repay the debt, but it was, more importantly, a \$1 million-a-year of interest expenses that we can now invest in students, instead of paying a bank an exorbitant amount of interest.”

The journey toward a positive cash surplus will continue with further execution of the Plan in the 2026-27 academic year through an end to faculty external tuition remission and reduced paid faculty development benefits, which serves as about \$1 million of the Plan’s total forecasted annual savings of \$11.7 million, the Jan. 12 copy of the Plan stated.

The two biggest contributors toward the Plan’s savings were employee salary reductions and faculty layoffs, supplying a projected \$6.6 million and \$4.5 million back to university funds.

However, with the loss of 30 colleagues and cut benefits and salaries, faculty morale took a hit coming into spring 2026.

In an email to The Rider News on April 21, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Kelly Bidle said that, through conversations with constituents across campus, she has learned that an investment in faculty must be made to counteract some of the sacrifices.

A result of these conversations, she said, is a faculty



Photo by Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

Rider President **John Loyack** reflects on his first year as a Bronc and the progress of the March to Sustainability Plan.

development structure that is soon to be announced, which will involve a competitive selection process for faculty fellows to design and deliver programming to their peers.

“Faculty learn best from their peers, and I want to create a robust teaching and learning collective that is led by faculty, for faculty,” Bidle said. “I believe faculty are eager to deliver and participate in more opportunities like this on campus.”

An additional initiative to tend to faculty losses was the university’s admittance into the Council of Independent Colleges on March 26, an association of colleges and universities across the United States.

The CIC’s Tuition Exchange Program grants tuition-free enrollment to full-time employees and their dependents at the 420 colleges in the council, a process that will start at Rider on Aug. 1.

The reason for this change, Loyack said, is that tuition remission is “a benefit that’s out of market” and the university had to realign their resources amid their financial turmoil.

He added, “We wanted to make sure that faculty and staff had some good options where tuition remission could be something that’s much more efficient from a cost perspective, but yet provides the benefits back to their family.”

An attempt to lead Rider down greener pastures

In Loyack’s first efforts at the university, he welcomed the Presidential Hope Fund to Rider, an initiative to provide students with a financial safety net that dates back to his time at King’s College and Alvernia University.

Since its launch in late October, the Hope Fund has allocated nearly 60 students with \$200,000, according to Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff for Student Experience Mary-Alice Ozechoski, who oversees the program and was brought onto the Senior Leadership Team by Loyack, who previously worked with her at Alvernia.

Loyack described taking the initiative to “a different level” at Rider compared to the prior institutions, saying, “[At Alvernia] in 2.5 years, we raised \$2.5 million. Here, in 60 days we raised \$2.5 million.”

The motive behind the Hope Fund for Loyack was extending a helping hand to first-generation college students, being one himself, and making sure students were being supported financially in order to be able to

progress academically.

He said, “Someday, they’re going to go on and do great things and you sort of help get them ... around the pothole. It’s one of the things that feels really good as a president.”

As Loyack looks onward to the future of his term, he said he’s excited to finally be getting to “the fun part of being a president,” which, to him, is building new programs and new student experiences.

With almost half of Rider’s students being first-generation college students, Loyack’s vision for Rider is to become “the first generation, experiential learning-based, outcome driven institution in New Jersey.”

“I think if we do that right, the value proposition of that’s very strong ... Because we invest so many resources in [students] along the way, we get a lot of all of you to the end goal, which is what it’s all about,” Loyack said.

How he plans to achieve this is by getting students engaged with entrepreneurs, providing free resources for them to grow and expand and planting them in the local community to help students receive experiential learning.

He also added that he hopes to build out the health sciences program altogether at Rider, expanding beyond just degree programs into technical 12-to-16-week programs and nursing programs.

With the potential for new initiatives, Loyack also said he planned to accommodate them with facility expansion so that the programs would have a home on campus.

Looking back on his first year as Rider’s president, Loyack encapsulated the biggest thing he gained from the year in one word: “survival.”

“That was the goal in year one, was to do what we needed to do to survive with the creditors; survive financially and still provide a good experience to students along the way,” Loyack said.

As he reflected on the obstacles he faced to get there, he explained that there was also a different outlook amid the challenges.

He added, “I guess that’s the fun of obstacles, right? If you overcome them, you have the joy of getting to the other side.”



DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

A team of three Rider students takes fourth place out of 30 teams and another takes eighth out of 90 students in individual awards at the New Jersey Undergraduate Mathematics Competition.

By Brannagh Rattigan



DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

Students and staff at Rider talk about the use of Artificial Intelligence in higher education.

By Morgan Dickens and Zyheim Bell

Relay for Life gathers Rider community

By Sofia Santiago

White petals, carried by a refreshing breeze, rained over the Campus Mall. The sun warmed the various tables and field games set up on the grass. Music played over the two large speakers set up at the end of the Campus Mall and members of various on-campus organizations gathered on blankets on the grass or played catch with their friends.

This picturesque scene was the reality of the annual Relay for Life event, hosted on April 18, during which social and academic organizations across campus convened to raise money and awareness for cancer and its research.

Relay for Life is part of the American Cancer Society's program of fundraising events, and the sector at Rider is one of the many across the country. This year, the event's primary organizers and co-chairs were senior accounting major PJ McCall and senior arts and entertainment industries management major Mekhia Gwynn.

Planning for the event started in the beginning of the semester, and Gwynn shared that she and McCall "... worked so hard. We had long nights, early mornings and busy days. I think our passion for Relay for Life, and then just being locked in with each other, really pushed for it, and our perseverance definitely made way."

However, before finalizing any of their plans, they had to be greenlit by a liaison from the American Cancer Society. Students volunteered to help the fun-filled day flow smoothly by setting up the tables, games and food. The itinerary of the main event started at 2 p.m. with registration. To be able to participate in the general event, each student donated \$25 and organizations donated \$5 to participate in the sponsorship lap, where groups circled the Campus

Mall for the cause. If students had individually signed up before a certain date, they were offered a purple shirt at registration.

Since Relay for Life is considered a competition, each organization was registered as a team and would be crowned the winner if they donated the largest amount throughout the afternoon. Participants were able to track the team standings and how much had been raised through the American Cancer Society's app and Rider's Relay for Life website.

This year's theme was Disney, and every organization interpreted it in a different way. Some took the theme literally, such as Club Badminton with their setup being turned into a dining table and cooking station, with members dressed up as chefs and an inflatable rat costume portraying the film "Ratatouille." Rider Pep Band represented the movie "Cars" with flags and stripes, Bonner Community Leaders portrayed "Toy Story" with toys and costumes, Delta Phi Epsilon was "Hannah Montana" and Alpha Phi Omega was "Monsters University."

Victoria Mazzara, a junior graphic design major and member of APO, commented, "Getting to pick a theme and roll with it is one of my favorite parts. [Our table is] cute, ... They really let you be creative, and as a graphic design major, I love that."

She also expressed that the event held a larger significance for her and for many others.

"Cancer affects many people globally. Even if you're not personally tied to it, I think it's just good to support a cause that doesn't have a full cure yet," Mazzara said.

Victoria Annunziata, a junior accounting major and a member of Delta Sigma Pi, shared her personal connection to the event, as this marked her eighth time participating in a Relay for Life and her third time doing it at Rider.

"This is an event and organization I've supported since I was about 11. Being able to go into college and have that same vision and alignment has been really a pleasure, and to be able to see other people experience it is truly amazing," Annunziata said.

Although most teams were Rider organizations, one was from the greater Lawrenceville community: the Always Strong & Courageous team, led by Yolanda Gramajo, a cancer survivor and Lawrenceville resident.

After a surgery last spring, doctors discovered that she had cancer. This came as a surprise for her, since there was no history in her family. She went through rounds of chemotherapy for six months, and is still going to the hospital for checkups every three months.



Sofia Santiago/The Rider News

The Always Strong & Courageous team, from left to right: Evan, Joy, Ethan and their mother and cancer survivor, Yolanda Gramajo.

"Looking at all the ladies in the hospital with me, I was like, 'I have to do something. I have to.' Because when cancer knocks at your door, you pay attention," Gramajo said.

She discovered Relay for Life at Rider through the American Cancer Society's website while searching for events near her. The Always Strong & Courageous team consisted of Gramajo and her children, and they raised around \$1,600 prior to the event.

As a first-time participant, Gramajo expressed her excitement and her hope that the event will be promoted to the community outside of Rider to get them involved.

At 2:30 p.m., the main activities kicked off with organizations completing a Sponsorship Lap around the Campus Mall to a song of their choosing. While each team took their lap, the others enjoyed the warm spring day on the grass, socializing with friends.

"Last year it was sadly inside, so it was a little bit of a different vibe. But I'm so happy we're back out in the sun, getting to walk around again," said Leah Miller, a junior musical theater major and Vice President of Recruitment of Zeta Tau Alpha.

"I think [Relay for Life] unites the community together. Sometimes it's hard, and you feel separate from each group, but this really helps us all support one cause," Miller said.

The afternoon continued well into the evening with a relay race, a pie eating contest, tug of war, a scavenger hunt, a pizza party and a fashion show. The co-chairs announced during the closing ceremony that \$11,819 were raised in total, with Sigma Phi Epsilon winning, raising close to \$3,500 for the cause.

Annunziata emphasized the importance of an event like this, saying, "You never know someone else's experiences and what they've been through. I think [Relay for Life] is a time to reflect that we might have all had a similar shared experience, and we can all come together and support the same issue and fight against cancer."



Tatyanna Beauliere-Jackson/The Rider News

The afternoon started off with Sponsorship Laps.

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Senior Spotlight: Zoey Pangburn

By Teagan Rotella

When Zoey Pangburn first stepped foot onto Rider's campus, she wasn't herself. Literally. Being an identical twin sister can sometimes mean switching places when the other gets sick, which was exactly what Pangburn did for her twin, Micki.

What Pangburn did not expect was to walk out of the campus tour and consider Rider for herself.

"I'm listening to the people talk about Rider, and I'm like, wait, this actually sounds really good," Pangburn said.

Pangburn, a senior political science major, and her twin sister both eventually committed to Rider. Since then, Pangburn has been a part of a few organizations on campus, such as Rider's Model United Nations team.

"I've learned so much about public speaking, representing ideas I don't necessarily agree with and coming up with arguments for things I hadn't considered before," Pangburn said.

From April 6 to April 10, Rider's MUN team was in New York for the National Model United Nations Conference and received the Outstanding Delegation Award.

"Once you're [in the sessions], you're running around non-stop. You're trying to control the room and also be as diplomatic as possible," Pangburn said. "It's a lot of fun."

Pangburn is also the assistant captain of Rider's mock trial team.

Since being involved in Rider's mock trial team, Pangburn is better at thinking on her feet and understanding the Federal Rules of Evidence.

"I can't say that there's any other organization on campus that is as helpful for somebody who's going into law as mock trial is," Pangburn said.

For her future career, Pangburn plans on becoming

a real estate lawyer. She will attend Temple Law School in the fall, where she received the Beasley full-tuition scholarship. Last summer, she worked at Lex Nova Law Firm in South Jersey and is looking forward to working there again this summer.

"I essentially manage their estate planning, and I've been a witness to a couple of signed documents," Pangburn said. "It's pretty fun and I'm excited to go back."

Before attending Rider, Pangburn's academic journey was a unique one.

She attended a technical vocational high school that offered a program where she was able to test out of high school her sophomore year. Then, she started attending Camden County College for her junior and senior year of high school, receiving both her high school diploma and associate degree. After graduating, she transferred to Rider to complete her bachelor's degree.

Because of her unique academic experience, Pangburn is nervous about the fact that law school is a three-year program.

"When I look back, what I've done is two years at Rider, two years at Camden County, and two years of high school," Pangburn said.

Despite the fact that this experience will be new for her, Pangburn is glad that she will be familiar with her college by the time she leaves.

Megan Rothstein, a junior actuarial science major, met Pangburn for the first time on move-in day.

After an event hosted on the Campus Green, Rothstein, her mom and her roommate at that time filled up a tote bag with sodas from the event to bring back to their dorm room.

"As we're walking back to Longstreet, I hear someone behind us say, 'I'm thirsty.' So, I turn around



Photo courtesy of Zoey Pangburn

Senior political science major **Zoey Pangburn** has made the most of her two years at Rider.

with this bag full of sodas, and I say, 'Here, you want one?' And that's how [Pangburn and I] first met," Rothstein said.

They found out their dorms were on the same floor in Longstreet House, and hung out together for the rest of the day.

"So now, of course, this year, we're roommates, and I like to think we're inseparable," Pangburn said.

Reflecting on what has changed since attending Rider, Pangburn believes she has become more optimistic and resilient. She is most proud of the strong friendships she has made, as she believes they will continue past college.

When asked what advice she would give to incoming freshmen, Pangburn said, "Don't be scared to get involved. Find people who have similar interests to you and just throw yourself into the deep end there."

Transcending language and culture: Arts Abroad in Japan

By Sofia Santiago

Nine days, four cities, countless cultural exchanges and lasting memories.

Over spring break, the Office of International Education offered students a study abroad course, Arts Abroad: Performing Arts in Japan.

The itinerary was created by Yoshinori Tanokura, associate professor of set design and theater. Originally from Japan himself, Tanokura planned the experience to include a diverse range of performances and structured hours with free periods for personal exploration.

The schedule included a musical in Osaka, a stop to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, a visit to the Great 'floating' Torii Gate of Miyajima Island, a Noh theater workshop in Kyoto, an afternoon in Super Nintendo World, a Kabuki performance in Tokyo and a cultural exchange with students of Josai University.

The balance of traditional Japanese aesthetics and Western influences in the events was created intentionally by Tanokura to contrast the two and show how they co-exist.

This is the fourth time the trip has taken place, and it was the first time that Hiroshima was featured as a stop on the itinerary, which Tanokura added after receiving feedback from students.

"Academically, there are different purposes for each student, because we had psych students, business students and AEIM students. Even though the main purpose is to learn about the Performing Arts in Japan, I hope the students gained or learned something useful for their own measures," he said.

Tanokura designed the class to prioritize personal learning, since not all students who attended are majoring in the arts. This was done through mandatory daily journal entries during the trip and a final reflection after the trip.

"I hope they learned about themselves. As [they are] an American in a foreign country, I want them to think about where they stand in this world, and when they come back here, I want them to realize good things about this country as well," Tanokura said.

Liam Sjolander, a sophomore computer science major, had an interest in the trip since hearing about it at the start of the semester and was one of the students who was able to go thanks to the James P. Bush



Photo courtesy of Liam Sjolander

Students from across a variety of majors enjoyed sight-seeing and cultural exchanges in Japan.

scholarship offered by OIE.

"I felt very zen during the trip. There were a lot of moments where you can get overwhelmed if you let it, because we took the trains and in the cities it's very busy, ... but it was nice to have that experience of knowing I can have control of how I'm feeling even in this situation," said Sjolander.

This marked his first time out of the U.S., and Sjolander highlighted the importance of the scholarship in being able to attend.

"I feel very lucky and grateful for [the scholarship], because I genuinely never thought I'd be able to do something like this right now," Sjolander said.

One of the highlights of the trip for Sjolander was the ferry ride to Miyajima Island and being able to see the famous red Torii Gate that gets submerged by the

tide and appears to float.

Ryann Reich, a junior acting major, echoed this opinion, describing an encounter with a respectful deer on the hiking trails of the mountains on the island.

She shared how they had opportunities for theater majors to immerse themselves in what the theater scene is like in Japan.

"We went to see a musical on the first night called 'Ghost and the Lady,'" Reich explained. The musical was based on a novel about a ghost who protects Florence Nightingale, and was entirely composed and sung in Japanese.

Reich continued, "It was super cool. And it just really shows that art really does transcend languages, because I had a blast at the musical regardless."

Has the silver screen finally gone grey?

Often, I hear people make the claim that “cinema is dead,” or that it is going down in quality; nothing more than sequels, remakes and obvious cash grabs. But, does this claim carry any merit? I would argue, as someone that is pretty well-versed in this field, that, no, movies are not dying.

To say such a blanket accusation like “all movies are slop” is simply false, and we can see this just by looking at the previous year. We saw some of the greatest and most remarkable films be made in “One Battle After Another,” “Marty Supreme,” “Train Dreams” and Best Picture winner, “Sinners.” Were there bad movies? Of course there were, but over 600 films are released each year on average, so to expect an absolute cinematic masterpiece every single time is just absurd.

To revisit the claim again, I think that the 21st century has been one of the best times to be a movie fan. 2007 and 2019 were two of the greatest years of film, with the releases of “There Will Be Blood,” “No Country for Old Men” and, later, “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” and “Parasite,” just to name a few. When looking at these and the many other instant classics, it becomes difficult to argue that cinema has gotten worse. What I will say is that there is an obvious and more abundant amount of slop being churned out nowadays.

The blame is not hard to point out, as the rise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Netflix has directly impacted the way we consume movies. Marvel has been making adaptations of their comics for decades now, but it was not until Sony Pictures came along and

released Sam Raimi’s “Spider-Man” in 2002 when dozens of sequels, prequels, spin-offs and more started flooding theaters across the world. This money-making trend has spawned copycats who have realized how lucrative this method can be. While yes, some Marvel movies have been great, there’s a shared sentiment that, ever since “Avengers: Endgame,” the quality has dipped tremendously. Yet, the company still buys up all timeslots for theaters, making it impossible for other films to get their chance at being seen and making a large box-office return. The same goes for Marvel’s new parent company, Disney, as they do the same shady business practice of buying up every single time slot available and flooding movies with their subpar content as of late.

Similarly, Netflix and other streaming services have been detrimental to the film industry. While movies and television shows are much easier to watch, it has come at a major cost. Movies are being pulled from cinemas far earlier than they have in the past, and in some cases, being pushed out on streaming in tandem with theater releases. This hurts theater revenue and is a huge reason as to why they are struggling to turn a profit; people are less inclined to go buy tickets, when they could just as easily see it on streaming. Convenient, yes, but this has paved the way for the “Netflix-ification” of media. This trend is most apparent in the newest season of “Stranger Things,” as the writing panders to an audience of people glued to their phone. The writing was repetitive, exposition-heavy and just plain terrible. Netflix knows their

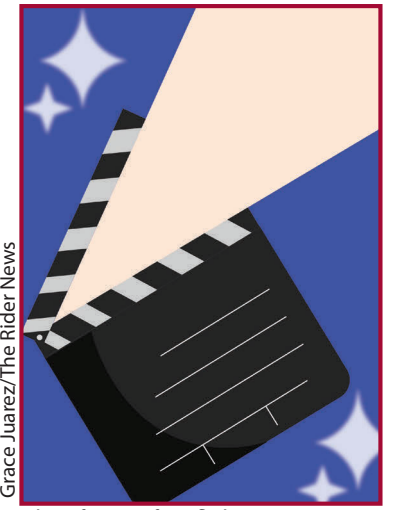
audience, but is also responsible for creating it.

With that being said, we are lucky enough to be seeing the rise of independent production studios like A24 and Neon; their growing popularity and cult-following is a revolutionary attack against these heartless conglomerates. They have been a breath of fresh air in terms of indie filmmaking getting to shine in the mainstream. Filmmakers with incredible and original ideas are being given the greenlight to create projects that would so seldom be represented in Hollywood.

So, while there are many duds in modern cinema and several problems behind the scenes, it is untrue to say that it has gotten so bad to the point of “dying.” There are too many great films and original ideas coming out for that to be true. The future for cinema is bright.

Alfie Eville

freshman history and secondary education major



Grace Juarez/The Rider News

Film is far away from flatlining

The newest Mario movie is for the fans

One of my favorite games growing up was “Super Mario Galaxy.” I loved flying around to the different planets and exploring the world of the game. So naturally, I was pretty excited when Illumination and Nintendo announced that the sequel to the 2023 film, “The Super Mario Bros. Movie,” would be covering this version of the game. I have to admit, though, that I have mixed feelings about it after having seen it. On one hand, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the film as a fan of the games, but on the other hand, I found it lacking in some places.

This movie definitely does a lot right. The music, for instance, I was quite happy with. “Super Mario Galaxy” has one of the greatest original soundtracks in a video game, and it definitely shows in Brian Tyler’s score for the film. Another thing that this film does right is the visuals; this is the best that an Illumination film has ever looked. I have been noticing a trend over the past couple of years that I like to call the “Spider-Verse effect.” Ever since critics and audiences had positive feedback on the hyper-stylized animation of “Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse,” a lot of mainstream animation companies seem to be going for a similar look, which is noticeable in “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie.” The animation was much better than the original, while still staying faithful to the style of the first and, more loosely, the games. There is, however, one section, when introducing the character Fox McCloud, where the animation switches from the regular 3-D style to 2-D, invoking the feeling of 90s-era anime, like “Neon Genesis: Evangelion.” This sequence has been stuck in my mind ever since

and I hope that, if they decide to do a Star-Fox spinoff, they keep this beautiful art style.

Just like its predecessor, the voice acting was just alright, but it did have some standouts. Memorable performances from the first movie include Jack Black’s Bowser and Charlie Day’s Luigi, and they both retain that same quality in this new installment. This new film has some new additions, including Glen Powell as Fox McCloud, who stole nearly every scene he was in, and, most surprisingly, Donald Glover’s Yoshi, which was a masterclass in character voice-acting. He jokingly said during the press tour that he would be “surprised if [he] didn’t win an Oscar for this,” and I honestly agree. His voice was so unrecognizable that I would have believed it if you had told me that they used clips from the games. Both Powell and Glover were clearly passionate about the project and it makes the film all the better for it.

However, this film does still have its shortcomings, and that becomes most apparent in the writing. For the first half of the film, the pacing is excellent and I was engaged the entire time. However, the second half was a lot more sloppy. It definitely had sequences that were well done, but it felt very unbalanced and unengaging; at times, it can feel as though it is leaning too heavily into ‘nostalgia-bait.’ Another complaint I have about the writing is that it is really not a faithful adaptation of the game. Although, I feel like the game has a certain melancholic vibe that just cannot be replicated in a kids film. You can tell Illumination was not really trying to make a faithful adaptation of the game, but instead, to make a sequel to their box office hit while incorporating some elements from the Galaxy games.



Gail Demerski/The Rider News

Illumination’s Mario sequel has its shortcomings

All in all, “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” is good. It has its problems, but if you look at it as a whole, it is still a good kids film. Plus, it has enough references to keep someone who is into video games pointing at the screen and saying, “Hey! I understand that!” So overall, I would give “The Super Mario Galaxy Movie” 3 stars out of 5.

Ryan Denkovic

freshman English major

Senior editors leave with lifelong friends

When I first came to Rider, I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do or what I wanted to study, which was not new for me. What I did know, though, was that I wanted to do something that mattered. I started off as a communication studies major and I had floated the idea in my head of switching my major to journalism throughout my freshman year, but it was not until I accidentally ran into former journalism professor and my former adviser Jackie Incollingo — who I would not be here without — that I really felt like I had received a sign to take that leap.

I immediately got involved at The Rider News during my sophomore year, getting my start in the opinion section writing little think pieces about anything I thought was worth telling, from the environment to artificial intelligence.

From there, I started to fall in love with writing, but still was not sure I had found the right fit for myself. I asked the executive editor at the time if I could write for news and I was immediately thrown into one of the most dense things any student reporter can write about: financial aid. I remember doing the story with a lot of big numbers and complicated figures and finally finding that spark I had been looking for. Funnily enough, the first position I came into after that had nothing to do with news or opinion; I was hired as one of the features and entertainment editors going into my junior year, and needless to say, that catapulted me into where I needed to be.

I fell in love with the creative process of gathering my reporting and piecing it together into a cohesive story through my writing, a joy I experienced with

the many profile features I got to do. To this day, I still miss getting to be one-on-one with the people I interview in that way.

After working as a section editor for a year, I wanted to pursue the challenge of being the executive editor and running the newsroom myself. Although I was not sure if I was up to the task, the main thing that pushed me was the home I knew I would be coming into at the newsroom. There is a different energy when you walk into the newsroom that is hard to find anywhere else: copy editors passing editing suggestions back and forth, section editors writing their deadline stories while laying out pages and conversations being screamed across the room while singing, dancing and even the occasional mock court case took place in the background.

The run-down basement in Longstreet House has become more than just a newsroom for me. It is filled with painted bricks that act as the legacies of all the people that came before me and memories of shared moments between co-workers that have since become friends.

As executive editor, yes I have gotten the privilege to write about the biggest news on campus and expand my reporting on a level many student reporters are never able to reach while still at college. But, more importantly, I have been able to experience the beautiful chaos of late Tuesday production nights with my best friend and outrageously talented managing editor Caroline Haviland and learn what it means to be a leader to an executive board that I could have only ever dreamed of leading.

So yes, I may not have started off knowing what I



Grace Bertrand, outgoing executive editor

Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

wanted to do when I first came to Rider, or even who I wanted to be, but I did know one thing: I wanted to leave a legacy that I would be proud of. And as I leave here now and exit the privilege of serving as executive editor at The Rider News, I truly feel like I have done that, and am also leaving with life-long friends, which is more than I could have ever asked for.

Grace Bertrand
senior journalism major

Never will I ever forget the day I decided to become a journalist. I was sitting in my living room watching the news with my dad when a segment came on about detention facilities in China. I remember just feeling really mad and thinking, “why isn’t anyone talking about this?”

That was the day I knew journalism was what I wanted to do. I have always enjoyed writing since there is joy in telling stories and encapsulating emotion on a piece of paper. Words are power and I wanted to make sure I used mine right.

When I applied to colleges, I was scared of making the wrong decision. Then came the day I visited Rider University for the first time on Admitted Students Day, and I was hooked. The campus was vibrant on a cool, spring afternoon, and it felt like I was home. I made my way into the Fine Arts Building and met the faculty and students within the department of Communication, Journalism and Media. I listened to the panel of students in the department and heard the managing editor of The Rider News, Shaun Chornobroff, talk about the experience he has received from the student-run newspaper.

I turned to my mom and dad and said, “I want to do that.”

So, I started toward my goal and joined the newspaper my freshman year as a copy editor. From the beginning of my time in the basement of Longstreet House, I knew I found a place I would forever call home. I eventually began writing for news and found a love for that style of writing — although, I’ll admit now, that I wish I would have written for the other sections more often.

By my junior year, I got chosen to be one of the

news editors, which was a time of personal growth for me in my journalistic craft. This job rightfully trained me for my eventual appointment as managing editor in my senior year.

As I reflect on the past year serving as managing editor, I am just filled with a heart of gratitude. First, I am so honored to have worked alongside my best friend, Grace Bertrand. I could not have asked for a better executive editor to lead this staff with, and will always hold our time serving together near to my heart.

To our staff of amazing editors, thank you for putting up with our spontaneous songs and dance, for always being prepared and for being passionate about your work. I can wholeheartedly say that each and every one of you are going to go off to do great things in your careers.

As I prepare to graduate and go into the world of professional journalism, I am faced with the reality of the threat against the freedom of the press in our nation. But this does not mean we must stand down and retreat our defenses. This means we stand up to those who oppose us and question authority. I will always thank our previous faculty adviser, Jackie Incollingo, for pressing this into the staff at this student-run newspaper.

I will leave this colorful newsroom as a completely different person than who I was when I joined four years ago. I will forever miss the family I have made and the times we all spent together.

Caroline Haviland
senior journalism major



Caroline Haviland, outgoing managing editor

Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

Caroline Haviland

DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

March Madness concludes with a bang, just in time for the WNBA draft



By Terrell Munford



DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE:

New! Harvey and Schnozola comic



By N.D. Medal



A lasting legacy: Santiago leaves as one of Rider's all-time greats

By Samantha Clark and Joshua Yuhas

Shining on the volleyball court as one of Rider's greatest athletes, senior opposite Kiannisha Santiago has carved her name into Broncs history. Before the accolades and records, though, she was simply trying to find her place; one she now leaves as one of the program's most impactful players.

New beginnings

Starting from the age of five, Santiago's volleyball journey began in San Juan on the island of Puerto Rico, where she played for her middle school and high school teams, while competing for the South Coast Volleyball club.

Playing as both an outside hitter and an opposite, Santiago learned how to adapt her position early, a trait that became critical in her development as a player.

While playing in Puerto Rico, her aspirations to play at the collegiate level in the United States bloomed, and in 2020, she made the move stateside for high school at Hudson Catholic High School in Jersey City.

With the international move, Santiago entered into the recruiting world late, however, that did not stop Rider Volleyball Head Coach Jeff Rotondo from spotting her potential.

"There were a few people we were in pretty deep conversations with in that recruiting class, but we figured out, 'let's give this kid a look,'" Rotondo said.

Through an invite from her high school coach, Rotondo was impressed by Santiago, but also recognized there was work to do.

Flipping perspectives to Santiago, she contacted Coach Rotondo and his staff, where throughout talks, she established herself, leading them to bring her into the program.

"I sent an email to Rotondo. He came to see me in practice and we shared emails," Santiago said. "He took me on a tour, we had a meeting and I decided I wanted to come to Rider."

Setting herself apart through her athletic ability in the recruitment process, she demonstrated a reliable piece for the Broncs, and Coach Rotondo saw the vision for her influence on their roster construction.

"Everything she did on the court and off the court pretty much let us know that this was a kid we needed to build around," Rotondo said.

Earning her spot

Shortly after moving to America, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, restricting Santiago's direct contact with the English language.

With that, she started her first day at Rider as a shy and timid Bronc, the language barrier proving to be one of her biggest obstacles off the court.

Santiago began as a walk-on for Rider, appearing in 22 matches in the 2022 season. She earned 12 starts, the second-most among all freshmen that year.

She continued this success in the following two years, earning Second Team All-MAAC honors after her sophomore season and First-Team All-MAAC honors after her junior year.

Although her hard work at Rider was seemingly successful, Santiago was still not satisfied with her performance on the court.

"There were times throughout my junior season that I wanted to give up, because volleyball wasn't going the way I wanted to go," Santiago said. "[But



Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

Senior opposite **Kiannisha Santiago** was voted The Rider News Female Player of the Year.

my mom] always picked my head up, talking positively, and thanks to her, I never gave up."

In addition to her mom, who she credited as her best friend and main source of motivation, Santiago's teammates served as her family on the court, pushing her to be better each and everyday.

Whether it is driving teammates to the grocery store, working out together or making memories in and outside of practices and matches, the culture of the Broncs is synonymous with a familial connection.

Santiago said, "We don't call us a team, we call us a family."

Senior libero Keegan O'Connor, who joined the team with Santiago in 2022, said, "Coming in as a walk-on, not playing much her freshman year, to winning Player of the Year... it's an insane growth that she's had," O'Connor said.

'I wrote that goal in my notebook'

In her senior season, Santiago was unstoppable, leading the Broncs with 435 kills, fourth in the MAAC, paired with 515 points, second in the MAAC.

Reaching milestones in her final season had a profound impact on Santiago, particularly reaching the 1,000 career kills mark during her stellar 2025 season.

"It means a lot, especially coming as a walk-on and not having much playing time. Reaching the 1,000 kills really made me happy," Santiago said.

Thriving in all regards, Santiago posted career highs on both offensive and defensive ends, breaking her season highs each year she played with Rider.

"She's a catalyst, there is no doubt about it. She is the kind of player that, when people see her play, they want to match her energy, because it's really hard not to. She plays with so much fire and energy," Rotondo said.

With All-MAAC honors her last two seasons, Santiago wanted more than repeating this performance.

Instead, she had a bigger goal in sight — the MAAC Player of the Year honors.

"As soon as we started preseason, I wrote that goal in my notebook, and I just kept trying to do my best to achieve that," Santiago said.

Coach Rotondo saw her confidence develop throughout her career, and her predetermination paid off when the conference coaches voted her for the 2025 MAAC Player of the Year.

Santiago's feats were also recognized by her Rider peers, which has a unique impact on a student-athlete.

During her time on campus, she has been told how students loved watching her play, which infused confidence in Santiago.

"I saw my name in the four or five nominated players and I was very confident, because of the support, messages and love that they shared daily around campus."

Through her continuous hard work and effort throughout the grueling 29-game season, the Broncs pushed their way into the finals with Santiago manning the front lines to get them there.

If there was a game to define her career, the answer was simple for the volleyball star of the Broncs.

"It was the Quinnipiac game in the semifinals. I almost had a perfect game," she said.

Santiago led the Broncs in the game with 20 kills and third on the team in digs with nine, as Rider won over Quinnipiac University in four hard-fought sets to advance to the finals.

The win against Quinnipiac in the semi-final round of the conference championships perfectly culminated Santiago's four years as a Bronc.

In 2022, she faced the same competition as a freshman, where the team competed against Quinnipiac in the semi-final round. There, the Broncs lost 0-3, marking their 3-1 win in the 2025 season as a full-circle moment and the perfect end to her highly-decorated career.

Etched in history

Santiago recently signed a contract with an agent to advance her post-graduation goals of playing professional volleyball.

Looking back at her four years repping cranberry and white, Santiago feels proud of her accomplishments, as well as gratitude for the program and the people that brought her so much.

"[Being a Bronc] means a lot, because Rider has done a lot of things for me," Santiago said. "It means a lot to carry that name."



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The silent killer: Kyle Neri's Bronc success

By Benjamin Shinault

Just a few weeks after Rider baseball pulled off a historic upset win over nationally-ranked Coastal Carolina University in the 2023 NCAA Tournament, Rider made quite the addition to its team, a homegrown New Jersey talent named Kyle Neri.

Neri served as the perfect replacement for then star outfielder, Brendan O'Donnell, as Neri possessed all five tools on the field: hitting for power and average, speed, fielding and strength.

When then Head Coach Barry Davis saw Neri, he knew he would be a perfect match for the school only an hour away from his home.

'I got a call'

Coming out of Williamstown High School in 2022, Neri was a sought-after prospect. Neri, according to Perfect Game, was ranked a top 10 outfielder in New Jersey and within the top 50 prospects overall.

In high school, Neri carried a batting average of .410 and had 75 hits. Neri was also a standout recruit at the Perfect Game Circuit.

With this, Neri would commit to Bryant University, but at Bryant, Neri did not dress once as he took a redshirt year.

"Originally, my first plan was to play four years and be done, and I knew being there I would have to wait a little longer," Neri said. "It just wasn't my spot."

Neri hopped into the transfer portal and awaited schools to come after him. At that time, Rider was playing in the Conway Regional in the 2023 NCAA tournament. After the Broncs were eliminated, Davis needed to recharge his team, which was decimated by graduates and players hopping in the portal.

"I saw him play a summer game down in Hammonton, New Jersey. We talked, he came up for a visit and I made him an offer and he took it," Davis said.

Rolling with the Broncs

In his first year at Rider, Neri got a bulk of the starts. He wrapped up his impressive redshirt freshman season with a batting average of .312, while hitting six home runs and bringing in 27 runs. With the head-turning stats, he took home MAAC All-Rookie team honors.

As each season passed, Neri became an even better player. In his sophomore season with the Broncs, he finished the season on the All-MAAC first team, once again batting well over .300 at .324, lacing 14 doubles, bringing in 43 runs and slugging six home runs.

This season, Neri sits in the top 10 for batting average, on base + slugging percentage, RBIs, hits and runs scored.

For Neri, not much has changed when it comes to mechanics or a different style of coaching, he just feels more comfortable.

**MEN'S
PLAYER
OF THE YEAR
#12**

**KYLE
NERI**
**TOP 10 PLAYER
IN THE MAAC**
.354 BATTING AVG.

Graphic by Yanuel Santos, Photos by Abby Ray/The Rider News

Senior outfielder **Kyle Neri** was voted The Rider News Male Player of the Year.

"I'm playing against guys that I know more often," Neri said. "You can start to figure out where they are weaker and you can attack those spots over the years."

Neri did get a change of scenery, though, when he played for the Upper Valley Nighthawks in the summer of 2025, a collegiate summer league team based out of Hartford, Vermont.

With the Nighthawks, Neri played alongside current Rider players in junior pitcher Jack Ruditzky and junior catcher Nick Shuhet.

There, Neri suffered a head injury and could not

play a ton, but still learned a lot.

"I got hit in the head while I was there and was out for 10 days, so I think being able to struggle and then take a step back for those 10 days showed me how to push through everything," Neri said.

Off the diamond

Like most division I athletes, they grow up playing many sports, and Neri is no different. Neri took part in street hockey, track and basketball. But, one sport, the one he played before he could even remember, was baseball.

"I started playing even before I could remember," Neri said. "I played all the sports growing up, but I played baseball all the time and the others kind of got weeded out."

Through Rider baseball, Neri was able to grow close with his fellow outfielders, but got the closest with senior pitcher PJ Craig.

Playing together for three years now, the two grew a strong bond.

"I've clicked with a few pitchers as well. PJ Craig has been one of them that I've been close with throughout my time," Neri said.

'He doesn't say a whole lot'

On the field, Neri is intense, but behind the scenes, teammates and coaches describe Neri as a quiet guy.

"He's relatively quiet, he doesn't say a whole lot," Davis said. "He's easy to talk to, pretty steady demeanor. What you see is what you get."

Despite being a MAAC leader and, now, Rider News Male Player of the Year, Neri still wants to help out the team any way he can, even if it is cleaning up the trash in the dugout.

"He's not entitled, he doesn't say, 'I don't have to pick up the dirt, or pick up the trash, or pick up the balls, move the screens,' he's willing to do all those things, which is always great when you have a senior leader," Davis said.

With the season starting to dwindle down and the race for another MAAC championship is on, Neri is planning on finishing the season strong and adding to his already stacked Rider resume.

"The plan right now is to win the MAAC Championship and go to regionals," Neri said. For Neri also, the future for him is still undecided, leaving anticipation for the Rider star.

"I would love to play baseball as long as the game lets me," Neri said.