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Meet HumBot

I'm a chatbot designed to send you information on HSU.

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Humboldt State introduces AI chatbot for incoming students

Photo illustration by Megan Bender

by James Wilde

This fall, Humboldt State University introduced artificial intelligence chatbot HumBot to provide basic information for new students and transfers. Director of Communications and Marketing for Enrollment Management Josh Smith led the project over the last two months until its release. Thus far, HumBot has received more than 1000 questions and comments. “There is a good chance that those questions may not have been asked if that avenue was not available to them at the time,” Smith said. “We get them at all hours of the day.” Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Alexander Enyedi initially pushed for the development of a chatbot two years ago after hearing about a chatbot at Georgia State University. Pounce, the name for GSU’s chatbot, delivered

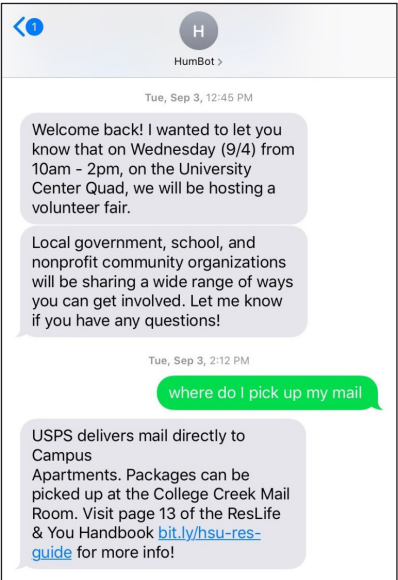


Photo courtesy of Matthew Howe HumBot responds to fisheries transfer student Matthew Howe on Sept. 3. HumBot has answers to over 850 questions so far.

more than 200,000 answers to incoming freshman within the first few months of its implementation in 2016. Enyedi, with help from Smith and Associate Professor of Social Work Jen Maguire

“It was started off by everybody just going in there, reading all the questions and answers, and first making sure that it was accurate, and second, trying to make it a little bit more friendly.”

-Josh Smith
Communications and Marketing
for Enrollment Management Director

worked together to create HumBot. “I’ve been a passionate proponent for the chatbot technology for over two years,” Enyedi said in an email. HumBot is one chatbot among seven within California State Universities. AdmitHub, an AI chatbot service designed for students, developed all seven chatbots. HSU created HumBot in the

last two months after receiving an \$80,000 grant from the Irvine Foundation. AdmitHub handed over HumBot pre-seeded with answers to the 700 most common questions asked by first-year students. HSU then needed multiple departments to analyze the answers. “It was started off by

SEE HUMBOT PG. 3

Going beyond hospital walls

New nursing director develops relationships with local health centers

by James Wilde

Four weeks into the job, Humboldt State University’s nursing program Director Kimberly Perris has started putting the pieces in place to reform HSU’s bachelor of science in nursing program. Perris said she wants to empower local nurses to fill empty leadership roles in local health services. “My excitement, what I’m hopeful for and why I’m grateful to be here is because I really envision a role for nurses where they can go beyond the hospital walls, work in team-based care models and just take on more autonomous roles,” Perris said. HSU canceled its BSN program in 2011, citing a lack of funding and qualified faculty. After years of a lack of BSN-educated nurses, HSU is relaunching the BSN program with the help of a \$2 million dollar grant from St. Joseph Health. Director of Special Projects Connie Stewart leads the California Center for Rural Policy, an HSU program designed to improve rural communities. Stewart currently oversees fundraising for the BSN program, and she hinted the receiving of more than just the St. Joseph Health grant. Stewart, a former Arcata mayor who has served the community for more than thirty years, said that Perris is perfect for the job. “She’s got really great, fresh ideas about how to improve health care in Humboldt County,” Stewart said. “I couldn’t be more excited to be working with her.”

Stewart emphasized the importance of the BSN program not just for Humboldt County, but for HSU. HSU students and faculty, Stewart noted, need healthcare too. “This program has to be successful in order for HSU to thrive,” Stewart said. Perris dabbled in health-related fields in her youth, where she said she picked up a passion for helping and educating patients. Perris graduated with an Associate of Science in Nursing in 1991. She worked in family planning before she worked at the HSU Student Health Center from 2004 to 2016 as a nurse, a job Perris said she loved. “I loved the education piece of it,” Perris said. “Working there is where I really

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El Centro welcomes and connects with Latinx students

El Centro hosts Convivio de Bienvenida
by James Wilde

Music and cheerful chatter filled Arcata’s Redwood Park on Sunday as Humboldt State University’s El Centro Académico Cultural held its Convivio de Bienvenida, a convivial welcoming event.

Ritz Garcia, a junior and critical race, gender and sexuality studies major and liaison for El Centro, said he has loved being a part of El Centro.

“It’s made me feel like family,” Garcia said. “Like there’s somewhere I belong.”

The gathering served as an opportunity for Latinx students, families and community members to convene and connect with one another.

Resource centers from HSU and the local community offered information on a wide range of topics that included parenting lessons, food pantries, housing insecurity, drug addiction recovery, communication with law enforcement and the expansion of diversity in the community.

Meanwhile, children played in the grass and members of Latino Outdoors led hikes into the surrounding redwoods every 30 minutes.

Daniel Gallardo, vice



Photo by James Wilde
A table at the Convivio de Bienvenida, a Convivial Welcome from HSU’s El Centro Académico Cultural on Sept. 15. The event, held at Arcata’s Redwood Park, housed tables for resources at HSU and the surrounding community.

president of LatinoNet and coordinator for the Assisting Families to Access Change Through Resources Americorps program, hoped to connect attendees with community offerings.

“There’s a perception of Humboldt not having a lot of resources,” Gallardo said. “We’re trying to debunk that.”

Gallardo emphasized that resources for the Latinx community are available in Humboldt but can be difficult to

access. Gallardo urged students to join the AFACTR program, which has a goal of preventing child abuse in Humboldt County. AFACTR awards up to \$10,000 per year in services.

Jorge Matias, health educator for St. Joseph Health, pushed table visitors to check out health classes offered in Eureka and Fortuna. Matias promoted a Zumba class for physical health but also emphasized the importance of mental health.

“We want to get rid of the stigma with mental health,” Matias said.

Before rain clouds crept in, attendees enjoyed a free lunch alongside a brief mariachi performance. A table for Adventure’s Edge offered raffle tickets for two new backpacks while another table for Equity Arcata offered information on housing, employment and education.

El Centro intentionally designed the event with

inclusivity in mind. El Centro, which was previously known as the Latinx Center for Academic Excellence, changed its name to better represent those it serves.

“Not everybody identifies as Latinx,” Garcia said. “El Centro sounds more inviting.”

HSU’s Hispanic Serving Institutions STEM grant, a \$3.9 million U.S. Department of Education gift spread over five years, from 2016 to 2021, funded the event.

Each table offered its own brand of services focused on improving the local community. Bertha de la Cruz, a representative for Food for People, sought to connect attendees with free food resources.

“There’s tons and tons of food,” de la Cruz said. “I wish I would’ve known all of this as a student.”

Devon Hernandez, academic and career adviser, helmed a table for HSU’s Academic and Career Advising Center.

“We’re here to make sure students have the resources they need,” Hernandez said.

For attendees of the Convivio de Bienvenida, resources appeared abundant. More information on El Centro and their upcoming events can be found in room 205 of Nelson Hall East or on their website which is still branded as the Latinx Center for Academic Excellence.

NURSING

FROM PAGE 1

decided to go back to school, and I saw a role for nurses that could be a little bit more fulfilling and autonomous and help improve access to care.”

Perris earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice Executive Leadership from the University of San Francisco in 2018. Perris said she’s driven to give other nurses the same educational opportunities she had.

“I’m grateful that we can provide the opportunity for nurses to expand on their education—I know for me it was life-changing to do that,” Perris said.

HSU’s BSN program is designed for already-registered nurses who want to further their education. Perris said this will allow nurses to become more involved with the community and work outside of hospitals.

The program’s goal is to graduate 50 nurses in 2022, with 25 students entering a part-time, two-year program in 2020, and another 25 entering a full-time, one-year program in 2021.

Perris said she’s developing relationships with local health centers for BSN nurse roles. She’s also working to make the transfer process from College of the Redwood’s RN

program seamless.

CR’s Director of Nursing and Health Operations Roberta Farrar echoed Perris’ hopes.

“My hopes and goals would be to see each class filled to capacity with a waitlist of those wanting to enter the program,” Farrar said in an email. “That the registered nurses who choose Humboldt State are satisfied with their education and use knowledge gained to make necessary changes in any healthcare setting they are employed.”

Both Farrar and Perris said the program won’t bring more nurses to the community, but will instead give more opportunities to nurses in the area, enticing them to stay in Humboldt.

“A lot of nurses leave the area because they want to continue their education or there aren’t the kind of positions that they’re looking for,” Perris said. “So this role will provide more nurse leaders for the community and nurses to have more of a systemic look at the population.”

While Perris said she has felt overwhelmingly supported in her first few weeks, she did acknowledge the pressure of her position.

“I feel pressure because I want this to be successful,” Perris said. “And I want to make sure I have all the details in place to keep moving it



Photo by James Wilde
Humboldt State University’s new Bachelor’s of Science in Nursing Program Director Kimberly Perris. Perris is working towards a goal of graduating 50 nurses from the BSN program by 2022.

forward and not let anything fall in through the cracks.”

Despite the pressure, Perris said she doesn’t have any significant fears.

“There will be likely a little series of things that don’t work, and that’s normal in

a new project,” Perris said. “I’m sure there will be some hopefully-just-mini failures because this is a brand-new program, but that’s okay.”

Long-term, Perris said the BSN program will help nurses have a broader understanding

of the community and its healthcare needs.

“We have a struggling health care system right now and I think nurses are one of the missing pieces that can help to improve that,” Perris said. “The missing links.”

HUMBOT

FROM PAGE 1

everybody just going in there, reading all the questions and answers, and first making sure that it was accurate, and second, trying to make it a little bit more friendly,” Smith said.

HSU staff and summer students then seeded HumBot with an additional 150 questions before it was

released this fall. HumBot will continue to learn as students interact with it.

“That is going to be an ongoing, multi-year, get smarter each time kind of thing,” Smith said.

Associate Professor Maguire is conducting research through the bot and Smith said she has been shaping HumBot to address issues specific to HSU. Maguire could not be reached for an interview.

“She is kind of the

intellectual arm of the chatbot,” Smith said. “She and her colleagues are seeding the knowledge base of the chatbot with questions that relate to housing insecurity, food insecurity—HumBot is still learning those things, but it is our particular brand.”

Transfer fisheries student Matthew Howe used HumBot to find out where to pick up his mail. Howe admitted to being surprised by how well HumBot worked.

“I thought it worked fairly

well,” Howe said. “I was expecting it to not perform at all. I was surprised at how well it did work.”

Howe said he would use HumBot again, although he doubts he would ask it anything personal.

Smith noted that questions sent to HumBot can be viewed by the project staff. HumBot is unlikely to be helpful for personal matters, although with the possibility of endangerment HumBot can notify university police.

Smith hopes HumBot can play an important role in the modernization of HSU’s accessibility.

“I would just encourage students to kind of re-look at those things that maybe they don’t know about or maybe weren’t up to par with a couple years ago,” Smith said.

For now, HumBot is only available to new students, but it is expected to roll out for second and third-year students next fall.

No pee, hair or spit: marijuana breathalyzer arrives 2020

One blow is all it takes to show marijuana intoxication levels with new breathalyzer

by Grace Caswell

Marijuana has been a touchy topic since Colorado and Washington made their first moves to legalize recreational use in 2012. Since then, 29 states have followed and declared marijuana legal for medicinal and/or recreational use.

Tension forms at the discrepancy between state and federal opinion on where marijuana falls legally as a drug. The lack of legal confirmation from the federal government makes it difficult for government employers, especially police officers, to execute and process circumstances surrounding marijuana intoxication. Recent developments in marijuana detection technology suggest a breathalyzer is in the works.

Current marijuana testing requires a hair, urine or blood sample. The test results detect past use up to six months and reports the current THC level in the body. This testing proves to be unreliable as past use of marijuana will distort a current reading of bodily intoxication, which is what law officials care about.

The two technology companies racing to release their version of a more accurate breathalyzer are Hound Labs and SannTek.

Hound Labs was established five years ago and is leading the race with an expected release of late 2020. The Hound Labs breathalyzer operates on a specified time basis. It can detect



Photo illustration by Michael Weber

The breathalyzer method proves to be more accurate and better suited for law and medical officials, as alternative testing can take hours to produce results.

marijuana if it's been used in the last three hours. The three-hour window comes from two findings; one, marijuana is only detectable for the first three hours. Afterward, THC levels drop so low and so fast that it becomes virtually undetectable. Second, the initial three hours of intoxication are the most impaired and therefore the most crucial.

The breathalyzer method proves to be more accurate and better suited for law and medical officials, as alternative testing can take hours to produce results. In addition, this method is also beneficial to the participant, as the regulated three hour time interval doesn't hold participants liable for past usage beyond that time frame.

If this new testing method becomes normalized, the three hours prior to testing will be the most critical, but anything before those three hours is merely tangential. Ideally, someone tested for their marijuana use could not be held liable for their marijuana use prior to the three-hour window because the breathalyzer would not be able to detect it.

The opposing company, SannTek, and their breathalyzer the SannTek 315 will operate similarly to the Hound Labs breathalyzer. SannTek 315 is still in early development so the company is not providing much information. Like Hound Labs, their product will utilize a time interval to reveal the last ingestion of marijuana and current intoxication.

Hound Labs conducted clinical testing in 2017 in cooperation with University of California, San Francisco. However, no findings have been concluded publicly due to the small sample size. SannTek 315 lacks any formal testing or trials at this time.

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Students celebrate autumn harvest

Asian, Desi and Pacific Islander Collective holds annual moon festival

by Thomas Lal

The Mid-Autumn Moon Festival is an annual Chinese celebration dating back to the Zhou dynasty. At Humboldt State, the Asian, Desi and Pacific Islander Collective observed the traditional holiday with a free event on campus. Students and members of the community were invited to enjoy food and conversation with others in the Kate Buchanan Room.

Attendees were provided utensils to paint Chinese characters throughout the event and of course, enjoy mooncakes to properly celebrate the creation of their art. Mooncakes are a wheat based pastry seen as an essential part of the festival in Chinese culture.

A short presentation from the ADPIC officers helped show the meaning of the event. They talked about how the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival is traditionally a time to spend with family or in absence, think of family members.

After this, ADPIC member Jonathan Haeteurn and fellow Humboldt Rockers' member Romel Robinson entertained the crowd by break dancing. The dance may not have been expected from the event, but it was very well received with Haeteurn and Robinson being applauded throughout the performance.

Maria Castillo took her friend Afua Mensah to the event after hearing about it earlier that day. Mensah was happy that she had decided to join Castillo for her first Mid-Autumn Festival and said that she might be interested in attending more ADPIC events



Photo by Thomas Lal

Students and community members work on Chinese calligraphy during the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival put on by ADPIC Sept. 13 in the Kate Buchanan Room.

in the future.

"I really enjoyed it," Mensah said. "I've never had a mooncake before so I'm like, 'this is pretty good!'"

The event was marked as the first event for ADPIC since becoming an Associated Students program. ADPIC President Tammy Phrakonkham was happy with the turnout from the campus and community, especially considering the lack of attendance at the events earlier in the week. She also believed that the amount of people that came out proved that there should be more support for the program from the school.

"I want students, like me, to feel like they're welcome," Phrakonkham said. "I'm from Kansas City. I get out here and there's no one here that looks like me, I feel like I don't belong. I feel like I'm always having to bring my chair to the table."

The ADPIC program passed around a petition supporting the goal of eventually having an ADPIC center on campus strictly dedicated to the progress and success of the program. In addition to aiming for a center space, the program recently procured a garden plot from the Campus Center for Appropriate Technology with the hopes of adding workshops for students to make different cultural cuisines.

"For five years prior, we were a club," Phrakonkham said. "We have always been trying to fight to have our own center because a lot of the students felt like we weren't represented here. When you think of Asians you aggregate that they're all smart, they're all rich or whatever. But half of us are South Asians or Southeast Asians. We're also first generations and children of refugees."



Courtesy of ShareAlike Creative Commons

DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR FINALIZES PLAN FOR LEASING OUT ALASKAN REFUGE’S COASTAL PLANE

*Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is now
vulnerable to oil industry drilling*

by Collin Slavey

The Federal Government has finalized the Environmental Impact Statement to open Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Reserve for oil drilling.

The hands of industry and development have clawed at wilderness since pioneers began pushing westward. Oil has tempted landowners for decades, but the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve denied the resource to industry interests in order to preserve its unique, ancient landscape.

That landscape is threatened. In the perpetual words of writer and wilderness activist Robert Marshall, “And so the path of empire proceeded to substitute for the undisturbed seclusion of nature the conquering accomplishments of man.”

“[The Oil and Gas] Leasing Program will help meet the long-term energy needs of the nation, support job creation and economic growth of rural Alaskan communities,” The Department of the Interior, acting through the Bureau of Land Management, announced on September 12. “The [Tax Cuts and Jobs] Act directs the Secretary of the Interior, through the Bureau of Land Management, to establish two area-wide leasing sales, not less than 400,000 acres each, along the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

The legal authority for the Oil and Gas Program is found in Public Law 115-97, otherwise known as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Written into Title II, section 20001(page 184) are simple yet powerful exemptions for the oil industry’s special interests. For example, “Section 1003 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 3143) shall not apply to the Coastal Plain.”

The intent of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is clearly to honey-pot Alaska into opening up the refuge to industrial interests. The Act sets aside standards in the Mineral Leasing Act as the Federal Government plans on claiming royalties at a rate of 16.67%, when standard royalties

are 10%.

While the Mineral Leasing Act Section 35 gives 37.5% of money made from sales, bonuses, royalties and rentals of public lands to the State, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act declares 50% of the money made will go to the State Treasury.

The Trump Administration declared \$1.8 billion dollars of oil could be mined, essentially promising Alaska \$900 million in revenue. The latest federal report suggests the potential income is half of that, approximately \$905 million in revenue for the government and significantly less for Alaska.

The projections continue to fall as independent studies conclude significantly lower revenue opportunities based on other local lease sales. How low can you go? Alaska’s governor is prepared to open up the wildlife refuge no matter the cost.

“Forty years after Congress selected the Arctic Coastal Plain for potential energy development, the Trump Administration is making good on that decades old potential,” Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy said. “I join with all Alaska Governors since 1980 in assuring the nation and the world that we develop our natural resources responsibly. I look forward to the lease sale scheduled for later this year.”

In 1929, a 28-year-old forester named Bob Marshall visited the landscape which would eventually become Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on summer vacation. He chose that area because it was the most remote section of Alaska.

Marshall published an essay titled The Problem of the Wilderness where he describes the extraordinary benefits of the wilderness, considers the drawbacks of preserving wild lands and calls wilderness allies to action in the face of society’s aggressive advance into nature.

“Within the next few years the fate of the wilderness must be decided,” Marshall wrote. “This is a problem to be settled by deliberate rationality and not by personal prejudice. Funda-

mentally, the question is one of balancing the total happiness which will be obtainable if the few undesecrated areas are perpetuated against that which will prevail if they are destroyed.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the network of protected lands in the United State’s National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been referred to as “The American Serengeti” for its rich biodiversity and untouched landscape. The ANWR is home to a caribou herd nearly 170,000 strong and other beasts including polar and grizzly bears, snow hares, mink and beavers. None of the revenue from Oil and Gas sales will go toward reserve restoration efforts.

The Coastal Plain is “Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit,” the sacred place where life begins, to the native Gwich’in people. Both the Gwich’in and Inupuat people have depended on caribou and the land for food, clothing and resources to support their way of life. Gwich’in Elder Jonathon Solomon acknowledged his people’s connection to the land.

“It is our belief that the future of the Gwich’in and the future of the Caribou are the same.” Solomon said. “Harm to the Porcupine Caribou Herd is harm to the Gwich’in culture and millenia-old way of life.”

It seems, despite the 89 year difference, Robert Marshall’s word still ring true.

“There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth,” Marshall wrote. “That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness.”

“It is our belief that the future of the Gwich’n and the future of the Caribou are the same. Harm to the Porcupine caribou Herd is harm to the Gwich’in culture and millenia old way of life.”

-Jonathon Solomon
Gwich’in Elder



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SPORTS COLUMNS

NOW WE ARE AT A LOSS

A local’s perspective on life without the Humboldt State Football team

by Liam Warner

In July of 2018, with most of the student population home for the summer, former Humboldt State President Lisa Rossbacher and former Athletic Director Duncan Robins made the announcement that the HSU football team would be cut following the conclusion of the 2018 season.

The efforts of many community members to raise money for the football program earlier in the year were seemingly for nothing. Many community members, including myself, were outraged about the decision to cut the football team, but some applauded the move, saying that a football program was unnecessary and a drain on academics. Either side you may be on, it was a polarizing move for the university to

make.

I am part of the small percentage of HSU students that grew up in Humboldt County. In fact, I grew up right here in Arcata about a mile away from the HSU campus. I am as local as a local student can get. I spent a good portion of my life going to HSU football games and it became a significant source of pride that my small town had a Division II college football team. When I started attending HSU, this was not just my school’s football team, this was my hometown team as well.

When I transferred to HSU from College of the Redwoods, the first thing that caught me off guard about HSU was how separate it seemed from the rest of Arcata. Even though I was going to school in my hometown, HSU felt like a world of its own, far from the Arcata I grew up in. I felt that my identity as a native of



Photo by Deija Zavala

Humboldt State’s Alex Cappa (71) blocks for Ja’Quan Gardner (32) as he scores one of the final touchdowns during the 4th quarter of Central Washington University’s win of 42-28 at Redwood Bowl on Nov. 11th, 2017.

Arcata and a student at HSU were two separate worlds, even though in a geographic sense I was in the same place.

HSU football games were one of the only times that these two worlds felt one and the same. The games became some of the only times where I saw both students and local community members in the same place, at the same time, rooting for the same team. People from Arcata and Los Angeles alike, all rooting for

the Jacks.

It wasn’t just about the football team itself, but it was how football brought the entire community together. Getting rid of the football team felt like severing one of the last ties between the campus community and the local community.

The only good news I can gather from this is that the Redwood Bowl is actually seeing more football this season than when the HSU

football team was active. My alma mater, College of the Redwoods will be playing their football games at the Redwood Bowl starting on October 5, and both Arcata High and McKinleyville High are playing their football games on campus as well.

I hope that someday HSU football will be brought back, but in the meantime, all of the other HSU athletes that are still here deserve our full support. Go Jacks!

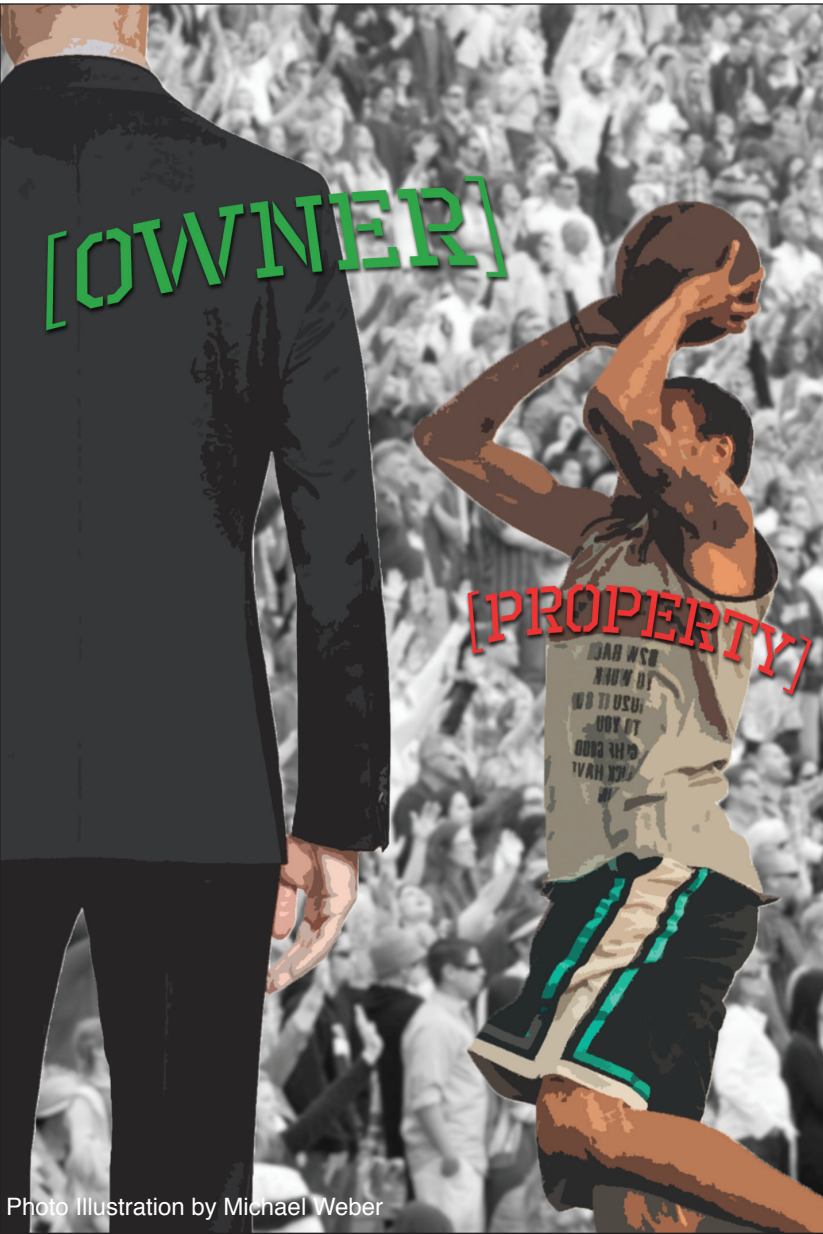


Photo Illustration by Michael Weber

Athletes are people too

Pro sports is a two-sided business in need of a power redistribution

by Andre Hascall

Owners of professional sports teams have made headlines the last few years for all the wrong reasons. The primary issue regards team owners treating players as property instead of as people, and a good amount of this coverage surrounds the National Basketball Association and the National Football League.

Since 2014 there have been numerous situations where owners of sports teams made racially-toned remarks concerning their athletes, who are predominately black. Simply referring to whomever controls the majority of the team as ‘owner’ can have its own racial implications in leagues where most players are people of color.

According to the NBA’s 2015 Racial and Gender Report Card and a 2014 NFL Census, 75% of

NBA players and 68% of NFL athletes are black. The NBA also has the largest percentage of people of color in its fan base, whereas NFL fans are primarily white.

In 2014, The NBA forced former LA Clippers’ shareholder Donald Sterling to sell his team after a tape of him spouting racist remarks was released to TMZ. But in the NFL it seems like their majority shareholders are able to get away with more. NFL team owners were more vocal than ever this past season due to the outrage from many fans about players kneeling during the National Anthem.

While NFL contracts may seem ridiculous compared to other high-grossing sports, professional football players receive the lowest percentage of guaranteed money in their contracts. In contrast, NBA athletes make every cent of their contracts and are often

considered to be involved in the daily running of the league as opposed to just their respective teams’ shareholders making all the decisions.

When it comes to the relationship between owners and their athletes, a large factor in the athlete’s treatment is how fans act. Rhetoric during the kneeling protests relayed many of the players who took a knee as unpatriotic, spoiled and privileged, with fans telling players to “shut up and play.”

Fans treat players as if they are toys for amusement instead of human beings. And team owners treat players like property that can be replaced at any moment. But when there is a media storm of fans and others calling for change like with the Clippers in 2014, progress can be made. Fans hold more power than they know and can directly affect how teams are handled and how athletes are treated.

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OPINIONS



Photo illustration by Michael Weber

Netflix's worst original movies: 'The Dirt'

There are many ways to make a decent bio-pic but this was not it

by Andromeda McNelis

We're all familiar with the term 'clickbait'—that thing YouTubers, social media influencers and crappy publications utilize to get views by advertising mind-blowing topics that don't pan out too much. Netflix is guilty of this.

Netflix advertises original movies with all-star casts on popular topics and many have been total flops. It's mind-blowing to try to analyze why these movies haven't worked out as there are usually decent actors and a whole lot of money thrown at scripts approved by Netflix executives. Yet, somehow we end up with biopics like "The Dirt."

The film follows the life and times of the band Mötley Crüe, a rock group from the 80s that were as influential to rock as N.W.A. was to rap. The movie is based on the autobiography of the band by the same name and the production received first-hand help from the members themselves. Somehow, it still managed to suck.

I would go so far as to refer to it as a dumpster fire, but one with a \$28 million budget. I hate this expensive dumpster fire so much that it inspired me to start this column, investigating and deconstructing Netflix's worst original movies.

"The Dirt" starts with a cliché voice over as we watch the band form, negotiate a signing and start making music before they dive headfirst into a world of debauchery. Despite this and heavy sourced material, the plot feels empty.

There's tons of drama, struggles with addiction and the rockstar lifestyle, yet all of it feels disconnected. What is a crazy and interesting true story turns into a passionless montage of crude humor, nudity and subplots that have no bearing on the rest of the story.

The poor structure and terrible acting could be forgiven if the writing didn't feel so lazy. There were far too many



Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee

Photo by Glenn Francis

I would go so far as to refer to it as a dumpster fire, but one with a \$28 million budget."

conflicts that resolved due to convenience or off-screen. When the band formed they were down a lead singer. They sought out Vince Neil at a half-nude backyard party and gave him their mixtape in hopes that he'll join their band.

Neil starts making out with a girl as a voiceover plays (did I mention that they pointlessly include these fourth-wall-breaking voiceovers that aren't even consistent throughout?) of him saying he had no interest in joining the band because he was only in a band to get chicks.

Fast forward five seconds to him and this same girl at his house, the voiceover plays again and he randomly decides that he will call the band back. He hasn't had an epiphany of any kind, Neil just decides to join the band. Instances like these are prevalent and pointless but, hey, writing like this gives us more time to watch the band do drugs and hang out with naked women. And,

of course, see Ozzy Osbourne drink urine off the ground.

When I said that the movie was a bad montage, I wasn't exaggerating. The filmmakers decided to take all of the band's most iconic and emotional moments and reenact them for the camera. Then they threw in some basic cut edits of band arguments and performances. The scenes are exaggerated for shock value and not narratively rewarding.

This brings us to N.W.A. and their 2015 biopic. The exaggerations made by the screenwriters of "Straight Outta Compton" were intentional and contributed to tension within the movie which helped hold it together. The characters that N.W.A. struggled with in the film motivated the audience to root for their success.

Mötley Crüe's biopic has no antagonists or even attempts to emphasize tensions felt between members. When the band gets back together at the end of "The Dirt," I felt nothing.

There was no struggle to get to that point and the movie never made a play for conflict in that regard. Besides external motivations, I also felt very little about Nikki Sixx's overdose and his continuous struggle with addiction due to the way it was portrayed.

Meanwhile, I cry every time I watch Eazy-E receive his HIV/AIDS diagnosis in "Straight Outta Compton." I don't cry in the scene where he dies, but the scene where he is diagnosed. Why? Because after all the conflict that he and fellow group members survived, this moment pulls everything out from under them.

What happens with Sixx's initial overdose and the band's continuous struggles with addiction? The directors chose to do a thirty-second scene where the band decides to go to rehab. That's cool, I guess. Not as much of an emotional impact, though.

And while we're on the topic, here are some other things that bothered me about this garbage fire of a movie: Machine Gun Kelly's over-acted and exaggerated portrayal of Tommy Lee, the recurring mention of the band's lead guitarist Mick Mars always being sick and no one caring, the weird humor they try to force onto Pete Davidson's character Tom Zutaut (including a scene where he speaks with a band member through a door while the same band member has sexual relations with Zutaut's girlfriend), Machine Gun Kelly's acting (again), the lack of cohesion between personal and on-stage life and finally, the lack of grounding in real world events. I, obviously, could keep going.

The absence of tension, overarching narrative or fun scenes showing off the band's greatness doom this movie from the get-go. Even if you were able to look past those issues, the terrible writing and bad performances, the movie leaves you with nothing more than unintentional laughter and the urge to turn it off. Which isn't anything that even shock value or sweet nostalgia can salvage.

ASK EVERGREEN SWITCHING MAJORS: COLLEGE IS NOT A RACE

Dear Evergreen,

I'm a third-year switching majors. Is that a big issue, or should I worry about not graduating on time?

Dear Major Switcher,

Switching your major as a third-year student can be a blessing and a curse. On one side, it's the perfect time to do it because you're still enrolled in school. It's better to do it now than to come back years later to try to major in your new studies. On the other side, switching now might create an unwanted financial hassle as you're most likely starting from square one with your new major. Unless you're switching to a major that has similar course requirements that you've already fulfilled.

College is not a race. It is completely normal to not finish a degree within four years. Don't beat yourself up or compare yourself to your peers. Make sure to schedule a meeting and talk with your adviser to map out the smoothest route for your degree transition—you might have less to do than you expect. You could even consider minoring in the major you want to change to. But remember, many people take gap years, change their majors or come back to school years later. Be proud of yourself for making this decision now. Best of luck!

- Evergreen



Ask Evergreen is our weekly advice column by the students of The Lumberjack.

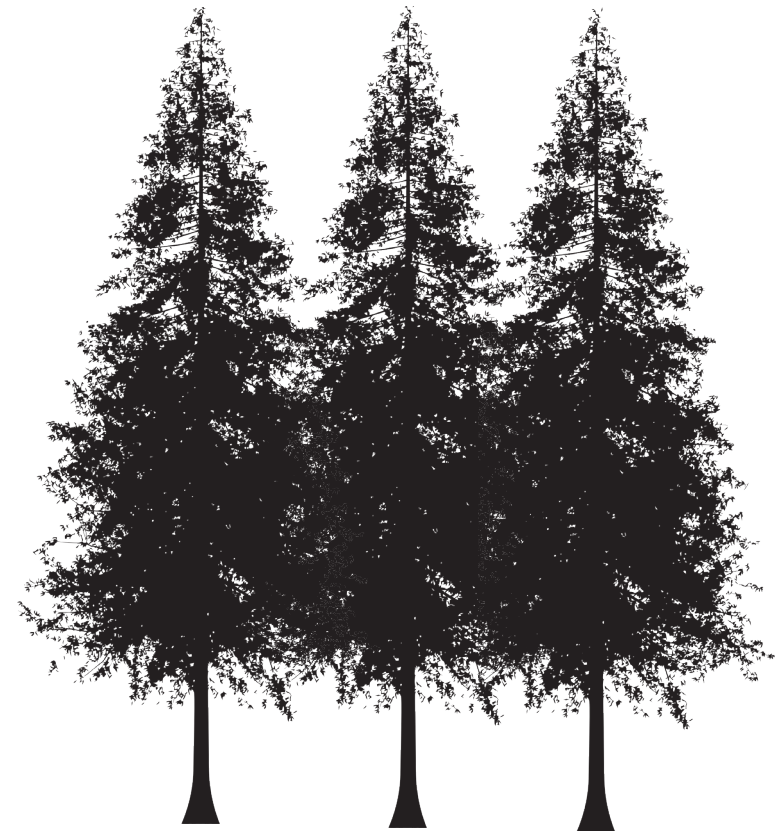
Each week we'll answer anonymous questions sent in by our readers about anything and everything.

If you have questions or concerns and aren't sure who to ask, feel free to send us your inquiry and we'll answer it.



Send questions to: contactthejack@gmail.com





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WEEKLY CALENDAR

Wed. 09/18

- Mental Health Event**
Time: Noon-4 p.m. **Where:** Nelson Hall 102 - Goodwin Forum
Description: Health education is important

Sci-Fi Pint & Fry Night
Time: 6 p.m. **Where:** Arcata Theatre Lounge
Description: Playing: "Creature of Destruction" (1967),Free with \$5 food/beverage

Pint for Nonprofits- Alzheimers Association
Time: 6 p.m. **Where:** Mad River Brewing Company & Tap Room
Description: Drink and donate for Alzheimers, 21+

Thurs. 09/19

- Student Legal Lounge Meeting** Time: 1:30-3:30 p.m. **Where:** Student Business Services 405 **Need help? Meet and talk about legal services**

Panel: "Birthright Citizenship, Immigration, and the 14th Amendment"
Time: 5:30-7 p.m. **Where:** Green and Gold Room - Founder Hall 166
Description: Join us for this timely Constitution Day panel discussion

Blue Lotus Time: 8-10 p.m. **Where:** The Basement
Description: You will love the smooth jazzy sounds of Blue Lotus

Fri. 09/20

- See it, Name it, Distrupt it** Time: Noon-1 p.m. **Where:** Library 209 - Library Fishbowl **Description:** A seminar in bystander intervention

Humboldt Climate Strike & Global Climate Strike Rally Time: Noon-4 p.m. & 3-7 p.m. **Where:** Arcata Plaza & Humboldt County Courthouse
Description: Support the Global Climate Strike, bring signs and allies

Creamery District Night Market
Time: 5-9 p.m. **Where:** Creamery District
Description: Night market with local artists, business, music and food

Sat. 09/21

- North Country Fair**
Time: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. **Where:** Arcata Plaza
Description: Celebrate the diversity of the community and the Fall Equinox

All Species Parade
Time:12:30-2 p.m. **Where:** Arcata Plaza
Description: Come dressed as your favorite critter to celebrate biodiversity at the 2019 All Species Parade

Goth Night with Venetian Veil
Time: 8 p.m. **Where:** The Siren's Song Tavern
Description: Live Bands, DJs, and more, \$5 at door

Sun. 09/22

- Engineering Day**
Time: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. **Where:** Arcata Library
Description: Fun, free science related activities for kids, FREE

Jazz Night
Time: 7 p.m. **Where:** Blondies Food and Drink
Description: Jazz up your Sundays

Two Mic Sundays
Time: 9 p.m. **Where:** Savage Henry Comedy Club
Description: FREE, Laugh it up, 18+

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