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Observer

The award-winning student newspaper of Northern Essex Community College • Haverhill and Lawrence, Mass.

Spring 2025 • Volume 89 • Issue Number 5 • March 28, 2025

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The future of Early College?

BY QUINLAN COOKE
Opinion Editor

For years, NECC has hosted hundreds of local high school students and allowed them to take college classes while still attending their high schools.

Recently, this program has undergone some changes and adjustments, and the future of the program will look a little different than in previous years; the availability of online classes, potential Whittier merge, and more.

NECC has a long-standing relationship with local high schools and has programs in place with them to give students the opportunity to attend college classes and earn credits while still in high school.

Recently, some students have been taking online classes and classes outside the designated early college time slots. There have not been clear lines drawn for the current academic year, and the allowances have varied



Photo by Daniela Valdivia-Terres

Early college students arrive at the Haverhill campus

from school to school.

The deviances this year have allowed me to take online classes, and classes outside the traditional time, and that class led to me writing this article, which was an amazing opportunity.

However, this situation was

not without its issues.

There was no clear rule on taking online classes or non-designated early college classes, so I had to strongly advocate for these choices to be the right ones for me.

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What's Happening?

Nursing & Allied Health
Career Connections
March 31, 11 a.m. to 1:00
p.m. Lawrence campus

Elevator Pitch
Apr. 2, 9:45 to 10:45 a.m.
C 203, Haverhill campus

Educational Opportunity
to Learn about Ramadan &
Sample Middle Eastern &
North African Cuisine
Apr. 2, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.
B 218, Haverhill campus

Music Cabaret
Apr. 2, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
TC 103, Haverhill campus

How to find security around each campus:

Haverhill Campus
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Room 110C

Lawrence Campus
45 Franklin St. main lobby

Call 978.556.3333 from a cell
phone. Extension 3333 from
any campus phone on either
campus.

Editorial

Improving Lawrence campus

BY DANIELA VALDIVIA-TERRES
Editor-in-Chief

The spacious atrium of the Dimitry Building on the Lawrence campus with hand painted murals with inspiring

NECC Observer

The award-winning student newspaper of Northern Essex Community College

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Publication Schedule

issue #	Publication Date	Ad/Copy Deadline
5	March 7	Feb. 28
6	March 28	March 21
7	April 18	April 11
8	May 2	April 25

We welcome letters and articles from our readers. You can submit via email, and must include your name and phone number for verification. Write "Letter" or "Article to Editor" in the subject line so we notice it right away.

Send your letters to observer@necc.mass.edu

We try to publish all letters we receive, but we reserve the right to edit or reject those we receive.

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quotes and one large glass wall like a fancy sunroom, is mostly empty. Unless Early College students are having classes, the big lobby is far from having engaged students hanging around or studying in groups.

In front of the lobby, there is the welcoming study room/SOAR office but if they are closed and you need to charge your device, the beautiful atrium becomes a dark place to study because it lacks of electrical outlets for laptops or cell-phones. There is only one "charging station" next to the entrance door, and the other remaining outlet is next to the microwave near the food vending machine.

I have been working standing up several times because I had to charge my laptop on the counter top where the microwave is placed, and the table next to the charging station was busy.

More than once, I have seen an elder

lady carrying many bags, presumably homeless, sitting down in the lobby arranging her belongings or reading a flyer.

There used to be a couple of soccer tables that at least, for a short time, while waiting for school busses, Early College students were interacting together in real time away from their screen. However, those "fulbito" tables are gone.

I don't think the lobby in Dimitry building in Lawrence needs any decoration. Instead, it needs an upgrade in being an effective and accessible space, maybe with a/some recreational or interesting entertainment that bring students together. The piano in the Spurk C-building calls curious and experienced piano player students around.

Dr. Naydeen Gonzales de Jesus, is the new vice president of the Lawrence campus and community relations. She said regarding her first and foremost important focus about her role is "to create a sense of belonging, sense of community, so that all of the students that are coming through our doors feel that they belong, and this is their place to be, to learn, to grow."

She also said she would work beyond the look-and-feel of Lawrence campus. "I want to establish strong and healthy relationships with our partners in the community with employers, City Council, and other four-year schools and universities to create pathways of opportunities for students to have to get jobs, to have internships," she said.

In order to be more engaged with

Lawrence community, Dr. Naydeen moved to Lawrence with her family.

She aims to bring local community residents and organizations to Lawrence campus so they can see NECC as a partner and they could celebrate their events in Lawrence buildings.

Dr. Naydeen was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the US when she was 14 years old. At that time she did not speak English. That was her first educational challenge, but once she started, she has taken a long academic journey. She obtained her bachelor's degree in journalism with a concentration in broadcasting, a master of arts in student personnel services, and a PhD in industrial organizational psychology.

Through her education, Dr. Naydeen was focused in learning in empowering the lives of people working with students, as student counselors or career and advancement for college students, and lately in her PhD, she focused on identifying assets, special needs and people's feelings about their organization or workplace to improve it.

Dr. Naydeen, as she likes to be called, wants to help and she wants to know Lawrence campus students' points of view, their preferences and concerns, and is organizing the Lawrence Campus Townhall for Student Voices, on Tuesday, April 1 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the Dimitry Atrium (lobby).

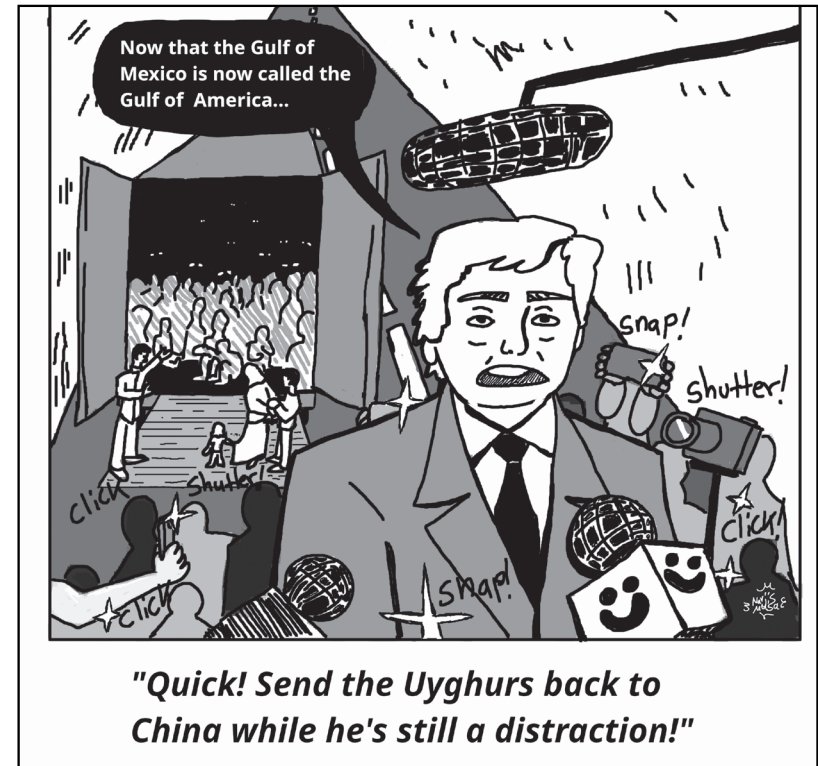
Light refreshments will be provided.

“Education is key to transform your life, to empower your life. It gives you the skills and opportunities that not other thing could do.

- Dr. Naydeen

Opinion

Comics by Narjis Musa



Campus Life

What is the college experience?

BY ROWAN ROCKWELL
Campus Life Editor

We are living in a time of unprecedented growth and change. The college campus is the ultimate forum of debate, discussion and establishment of an individual's intellectual identity. It is in these spaces where students are not only tasked with understanding the past but reckoning with the present and molding the philosophical hopes and intentions of our collective future. As this generation's batch of philosophical trailblazers and world movers existing in a strange, new world of rapid exponentiality how much do we want things to continue to change and what is worth staying the same?

The old adage "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" comes to mind here yet it seems that things have now reached a plane of disrepair. It is in these formidable intermediaries that the paradigm of history must be reshaped. Out with the old, in with the new, but if it isn't broke, maybe it can stay.

As Campus Life editor I have undertaken the task of an investigation into the legitimacy of the purpose of a Campus Life section here in NECC's Observer. In my recent interviews with staff and students it has become apparent to me that there is a schism between the fundamental realities of our commuter community and an ambiguous desire to transcend those realities in an effort to substantiate the so called "college experience."

In fact this term "college experience" is a bit of a fallacy. The idea of "getting an education" has become so warped and twisted that it has seemingly fallen second in importance to simply obtaining a degree as proof of an accomplishment that will admit you

into the next gateway of life. This or you have the money and need to extend your childhood (because who really wants to grow up).

I personally know many people whose quest for academic rigor and intellectual enlightenment has been diluted in the romanticized mire of the "college experience." The idea of a four year school for many recent high school grads has become an implied vortex of hedonistic purging as part of the reward for reaching a new milestone in adulthood and personal liberty. This would be a benign biproduct of post juvenile jubilee for many if it wasn't so societally catastrophic.

What's different about NECC is people more often than not come here for the purpose of a larger goal. They have the time to figure things out, maybe even make a few mistakes, many trying their hand at a four year school and realizing the money wasn't worth it for what they were getting out of the experience at that time in their lives.

According to a study by the PEW Research Center almost half of all American young men and women not in school stated their reasons were due to the cost of education. On top of that between 12% and 20% of Americans have student loan debt averaging around 1.7 trillion dollars, only around 1 million dollars less than the United States federal deficit. Because most esteemed colleges are private institutions they are regularly not eligible for the same kinds of subsidies granted to public institutions.

The risk and pressure of pursuing your dreams, your education and your career have become increasingly dicey. How much of this cost is associated with a dedication to the betterment of a students mind and how much is it relat-



Photo courtesy of NECC Archives/NECC Library

A photo from between 1965 and 1970 shows organic ecosystem of social interaction on the NECC Haverhill campus.

ed to creating the "college experience."

On top of that we are seeing a veritable social inversion in our culture writ large. The dichotomy of technology that is supposed to connect us and in fact is separating us more than ever puts us at a grave psychological crossroads. The shifting discernment between the benefits of online learning and working from home post pandemic have also reshaped our social environments.

To top it all off the vicious culture war divides in our country have giv-

en way to an overall restructuring of American morals and value systems that have left us shattered and disparate. This is a national and in some cases global situation that is continuing to unfold. There are many forces at play when it comes to the unraveling of our contemporary social fabric not just a problem with whether or not people should dorm at community college to make more friends and drink more alcohol.

Continued on Page 5

Campus Life

College experience, continued from Page 4

At NECC our lack of campus community may actually be a strength in honing our pupils focus on their studies and the purpose and meaning of this step in the project of their lives, all theoretically while being able to hold down a job and manage the rest of life's responsibilities, something that would be very difficult while dorming and going to school full time.

In my research and interviews with students so far I have found many students are not actually yearning for a more robust campus life and the students that are may already just be seeking out connection and community in general.

I don't think we should give up on the premise of creating that kind of community for students but I think being realistic about our strengths and our weaknesses when we look at the reality of the situation means devoting our efforts into specialized support towards getting students on the path for whatever they want to achieve and to be able to do it affordably.

Resources should also be devoted to offering students state of the art technology and access to the cutting edge of new information that pushes the envelope of mandated curricula.

It's still hard to fathom in the swirling turbidity of our modern lives what "ain't broke" and what "needs fixin'". If anything we should be adapting our learning environments to be more suitable to the everchanging playing field of educational needs and aspirations of all types of students with an emphasis on growth and integration as a human being so they can in turn create a fulfilling life and fill that life with connection.

At the end of the day NECC is a space we all share and the dire realities of our existential plight going forward should not obstruct us from acknowledging one another.

We have to remember to see each other, make each other feel seen and to find ourselves in other people.

Otherwise we are going to be making babies in test tubes and gazing back out of a small glass porthole in space at the seething, fiery corpse of an exhausted organism we once called Mother Earth, running away from a place we once called home.



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News

Reflecting on Hurricane Maria

Many people continue to feel storm's impact in their lives

BY IVELIS HERRERA

Correspondent

Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic were both hit by Hurricane Maria in 2017 -- the storm continues to affect how some people live now and created a traumatic situation.

Today I will share the reflections of who told me about their experiences and a little about how they live now after all these years.

The first person I interviewed is a 19-year-old girl who currently lives in Massachusetts but at that time she lived in Carolina, Puerto Rico. She told me how when they announced the hurricane she was excited because she wasn't going to have classes for a few days but when she saw the reality, these thoughts changed. Their routine changed completely during that school year to the point that they did not take

classes, or some did not have the possibility to do so, and the government had to move classes to everyone.

Since for obvious reasons it was not the fault of anyone, neither the educational system nor the students, but something atmospheric and/or climatic. She tells me that the first few days it was almost impossible to leave the houses because this hurricane left strong percussions on the island, fallen trees, destroyed houses, streets, parks and public places almost unrecognizable from what they had left the day before.

But she says "that despite all this she began to communicate with the people of her town more often than normal," because even though in these Latin Islands speaking is part of the daily routine, as they had no electricity and could not do many things, they spent

more time talking with the other people in the town.

As the months went by, the island slowly recovered, but with the record that Puerto Rico has, it was neither the first nor the last time that it has gone through this great chaos of hurricanes.

She currently lives in this state where she is finishing High School, but she will always remember that moment in her life that made her lose and build many things. You could even say that it made her mature to a certain extent.

The next person to share her reflections is 18-years-old, she lives in Massachusetts, and she lived in the Dominican Republic when the Hurricane Maria went past. She lived on in the capital of the island called Santo Domingo, in one of the most needy neighborhoods and one could say that it was also a little dangerous.

"I passed like 2 or 3 days without (going) anywhere for the similar time of the first girl, it is better stay in home..." she said.

"Around two weeks all the streets (of my) neighborhoods look like at total chaos from everything the hurricane left in its wake on to the point the all the adults need to star all the trash of the hurricane in the C corner of the streets, in the sides of the streets, so the ending and maybe fire some parts."

Like Puerto Rico, DR went back to regularly or most regular, but with less longer the wait than Puerto Rico maybe around at mouth or mouth and half.

In conclusion, the Huracán made the lives all of people upside down, but these two examples are only two experiences about what really happened during this Huracan, many people continue to feel its affects.

Open mic night brings Lawrence community together

BY CHALIENYS YOC

Correspondent

On the 20th of February, an open mic was held at El taller & Café Azteca, hosted by Sebastian Navedo (also known as Bigman) and ISHA! Known for its calm vibes and delicious food, El Taller also hosts open mics.

El Taller is a place where many artists and other people from the community consider a second home, especially when open mics are hosted.

Open mics have typically been held on the third Thursdays of the month from 7 to 9 p.m. on the second floor.

Navedo explains how during the open mics he sees "people lower their guard, as

they know it is safe. It is a place for people to express their art."

Navedo described the open mic as "heartwarming."

College student Mia Jimenez Soto described the open mic held on the 20th as

"an amazing experience."

She says that she felt as if the open mic and El Taller were "A place where one could freely express themselves and not worry about what others think because everyone is so open-minded and welcoming."

El Taller and the open mics hosted there make her feel like "even if I feel displaced in college, I always have a place in my community back home."

“

Sebastian Navedo explains how during the open mic he sees “people lower their guard, as they know it is safe. It is a place for people to express their art.”

”

Features

Astronauts return to Earth

Two were stranded for nine months

BY TRISTAN TAYLOR
Features Editor

Astronauts Barry Wilmore and Sunita Williams have finally returned home after unexpected issues during the test of Boeing's new Starliner spacecraft forced the two to dock aboard the International Space Station.

The Boeing Crew Flight Test launched on June 5, 2024, and was expected to last eight days, with a scheduled landing on June 14 in the American Southwest. However, due to a thruster malfunction on the Starliner spacecraft, codenamed Calypso, the two instead boarded the International Space Station as scheduled, but stayed due to the risks of returning to Earth aboard the Starliner, which was brought back to Earth uncrewed on September 7. Later in September, Williams and Wilmore were added to the



Photo Courtesy of Wikipedia

Barry Wilmore

plans for SpaceX Crew-9's return mission aboard a Crew Dragon spacecraft, codenamed Freedom.

After months of preparation, the two, joined by Nick Hague and Aleksandr Gorbunov, the two original mem-



Photo courtesy of Wikipedia

Sunita Williams

bers of Crew-9, have finally returned to Earth, landing in the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida, on March 18.

One NECC student, Matt Branscombe, told the Observer, "I'm grate-

ful that we have strong Americans coming home to be with their families and communities". Another NECC student, Jasmine Dionne, said "They signed up for it and knew something like this might happen. I'm glad that they're home now, and they should be on leave to spend time with family".

Now, Williams and Wilmore must battle the hazards that come from such a long stay in space, such as loss of strength, potentially irreversible damage to vision, atrophy of the muscles, a significant risk of radiation sickness, and a higher risk of cancer within their lifetimes.

We at the Observer would like to issue our congratulations to Williams and Wilmore on their successful return, and would also like to wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.

NECC alumni named to national YMCA board

STAFF REPORT

The YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) has welcomed new national board members, including NECC alumni Nayeli Almanzar Lizardo, who has been named to the Youth Advisory Council.

Nationwide, only 3.8% of YMCA board members are under the age of 30. As a youth-serving organization, the Y has the opportunity to move the needle on the representation of young people on its governing boards. The Youth Advisory Council was formed in 2023 to apply a youth lens to emerging issues. Working with Y-USA leadership, the Youth Advisory Council is comprised of 21 individuals, ranging in age from 16-24 from across the country.

The strategy behind the Youth Advisory Council is to shift the paradigm and recognize young people as active contributors rather than passive recipients of programs and services.

Almanzar Lizardo, Merrimack Valley YMCA, is a first-generation scholar, from Northern Essex Community College, now studying at University of Massachusetts, Lowell. "I am dedicated and passionate about implementing positive change within underserved communities by amplifying their voices to provide equitable and accessible resources," said Almanzar Lizardo. "Eager to contribute meaningfully through collaboration and innovative cause-driven solutions, I am ready to champion the YMCA's future, empowering us all."



Photo courtesy Nayeli Almanzar Lizardo

Nayeli Almanzar Lizardo

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Arts and Entertainment

The consequences of compromising on quality

By CESAR VELASCO
Correspondent

I still remember when I was a child and I could not stop watching Adam Sandle's movies over and over again, it made me happy and moved me. Nowadays I think that they are not the best movies that can exist, but I still remember them fondly. And this is where my point begins, what happens when they sell smoke in a film or in general? What happens if the movie you see is not at all what was promised, and even more when they intentionally relate the movie to something that by coincidence is part of your culture or just a nice memory of your childhood? I want you to ask yourself seriously, at this moment I ask myself "what would happen if I saw Chris Hemsworth imitating Adam

Sandle's humor in a movie sold to the fans or like me a nostalgic of this incredible actor?" Obviously this would be nice and emotional only if it lives up to the theme, so to speak if it lives up to the promised expectations of the very personal and special concept it is linked to.

Marketing could make a simple movie become something so personal that you feel a need to consume it, but from mom's life lessons we know that sometimes not everything is what it seems, like that crush was not what you thought and that movie you spent at least an hour on was a total disappointment.

As a reference I will take "Emilia Perez" by Jacques Audiard. During the preview of this movie the mar-

keting theme was so good that maybe many doubted if the movie would have so much impact and if it was really as exciting as it was sold -- it had strong points and themes like Visibility to trans people. In terms of culture there was Mexican culture, they had great Actresses and Singers starring in what could almost be a musical, I mean Selena Gomez had one of the main roles. As soon as the movie came out in the first few months it got some bad reviews, they said that there were themes that sold but they were all empty and some were offensive. In New Pink, Amelia Hansford opined "As a trans woman, this is why I think Emilia Pérez is sub-par, disingenuous, harmful nonsense... Basically Emilia is trying to repent for the sins she committed in her time as head of the cartel. The problem with this is that the transition is not a moral decision." There was also a critical question to the director as to how a Frenchman could make a movie in Spanish and about Mexicans? The only thing people weren't writing off was the musical part but in turn they made memes all over the internet. How could marketing fix the very disadvantaged movie? No way since marketing did their job.

As for the quality commitments of the entertainment, we are not necessarily talking about the money invested in it or the flashy effects it contains, but rather that it transmits what the director had in mind, that the effort and the purpose for which the idea went from an idea is understood, even in cinematography there are rules, We are humans and empathy is our gift, so we have a very strong connection with art and have criteria and that our tastes dif-

fer from each person, that is why art is so important in the society. It creates personality not only for those who create art, but also for those who feel it and think about it. I did a brief survey of people at NECC about whether they have ever felt this commitment to quality in entertainment -- both gave me a look back that said it sounds like I must be a film critic or knowledgeable about film to understand your question. I gave them a brief explanation that although it sounds like theory you don't necessarily have to be a Film Professor to know when you like a movie or when you don't like it. Their relieved faces followed by an opinion from each of them. Anthony said, "I didn't really like the Shazam movie, I was expecting more action and I feel that some parts of the movie are unnecessarily long. Maryangel, said "I feel that in general Christmas movies are very nice they have many clichés but they are clichés that you love because of the message that the holidays have and that is when people are closer together."

They have empathized with the movies to the degree that they can give a totally valid opinion to the art. We can conclude that a film should not promise more than it delivers, commercially it is always good to exaggerate but promising without considering the consequence of compromising the quality of entertainment could be negative. When a film promises more than it can deliver it runs the risk of disappointing audiences which can affect both critical reception and commercial success. We also have to commit ourselves to our responsibility of quality entertainment, we must always contribute and build and as I like to say the opinion ceases to be when it hurts, is offensive or destroys.

REGISTRATION OPEN HOUSE

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We welcome requests for ASL sign language interpreting & other ADA access requests. Please contact the host of this event: sregankelley@necc.mass.edu or 978-556-3140 for requests, questions or event information.



Northern Essex
Community College

Features

Water woes in the Spurk building



Photos by Bailey Orio

By BAILEY ORIO

Features Editor

Students and staff on the third floor of the C Building are grappling with issues caused by a persistently leaking ceiling on the third floor. The issue has led to trash cans being placed throughout the floor to manage the water dripping into the hallways, but this temporary solution has introduced additional challenges.

The placement of these trash cans has obstructed pathways, making it difficult for people to navigate safely, especially those with mobility challenges. Crowded and slippery hallways have increased the risk of accidents for all individuals, further emphasizing the urgency of addressing the problem.

DJ Rosado, a student who uses an electric wheelchair, shared the difficulties they face due to the situation. Honestly, “navigating through the third

floor of the C Building with those trash cans was very challenging because I have classes in the morning, and sometimes it can be very challenging with my mobility with my wheelchair.” DJ explained. “Actually, it’s very dangerous for me because if I have to use the bathroom, how can I get through when the trash can is in the way? So, it’s very hard for me because sometimes I like to do little laps around the hallways with my electric wheelchair, and what really affects me is that I can’t do that when the trash cans are in the way.”

The leaking ceiling issue comes at a time when the campus is actively undertaking infrastructure projects, including roof repairs on the Student Center and planned renovations for the B Building. While these projects highlight efforts to improve campus facilities, the challenges in the C Building remain an immediate concern.

Features

Alexa Plus

A new era of voice assistance, but at what cost?

BY BAILEY ORIO
Features Editor

Amazon's latest innovation, Alexa Plus, promises to revolutionize the way we interact with voice assistants. With enhanced voice recognition capabilities powered by generative AI, Alexa Plus is designed to provide a more personalized and efficient user experience. However, this advancement comes with significant changes to how user data is handled, raising privacy concerns among consumers.

Starting March 28, 2025, all voice commands given to Alexa devices will be processed and stored in Amazon's secure cloud.

This change eliminates the "Do Not Send Voice Recordings" setting, which previously allowed users to opt out of cloud storage. While Amazon assures users that recordings will be deleted after processing by default, those who wish to use features like Voice ID—a tool that personalizes responses based on the speaker's voice—must allow their recordings to be stored temporarily.

For users concerned about privacy, the "Don't Save Recordings" setting remains an option. However, even with this setting enabled, voice commands will still be processed in the cloud before being deleted.

This shift has sparked debates about the balance between technological innovation and user privacy.

Amazon's decision to mandate cloud processing for Alexa Plus comes in the wake of a \$25 million

fine imposed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2023. The lawsuit revealed that Amazon had stored children's voice recordings indefinitely without proper disclosure, violating privacy laws.

This incident, along with reports of Amazon employees listening to user recordings to improve Alexa's performance, has left many users wary of the company's data practices.

While Alexa Plus offers exciting new features, such as improved voice recognition and personalized interactions, it also highlights the ongoing tension between convenience and privacy. As consumers, it's crucial to stay informed about how our data is used and to advocate for transparency and control over our personal information.

Personally, I have several Alexa devices including an Amazon Fire tablet that I worry is overhearing conversations, I have also noticed my Echo Show bringing up topics or recommendations that I have had conversations about such as recipes I've discussed making.

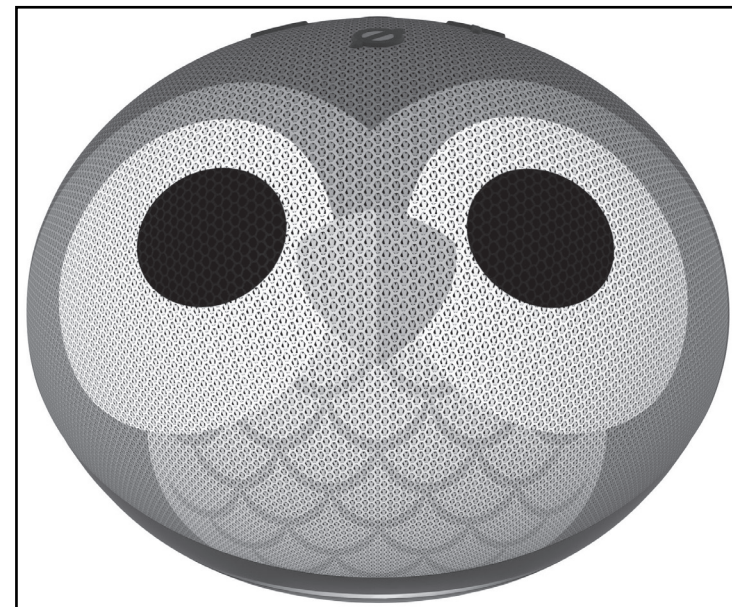
It makes me incredibly anxious for my privacy in my own home. In my opinion I am unsure how I feel about Alexa Plus. I enjoy the convenience of Alexa but I do have a lot of hesitation now with my Alexa due to privacy concerns.

Do you think the benefits of Alexa Plus outweigh the privacy concerns?



Echo Show 5 (3rd Generation)

Photo courtesy of Amazon



Amazon Echo Dot Kids (5th Gen)

Photo courtesy of Amazon

News

Dual enrollment continued from Page 1

The high school students that take early college classes are doing so because it is unconventional and most of them are looking for a challenge, but with limited class options, this can be quite difficult.

Jake Pitre, a current dual-enrollment student said “My biggest (challenge) was that there was not enough classes to support and will be able to transfer to my college major (bioengineering). The one calculus class offered got filled up too fast.”

Letting students who are looking for a challenge and who want to try new things take control of the classes they want to take and have more options is a great way to set up for when students are in college full-time.

Students who take early college classes know they are signing up for a schedule that is different from their peers, and they know there are both pros and cons to this unique situation.

Adding online classes to the mix allows for more flexibility, especially for a busy high school student who might be balancing work, sports, schooling, and college applications.

Nina Pelosi, another dual-enrollment student has said, “I have noticed over the years it’s been harder to be allowed to take online classes, but I think that’s a huge benefit of the program. Kids can succeed because they have a schedule that works for them and sometimes that can’t hap-

pen with an in-person class.”

This academic year, there was some resistance in students taking online classes.

There was no strict rule on these classes, and it was up to the high school the student was attending. In the case of my high school, there needed to be a justification for wanting an online class and there was a good amount of pushback.

It seems that the positive sentiment surrounding taking online classes is shared by NECC, as Miss Tammy Leavitt, an early college coordinator has said, “Online vs in person classes are good for students depending on what kind of learner they are.

Some do better in a class setting whereas others do better doing things at their own time...Whether the students are in person or online depends on the school.”

There is a lot that is up to the individual high schools that NECC cannot dictate, so a student should advocate for what they see as fitting them best and giving them the most out of the situation; especially because the student is responsible for paying for the course(s) they choose to take.

This is another change to the system, as prior to COVID, dual-enrollment students were not permitted to take online classes.

Perhaps the biggest change that might come to NECC is the potential merger with Whittier Tech; Whittier is a regional vocational technological high school in Haverhill.

The proposed merger is to build a high school on the NECC campus or host Whittier classes on the college campus.

The campus would be shared between the two educational bodies, and this proposed solution would save money and help to serve more of the community.

The merger would increase the student population of both schools and would aim to prepare students for the workforce, as the two schools both have a great focus on technological programs and certifications.

A current Whittier and NECC dual enrollment student, Andrew Lamoly, said “A merge would be interesting...it would give all Whittier students access to NECC’s resources and facilities which would be nice.

The classes would probably give more room for growth more than anything.” A Whittier student doing dual enrollment but being at the NECC/shared campus would provide so many opportunities.

A NECC/Whittier merge would definitely have to be more fleshed out, but it seems like it could serve the community very well and that this change might be a good thing.

For more information about the proposed shared campus, visit <https://www.necc.mass.edu/about/facilities/whittier-tech/>

There are several changes coming to NECC, especially to do with the high schoolers that can be found on campus, and these changes open up so many opportunities.



Photo by Daniela Valdivia-Terres

Early college students arrive at the Haverhill campus

Early college, in its many forms, is such a breath of fresh air to high school students looking for a challenge, or those who have a unique schedule.

NECC expanding their horizons with this program and leaving so many choices up to the high schools and their students is refreshing, and shows a presence of trust within the system they have built.

Without changes to the early college programs, I would not have had the opportunity to write and publish this article, and I am happy for all students who also choose to take advantage of this unique opportunity and program.

Sports

Envisioning a NECC Men's Volleyball team

So close, yet so far

BY **MARTHY MARTINEZ**
Sports Editor

Although I am regarded in my journalistic work as an “avid basketball fan” (shoutout to my previous article), there is another sport that captivates my heart with the same intensity as basketball: volleyball.

My passion for volleyball is quite

recent, as I have only been following the trends of men's collegiate and professional volleyball for around two to three years, dating back to my junior year of high school.

Even though I would not say that I am the “best” at volleyball (as I failed to make my high school's team or my previous college's club team), I still find volleyball to be a valuable pastime,

an activity that me and my friends can engage in and have a good time.

Now, as aforementioned, I am mainly a fan of men's volleyball, and I am aware that there are a vast amount of top-tier men's collegiate volleyball teams, namely the likes of Hawaii,

UCLA, UC Irvine, and Long Beach State. However, in Massachusetts, men's collegiate volleyball teams are rather scarce, and it is even rarer to see a men's team representing a community college. Therefore, I was rather surprised to learn about the possibility of a men's volleyball team being introduced to Northern Essex sometime back in 2024.

My insider in this investigation was Lawrence's Miguelangel Perez, a longtime school friend of mine and a volleyball player himself. I might say he's one of the greatest liberos that I know of, and it makes sense on why he would know the ‘scoop’ on the future of NECC men's volleyball, as he was in active talks with the prospective coach for the team. It sort of had me wondering whether or not I wanted to tryout for the team, even though I probably would have gotten turned down again.

Despite Miguelangel's

great knowledge regarding the situation, I was never able to catch the name of the coach that was aiming to help with the team.

And then, that was it. I completely forgot about the whole NECC men's volleyball team, and I continued on with my studies, the team an afterthought in the back of my head.

Fast forward to February 10, 2025. I decided to hit up Miguelangel via iMessage to check on what happened to the team, as I surely thought that they would be introduced anytime soon in the Spring 2025 semester. Regardless of my hopefulness, though, that was when he dropped the bombshell on what happened.

To summarize his words, the coach was distant for about two to three months, and then randomly messaged their team groupchat. The coach essentially wanted Miguelangel and the other men interested in the program to come out and “stand on business” on wanting a men's volleyball team here at Northern Essex. However, this never came into fruition, and the team is now a lost relic in time.

At the end of the day, although I am sad about the NECC men's volleyball team not existing during my time here, it still opens up the opportunity of it being introduced later on.

NECC does have a women's volleyball team. Three members of the Northern Essex Community College women's volleyball team earned All-Region honors. The Knights finished the season with a 13-8 overall record and finished as Region 21 semi-finalist.

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Sports

Checking in: Which teams are crushing it?

Men's basketball team makes it to national championship

By **KATHRYN PELCZAR**
Correspondent

The Northern Essex Community College men's basketball team is proving once again that they have what it takes to compete at the national level.

For the third consecutive year, the Knights have secured a regional championship. They finished ninth in the NJCAA national tournament, finishing their season with a win over Dallas-Mountain View College on March 12, by a 107-99 final score and in the process finished the season with a 29-4 overall record and 9th place national tournament finish in the 12-team tournament.

In the opening round of the championships, the Knights fell Dallas College-Richland by a 73-68 final score.

On March 1st, Northern Essex defeated fourth-seeded Bristol Community College in overtime 93-85 to advance to the regional championship game. The next day, they played Quincy College in a nail-biting match to secure their third straight regional title.

Head coach Darren Stratton continues to rack up accolades, earning the HoopDirt.com JUCO Coach of the Week award for the week ending Feb. 16.

"It's a milestone in my book that I look at, HoopDirt is one of the magazines that really look at your program and understand what you kind of establish here. But I'll just be realistic with you, I think the players make the coaches awards." Stratton states. This marks the third consecutive year he has

received the honor, making him eligible for the site's National Coach of the Year award.

A pair of Northern Essex Community College men's basketball standouts picked up All-Region 21 honors as recently selected by a vote of the league's coaches, while Stratton was named Region 21 and East District Coach of the Year for a third consecutive season.

Baseball begins

Meanwhile, the Northern Essex baseball team is gearing up for another promising season. The Knights, who opened their season on March 1, in a double header against Dean College, work towards their fourth consecutive NJCAA World Series appearance in May.

Head coach Jeff Mejia, who has compiled 298 career wins, will look to add to his impressive resume as the team enters the season ranked No. 8 in the nation,

"It's always an honor to be named with the best teams in the country. You know, like I said, you know, a little bit prior to when I got here, that didn't happen at this school very often," Mejia states, acknowledging the team's ranking.

Players to watch

As winter sports wrap up and the spring season begins, several standout athletes are making their mark.

For men's basketball, Alejandro Delgado of Haverhill and Javien Kirmil of Lowell have been key offensive contributors, averaging 14.8 and 10.6 points per game, respectively.



Photo by Talan Stratton

On the baseball diamond, eight players return from last year's squad. Michael Geissler of Peabody is expected to lead the pitching rotation after throwing 41 innings last season.

With both teams excelling, Northern Essex fans have plenty to be excited about as the postseason and spring competition heat up.

Sports

Patriots free agency frenzy

By COREY HARDING
Sports Editor

Every single year, roughly in the middle of March, a new NFL season begins. The draft gets closer, fans speculate about which direction their team will go, and any player with an expiring contract, or not currently on a team enters the free agent pool. Free agency is a period where teams can negotiate with a player to offer them a contract and help improve the team's current situation and improve their current roster.

For the Patriots, this wasn't anything new. In years past, New England always seemed to miss out on big names. Whether it was financial reasons, or preferences by the players, it was always the same story of settling for the second or third best option.

This year though, things were different. The Patriots had the most money to spend out of all 32 teams in the league, and both the organization and fans knew that if we were going to turn things around and start winning, the Patriots needed to make a splash, and that's exactly what they did!

For starters, Head Coach Mike Vrabel signed Harold Landry III, a veteran who played under Vrabel during his time coaching the Tennessee Titans. Landry is vital in scenarios where a defense has to step up and stop the opposing team's running game. In Landry's 8-year career thus far, he has amassed a solid resume of, 98 games played, 397 total tackles, 251 solo tackles, 146 assisted tackles, 50.5 sacks, 3 forced fumbles, and 2 fumble recoveries. Landry also has one pro bowl appearance in 2021. New England has them-

selves a great player and game changer. For his previous efforts, Harold Landry has earned his contract and is being paid handsomely on a three-year deal worth thirty-seven million dollars, roughly averaging \$14.3 million dollars per year.

Sticking to the defensive side, the next big signing was linebacker, Robert Spillane- a former Pittsburgh Steeler & Las Vegas Raider. Spillane is a very underrated veteran of the NFL whose abilities get overshadowed by bigger names. In 84 games played, Spillane has totaled, 497 total tackles, 301 solo tackles, 196 assisted tackles, 8.5 sacks, 1 forced fumble & 2 fumble recoveries, and 6 interceptions. Many people and fans consider Spillane the biggest free agent steal for the Patriots. Getting a contract worth three years and thirty-seven million dollars, roughly \$14.3 million per year, just like his new teammate, Harold Landry.

New England added a big name to their secondary, reaching a deal with cornerback, Carlton Davis. The contract is worth up to \$30 million dollars on a 3-year deal, averaging \$10 million dollars per year before taxes. Davis is widely considered a top cornerback and is the perfect complement to young star, Christian Gonzales. Davis has been in the league for seven seasons, being drafted by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2018. In his career, Davis has played in 89 games, recording 380 total tackles, 310 solo tackles, 70 assisted tackles, 4 fumble recoveries, and 11 interceptions. Davis also won a Super Bowl in 2020 as a member of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. After spending one season with the Detroit Lions in 2024, Davis finds himself in



Photo courtesy Dwight Darian/Patriots.com

Patriots DT Milton Williams

New England playing under defensive masterminds, Mike Vrabel & Terrell Williams. Williams is also very familiar with Davis as he was a member of the Detroit Lions defensive coaching staff during the 2024 season.

Now, the biggest name, and the biggest signing for New England during this free agency class. Defensive tackle, Milton Williams. Although originally intent on signing a deal with the Carolina Panthers, Williams was made an offer from New England that he could not refuse. A four-year deal worth one hundred and four million dollars. Averaging twenty-six million per year and officially making Milton Williams the highest paid player in the history of the New England Patriots franchise. Coming off of a Super Bowl victory with the Philadelphia Eagles, Williams is a monster on the defensive line and his stats speak for themselves.

In four years on the Eagles, Milton played in 67 games, totaling 132 tack-

les, 66 solo & 66 assisted tackles, 11.5 sacks, 2 forced fumbles, 1 fumble recovery.

As mentioned, Milton Williams won a Super Bowl with the Philadelphia Eagles this past February and at only 25 years old, his career is just beginning & the Patriots are looking more dangerous for any opposing offense. The last really big-name New England signed at the time of writing this, was on the offensive side. Tackle, Morgan Moses. At 34 years old, Moses has been in the league for 11 seasons, playing for the, then Washington Redskins, who transitioned to the Washington Commanders from 2014-2020, then became a New York Jet in 2021 for a single season. Moses was then signed by the Baltimore Ravens for two years, 2022-2023. One season later, Moses signed with the Jets on a one-year deal before finally ending up in New England on a

Continues on Page 15

Sports

Free agency frenzy, continued from Page 14

three-year deal worth \$33 million dollars, averaging \$11 million dollars per year before taxes. At 34 years old and playing in 166 games to this point, one can only assume that this is the final contract Morgan Moses signs in his career. Quarterback Drake Maye

has more protection in the pocket now. Some experts have said that Morgan Moses is a great signing for the Patriots.

During the remainder of this period, Mew England, Elliot Wolf, Mike Vrabel all made the moves that they

saw fit. Signing big names to fill needs on both sides, signing lesser-known players for depth or rotational players, and also losing some key players. The veterans that will not be returning to New England are cornerback, Jonathan Jones- arriving as an Undrafted free

agent in 2016. Defensive End and captain, Deatrich Wise Jr, being drafted by New England in 2017, and eight-time team captain, Center, David Andrews. Joining the team in 2016 alongside Jones as an Undrafted free agent. Andrews earned his way up the ranks and became the anchor for this offense. The three veterans earned Super Bowl victories, Andrews & Jones in 2016 & 2018, Wise Jr. in 2018. Their paths are now different but their efforts and contributions to the Patriots franchise will never be forgotten. Wise Jr. & Jones both signed with the Washington Commanders, while Andrews is still currently a free agent and is able to sign with any team he chooses as long as he is offered. Whether Andrews wants to remain playing or call it a career, he has had one of the most successful careers of any Undrafted player.

Even though the free agency period is still active, the consensus is New England has their sights set on the draft which begins on April 24th. Even though the team still has some needs, especially on the offensive side of the ball, they immensely improved their current situation and gave a positive outlook on their upcoming season. In January, chairman, Robert Kraft made it very clear that he wants to win. After New England spent a collective amount of \$299.8 million dollars, while still having a lot of money left over to still work with, the franchise has put the league and world on notice that we want to win, and we are coming back for the throne.

All player stats sited from ESPN, all financial information came from reports from Ian Rapoport & Adam Schefter.

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