



THE PHOENIX NEWS

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In Partnership with your Students' Union

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

“YUCKING SOMEONE’S YUM” THE SUO’S DECISION TO DEACTIVATE THE SEX POSITIVITY CENTRE

ART & CULTURE

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS: PUBLIC ART

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

In the town where you grew up, you might remember some kind of piece of public art, whether that be a massive statue, mural, or an installation. But what is the weight of such art in a community?

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ARCHIVAL SHIPS ON THE SEA OF INFOMATION

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

In recent years there has been a substantial rise of digital archival accounts on Instagram. These accounts aim to document certain parts of internet history, one of the more contemporary approaches to archiving the long and sprawling internet. This has interesting implications for underrepresented communities and their histories.

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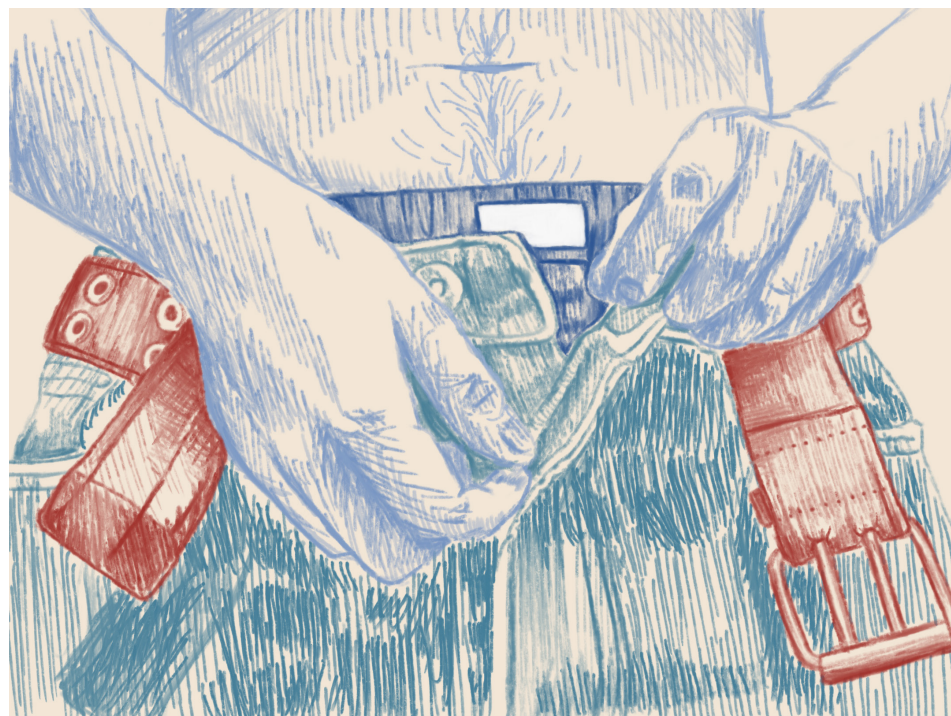


Illustration by Iso Maud Rodriguez

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

GOLDEN LEAVES & SILENT SCIENCE: THE SEASON OF FALL

BY NISHA CHOUDHARY



Photo by Sabhya Arora, 2025.

Have you ever wondered why the aurora borealis glows more often during fall, or why leaves burst into shades of yellow and red before they drift away?

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FROM DAMS TO YOUR DEVICES: THE POWER STORY YOU NEVER SEE

BY NISHA CHOUDHARY

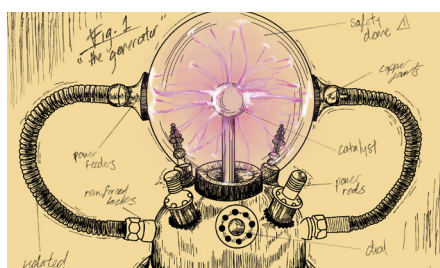


Illustration by Iso Maud Rodriguez

Every second, an invisible force powers your world — from wifi to your smartphones — but do we understand it?

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NEWS

GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION ON BALLOT

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

UBCO is one of the few campuses of its size in Canada that has only one students' union for both undergrad and graduate students. With no existing playbook for creating a students' union out of thin air, the Graduate Students Association is taking the unprecedented step to hold a referendum on the matter for all graduate students. This is their story.

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OPINION

“PROVE ME WRONG”: RAGE BAIT, VIOLENCE & MAKING PROGRESS

BY AVERY CUMMINS

We need to take accountability for our own ideas and how we share them — now more than ever.

IDEAS continued on page 4

THE PAPER THAT SPEAKS: THE LEGACY OF PHOENIX

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

For more than three decades, stacks of newsprint on campus tables have carried the stories, debates, and creativity of UBC Okanagan students. Long before digital archives and online newsletters, The Phoenix recorded the growing pains of a young university and gave students a place to see themselves in print.

LEGACY continued on page 7

THE CLASS RULE: LESSONS FROM A NO-PHONE CLASSROOM

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

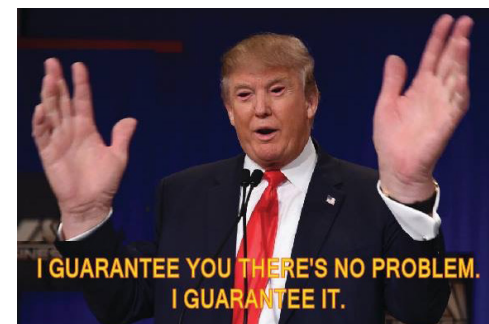
In a campus world shaped by screens and split attention, one class at UBC Okanagan takes a different route by establishing one rule — no phones, no laptops, no tech in class. This class asks students to unplug, be present, and rediscover what it means to think, connect, and be in the moment.

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CAMPUS LIFE

SHUTDOWNS & SHOWDOWNS: WHEN DEMOCRACIES HIT THE WALL

BY SAMAIRA TALWAR



Provided by Flickr

The systems meant to empower people are buckling under pressures old and new. With the fault lines in our political systems becoming more visible, does democracy risk losing its way?

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Illustration by Iso Maud Rodriguez



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Graduate Student Association on Ballot

BY QUINLIN OSADCZUK

Perhaps the most difficult aspect in starting anything truly new is that there is no rulebook or instruction manual — this is especially the case for starting a new graduate students’ union, as the Graduate Students’ Association (GSA) has learned over the past two years. In February, I wrote about this same effort by the many graduate students working towards this end, looking through their efforts and hopes. Now, from October 7th to 10th, the GSA will finally get their shot.

After extensive discussions and negotiations with the Students’ Union Okanagan, a referendum is soon to be held among graduate students as to whether they should separate from the SUO and form their own students’ organization: the GSA. The reason for the lengthy negotiations are because the SUO currently provides several services to all students, chief among them being the transit U-Pass and the SUO’s dental healthcare provisions. As the GSA hopes to maintain access to those services, not to mention for graduate students to still be able to attend certain SUO events, negotiations have been ongoing to see that the GSA can help to cover the costs for these events and services.

Another part of those negotiations has been ensuring that the GSA is a democratic organization, ensuring elections for leadership not unlike the SUO, and ensuring that a GSA would actually be fiscally viable. More on that, I spoke with the president of the SUO, Peter Idoko. Here is an abbreviated version of that conversation after exchanging the typical pleasantries: **Quinlin Osadczyk:** This is an unprecedented event, for a new graduate students’ union to be formed like this. What are your thoughts on everything happening as of now?

Peter Idoko: I agree that this event is unprecedented for our campus, but it is by no means a unique situation to our campus. While we have enjoyed having graduate students be a part of our Students’ Union for our many years of existence, there are many examples across the country where graduate students have a separate union from undergraduate students. This gives them an opportunity to represent graduate students’ needs from an informed perspective, an advantage that the SUO as a dominantly undergraduate organization frankly struggles to do. I think this change was bound to happen with the rapid growth in our student population and I think it goes to further demonstrate the intention of our students to step into leadership roles to make the most of the UBC experience for all

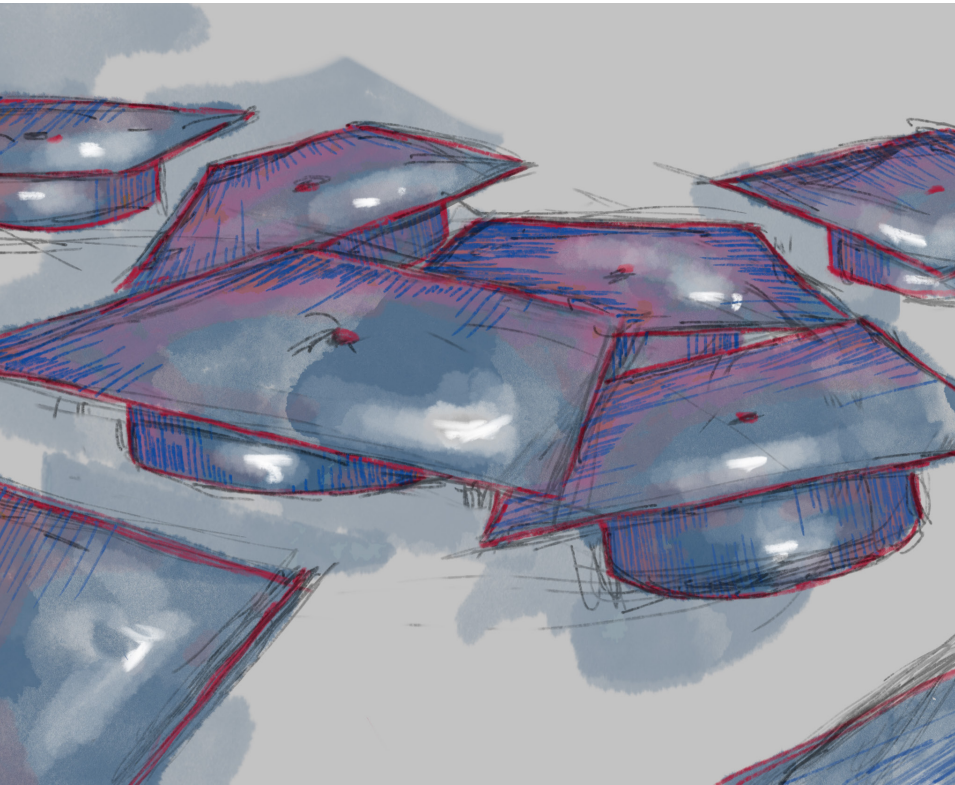


Illustration by Iso Maud Rodriguez

students at the Okanagan.

QO: Obviously there have been programs for graduate students up until now — can you tell me what those have been like, and how a new GSA might affect that going forward?

PI: Our primary programs for graduate students have been through involvement in our GSC and other graduate student clubs. Currently, graduate students have access to all SUO services; resource centres, health and dental, and programming to name a few. Upon separation, GSA members will become affiliate members of the SUO which will grant them access to some of the services they currently have as SUO members. Because the GSA is still new, we are working closely with GSA leadership to ensure GSA members are still taken care of through this affiliate membership. We intend to continue to work closely with GSA to ensure no student is put in a difficult situation should the referendum pass.

QO: What has the SUO done with relation to the GSA up to now? What has that process been like?

PI: We have had frequent meetings with the GSA to build a strong working relationship and understand the implications should the referendum pass. It has been easygoing so far and the GSA has caused us no problems so far. Other than that, we haven’t been overly involved in the GSA as we are focused on our initiatives and business this year. As described in our Action Plan, we are determined to make this the best SUO year for students since our inception. As such, we have been working with everyone, including the GSA to achieve that mandate!

QO: Thank you. Do you have any closing remarks?

PI: Regardless of the outcome of the referendum, the SUO remains com-

mitted to serving ALL students at UBC Okanagan. We encourage students (undergrad and grad) who are interested to go to one of the information sessions hosted by the GSA to learn more about the referendum.

Of course, I write this article with a perhaps unique perspective: as a faculty representative for the SUO, I have had the privilege of following this development for quite some time, having met a then-director of the GSA almost by accident, that person being Scarlett MacPherson. Following the interview with herself and other directors of the GSA, I kept in touch, following the matter first as tacit interest, then as a matter of fulfilling my job description in the SUO. To get a better idea of the GSA’s intent, its goals, and how it would lead as an organization should it be established — presuming they would win — I reached out to Scarlett. Here is an abbreviated version of that conversation:

QO: I last spoke with you some months ago about the GSA’s journey to be an independent organization — with a referendum now in progress, that goal seems closer than ever. Can you tell me about that journey?

Scarlett MacPherson: The journey for graduate students at UBCO to have an opportunity to vote on how their fees are used has been years in the making. From the tireless work of my co-founding Directors Brontë Shelton and Yazdan Gordanpour, to my five current co-Directors Joud, Shav, Bunmi, Ghulam, and Pronob - so many people have put in countless hours of work. I would also like to thank Dale Mullings and the SUO Board of Directors’ for their support in this process. Now that the voting for the referendum has begun, the choice belongs to the graduate students.

QO: What are your goals for

the GSA? How will you be different from the SUO?

SM: The goals of the GSA are entirely dependent on what graduate students want from the organization. This also ties into how the GSA differs from the SUO; undergraduate and graduate students are different: our programs are different from each other, on average we are at different stages of life, and we have different priorities. This is the primary reason why we’ve fought so hard for graduate students to have the chance to vote on this — so graduate students can self-determine what services are most needed for graduate students.

QO: What will you do to ensure the GSA works well going forward?

SM: We have plans for the future governance structure of the GSA, however all of this will be voted on by graduate students. Our Board doesn’t make decisions behind closed doors. We endeavour to involve our members in every step of the decision making process.

It was a nice conversation, though I have cut out the pleasantries-- as the referendum has grown closer and closer, Scarlett has found herself and her board working double-time to campaign in favour of the GSA, having just left one meeting and along the way to another when I saw her last.

Of course, the process of starting such an organization as this has been a long road for the many graduate students that have been involved in this process. During the SUO board meeting where the referendum was approved, genuine tears of joy were shed. What has been made especially clear to me over the course of the past few months in following this project has been the personal nature of it all; speaking with individual volunteers and people involved in the GSA has been more of an emotional ordeal than I’d anticipated. In an era where it can be hard to maintain faith in civic service and institutions, it was heartening beyond description to know that such vast groups of students were willing to work through the SUO to make something new. Perhaps it is sentimental, but it is also real.

As the referendum will remain open until October 10th, I implore you not just to vote, but to learn more about this decision before you do — so long as you’re a graduate student, as they’re the only eligible voters in this case. Even still, taking the time to learn more about the resources available to you is one of the best things you can do as a student. Then again, I am a little biased.

“Yucking Someone’s Yum”: The SUO’s Decision to Deactivate the Sex Positivity Centre

BY CHARLOTTE TAPPIN

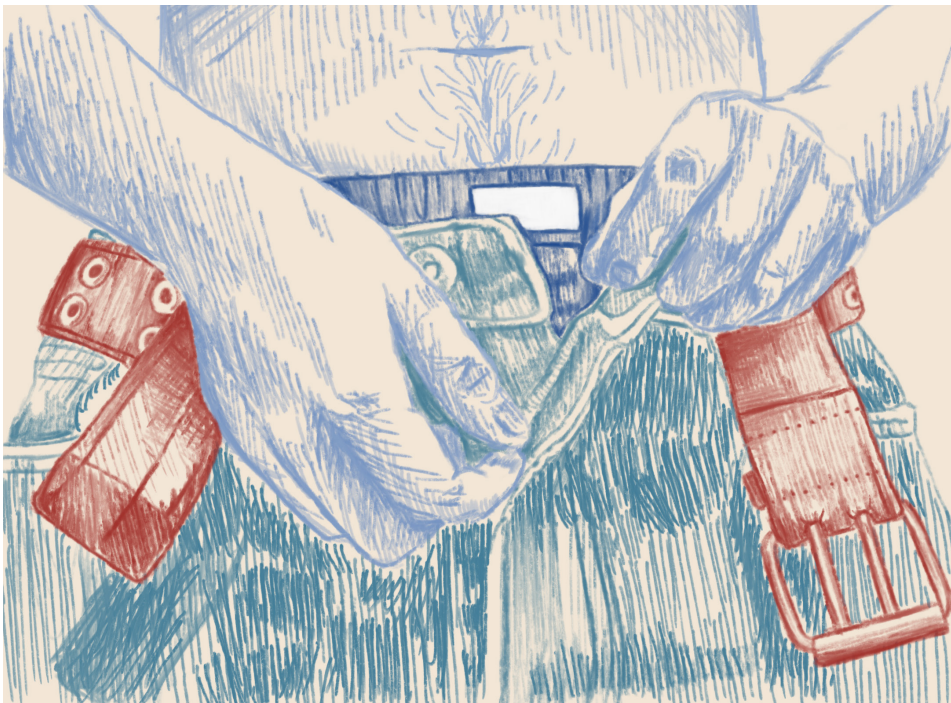


Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

On July 17th, 2025, the Sex Positivity Centre (SPC) was notified by the Student’s Union Okanagan (SUO) through an email that their resource centre was now “formally deactivated, and the resources [had] been reallocated,” and that this decision was in response to “ongoing challenges around student engagement, volunteer involvement, and consistent educational programming.” In this email, they also stated that the resources provided in the SPC would now be provided in the Pride Resource Centre (PRC) and the Women’s Resource Centre (WRC).

Less than a month later, on August 7th, the SUO posted a graphic to their Instagram explaining that the SPC would be “merge[d] with the Pride Resource Centre and Women’s Resource Centre for optimal sexual health promotion on campus” which was “in response to insightful feedback from our student community.”¹ No other motive for the deactivation of the SPC was announced publicly. In place of the SPC, a new resource centre has been opened: the Disability United Collective Okanagan (DUCO); this centre holds weekly office hours, but has not put on any events yet.

Maddy Belle, who was the Vice-President of the SPC in the 2024/2025 academic year, shared some concerns regarding the deactivation of the SPC. Belle stressed that:

“If people don’t know where to go, and people don’t feel comfortable going to certain [resource centres], it leads to misinformation and miseducation. Then, groups like the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) get used more often, because consequentially that is what happens. We were about preventing that from happening. [...] The Sex Positivity Centre aimed to provide resources, promote healthy relationships between people, and de-stigmatize sexual conversations and conversations surrounding sexual health. So even if it is as simple as something like [distributing] condoms and pregnancy tests, or talking to someone if you have a certain problem.”

In the SUO’s Action Plan for the 2025/2026 academic year, they aim to “expand mental health services and anti-stigma initiatives,”² among other important things that will benefit the student body. Providing places for students to access sex positive resources on campus is important, as it prevents physical harm, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and allows for spaces of open dialogue for students to feel accepted regarding their sexuality.

The SPC aimed to reduce stigma surrounding sexual conversations, and Belle stressed “[we’re] not yucking someone’s yum,” meaning to emphasize that “there

should be no stigma against sexual desires as long as [it is between] consenting adults. We were not there to judge.”

Belle also stressed concerns regarding how inclusive the integration of sex positive resources would be to the PRC and WRC, and reflected on a question regarding if she thinks that students will feel uncomfortable going to the PRC and WRC for sexual education:

“Absolutely I do, there is a teeny bit of stigma with the PRC, because it feels like you have to be queer, and it feels like you have to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. Or if you don’t identify as a woman or are not female presenting, where does that lead you? It doesn’t leave a space for everyone. As much as I’d love to focus on talking about queer sex openly, it is everything else that matters too. Where are people supposed to go for this information, and where are people supposed to feel comfortable? [...] I think this is going to lead to more miseducation.”

Despite the SUO’s promises to reallocate the resources previously provided by the SPC, Belle believes that they will not be effectively administered in the PRC and WRC without the experience and dedication the SPC executives had:

“They’re not educated in sex positivity and how to properly teach sex education and that is a problem. We can’t just give them all of our pamphlets, and say ‘now you have more paper to distribute,’ they don’t know what to do with that. And it isn’t the WRC and PRC’s fault that they don’t have that information, [...] it is the SUO’s fault for not providing [the WRC and PRC] sex positivity resources, and they now have this added responsibility.”

When the SPC was notified that their resource centre was being deactivated, the SUO did not directly integrate any of their executives into the PRC and WRC. The SPC executives were told they could apply to those resource centres if they wanted to do so. The Phoenix reached out to the PRC and WRC to ask if they had received any information from the SUO regarding how they would integrate new sex positivity resources, but neither resource centre responded to the inquiry. The PRC was recently hiring for a new resource coordinator which could likely be attributed to their absent response as the resource centre gets started. The SUO has also not put out any information regarding which specific sex-positive resources are now being offered in the PRC and WRC.

In the process of reaching out to the SUO Executive who oversees the resource centres, a concern appeared about the transparency of the responsibilities of the SUO Executive board. The SUO claims to operate on a principle of transparency,

they state that they “share openly about [their] business practices and actions,”³ and in their Plan of Action they emphasize achieving transparency for the student body.

On the official SUO website, Vice-President Internal, Shreya Patnaik, is said to have the responsibility of “handling internal matters within the SUO and liaising with its Resource Centres,” but after contacting Patnaik for an interview she explained that she did not in fact oversee resource centres, and that Vice-President External, Olivia Lai, held the responsibility of overseeing the centres. This description on their website is contradicted in their bylaws and AGM minutes, which put the responsibilities of resource centre oversight in the hands of their Vice-President External. In an email asking about the decision to deactivate the SPC, Patnaik stated that Lai made the decision to deactivate the SPC. However, during Lai’s interview she stated that the Board of Directors collectively made the decision to deactivate the SPC. Lai also states that “the process was transparent as all the board discussions are public and minutes are public. The decision was even posted to [the SUO’s] Instagram,” and that the discrepancy on the SUO website is due to changes in staffing which has prevented an update in occurring.

The original Instagram post announcing the deactivation of the SPC cited it as being in response to “insightful feedback from our student community.” In an interview with Lai, she explained the method in which feedback regarding the SPC was collected from students, commenting:

“The SUO heard insightful feedback informally from students about the Sex Positivity Centre during tabling engagements like EXPO, and events like [the Sexual Health Awareness Gala]. A formal survey was not sent out but the Board of Directors made a decision that there would be greater engagement and potential from the resources we offered through the Women’s Resource Centre and Pride Resource Centre.”

Later, Lai claimed to have a survey with statistics surrounding SPC engagement, but this data was never made available to The Phoenix.

Issues surrounding free space on campus are not unfamiliar to any student, and Lai added that: “UBCO campus is very limited in space and this includes the [SUO]. We wished that we could provide the services if we had more space. Based on student feedback, we have to choose the centres that provide the greatest needs on campus and even though sex education is very important, it is not the greatest need for the greater population. The work that SVPRO is doing has seen a 30% decrease in sexual violence cases on campus. [...] Not having SPC will not affect the number because students directly visited SVPRO over SPC.”

Lai commented that some of the feedback they received was regarding “that SPC’s operations have shifted away from educational sexual health support toward content that some students found uncomfortable or unsafe, for instance, promoting sex toys on the table was not always welcoming.” No specific event this concern was raised at was mentioned. However, actions from the SUO in the past – having their executives dress up in penis and vagina costumes, or giving out cookies shaped like genitals – were actions made in similar faith with the SPC displaying sex toys at public events and should not be disregarded. These actions on behalf of both the SPC and SUO were in the name of education and de-stigmatization, showing that both organizations have similar goals in mind: to reduce stigma

surrounding sexual health and wellbeing. Another reason Lai gave for the decision was that “[the] SPC [had shown] consistently low engagement and lack[ed] consistent tabling or programming outcomes,” although Belle explained that a low number of events was due to internal conflicts between resource centres that hindered the amount of events the SPC was able to put on. The SPC was prevented from hosting specific events because they were determined to be too similar to other events that were being planned by other resource centres, which led to lower engagement than desired. In the 2024/2025 academic year, the SPC hosted six non-tabling events; they were not the resource centre with the least amount of events hosted. In response to this, the SUO has stated that there is “no evidence showing that someone or the SUO [has prevented the SPC] from having an event.”

There were also important financial implications that went into this decision that Lai explained. The SPC used a low amount of their yearly budget which led the SUO to believe they were not using it for optimal student engagement. It was the SUO’s hope that through merging the SPC into the PRC and WRC, the centres could use additional monetary resources they typically have left at the end of the year to cover the implementation of sexual education into their resource centres. Lai finished by stating “[the SUO is] stressing that we are not removing the service, we are just changing how we offer it.”

If any students wish to access sexual health resources on campus, they should seek out information from the PRC, WRC, SVPRO, or PICNIC’s Sexual Health and Wellbeing centre.



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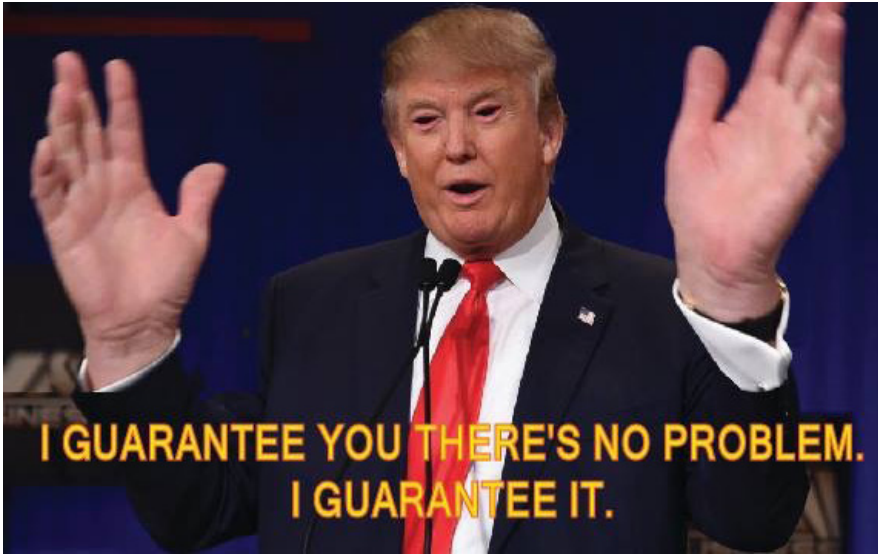
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1 Student’s Union Okanagan. (2025, August 7). Sex Positivity Centre Merges with Pride Resource Centre and Women’s Resource Centre for Optimal Sexual

Health Promotion on Campus. Instagram. Retrieved October 4, 2025, from https://www.instagram.com/p/DNEfT-j5yPq6/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link.

2 Student’s Union Okanagan. (2025). SUO Action Plan: 2025-2026. Retrieved October 4th 2025, from <https://www.suo.ca/governance/>.

3 Student’s Union Okanagan. (2025). Mission Statement. Retrieved October 4th 2025, from <https://www.suo.ca/mission-statement/>.



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The systems meant to empower people are buckling under pressures old and new. With the fault lines in our political systems becoming more visible, does democracy risk losing its way?

When a flawed democracy gets cornered by its own contradictions, the fallout shakes more than the halls of power – it is a seismic shock to the very construct of society. In 2025, the US government shutdown and Nepal’s Gen Z uprising aren’t just anomalies; they are urgent alarms that signal the limits of political inertia and the frustration of youth.

On October 1, 2025, at 12:01 am EDT,¹ the US government closed the halls of the white house for the first time in six years. This latest iteration of the shutdown is more than just another political stalemate. It exposes deep fissures in American governance. While a budget impasse between President Donald Trump’s Republican Party and Democrats in Congress was the direct cause,² this incident also exposes the political ambitions of the current administration.

Beyond budget disagreements, it’s a showdown over the path the US government is headed on. Amidst massive lay-

offs happening in the background, nearly 750,000 federal employees³ face unpaid leaves, and non-essential services (such as passport processing and national parks) have considerable delays. In spite of these setbacks, the new 90,000 sq. ft. White House ballroom continues its \$200 million construction³. These rippling economic effects will threaten a drag on the already fragile economy, posing a threat to the average American with employment uncertainty, delayed social services, and stalled federal processes.

Far from Washington, a drastically different yet strikingly similar incident occurred on the streets of Nepal in early September 2025.⁴ A protest that started out against social media bans spiraled into a grander outburst of political sentiment when thousands of protestors broke police barricades and stormed the Nepalese Federal Parliament Building in Kathmandu. On September 9, the Parliament Building was set ablaze.⁵ As the parliament went up in flames, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned, bludgeoned by the country’s youth demanding parliamentary dissolution and constitutional amendments. In an unprecedented turn of events, the new

1 Gomez, Justin. “The US Government Has Shut Down. Here’s What to Know.” ABC News, ABC News Network 2 Zurcher, Anthony. “Why Has the US Government Shut down and What Does It Mean?” BBC News, BBC, 2 Oct. 2025

3 Flam, Charna. “White House Will Continue Construction on 90,000-Square-Foot Ballroom during Government Shutdown.” People.Com, PEOPLE, 1 Oct. 2025 4 “2025 Nepalese Gen Z Protests.” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 2 Oct. 2025

Shutdowns and Showdowns: When Democracies Hit The Wall

BY SAMAIRA TALWAR

Prime Minister was elected informally through a virtual poll on Discord.⁶

From fighting for their rights on the streets to electing a new leader on the very platforms the previous government banned, the impact has been historical. This wasn’t merely a political squabble; it was a generational upheaval demanding systemic change. They have pushed for leaders who value transparency and challenged entrenched elites.

These two incidents give light to an uncomfortable reality – when political systems don’t mature with the growing needs of its constituents, democracy suffers.

The US shutdown stems from a system stuck in partisan paralysis, a country where cooperation is being sacrificed in the name of political gamesmanship. Meanwhile, the failure in Nepal is different but no less severe. The nation risked plunging into deeper political instability because of the elite’s disregard for transparency. Both cases show a fracture in the system, as the trust between the governed and the government fails and threatens democratic legitimacy.

What is the common denominator in these stories? At their core, they illuminate generational divides. In the US, an older political class is drenched in zero-sum thinking. They’re so out of touch with the population’s demands for more inclusive and constructive governance that they prioritize partisan victory over collaborative problem-solving, further alienating a generation that refuses to accept the status quo. In Nepal, the youngest generation is championing digital activism to rewrite the rules. They’re toppling a government

that is out of touch with their aspirations. This tension is a defining conflict, one that will shape the future of democracies globally.

These shutdowns and showdowns evoke a hopeful message. Today’s generation is invigorated to have domestic participation and push for meaningful reform. While the US and Nepal display symptoms of dysfunction, there also exists critical public discourse, a movement so strong that it is forcing leaders to confront the consequences of impasse.

The US government shutdown and the uproar in the streets of Nepal are not isolated incidents, they are chapters in the story of democracy hitting the wall.

With events like these happening, we are constantly reminded that democracy is not a static achievement. Rather, it is an ongoing contract that requires responsiveness and engagement. We are challenged to ponder upon the way democracy is practiced, the people that it serves, and the manner in which it can transform in an era characterized by increasing political polarization. The lessons are obvious: democracies cannot afford complacency. Political leaders must transcend their current self-serving motives to fulfill the promise of healthy governance, one that reflects contemporary realities and serves everyone equitably. The bottom line remains unchanged: democracy withers when it ceases to evolve and adapt to the needs of its people.

The question we must now consider is whether democracies will heed this call before the wall they hit becomes insurmountable.

veals about Social Media and Democracy.” Elcano Royal Institute, 2 Oct. 2025

5 Harvey, Lex. “A Parliament in Flames, a Leader Topped. Nepal Gen-z Protesters Ask: What Comes Next?” CNN, Cable News Network, 11 Sept. 2025 6 Chislett, William. “Nepal Elects Its First Female Prime Minister on Discord: What It Re-

“Prove Me Wrong”: Rage Bait, Violence, and Making Progress

BY AVERY CUMMINS

Everywhere you look, you can find reminders that the world in which we find ourselves is being rocked by a rise in political division and anti-intellectualism. From bumper stickers to corporate policies, people everywhere are devoting more time to division and denial than actual understanding of the global situation in which we find ourselves. It can be easy to slip into the “us-versus-them” mindset when it seems like reason and nuance have been tossed out the window.

I saw the uncensored Charlie Kirk assassination footage when I opened Instagram in the late morning of September 10, 2025. The public nature and extreme documentation of his death coupled with the power of social media makes the effect of politically charged violence feel tangible. While it made my stomach turn, it was also not incredibly shocking to me that the ideas peddled by Kirk created a breeding ground for violence and anger.

Kirk was a rage-baiter who made a profit off of other peoples’ frustration. I hesitate to call his method of sharing ideas “debate” because it is chock-full of contradictions and logical fallacies that are difficult to follow at times. Sitting under a tent that reads “prove me wrong” and speaking over those who try to do so was clearly not a very intuitive way to have a dialogue, and yet his ability to negatively manipulate basic human emotion to the advantage of himself and his fans was truly remarkable. However, I do not think Kirk is an outlier in his stubborn mode of conversation.

If you have ever been on a particularly strenuous hike, it might seem easier to turn around and walk with your back facing uphill once your thighs and calves start aching. However, you soon realize this is actually a much more frustrating method of conquering the trail, and that you are better off with burning legs than tripping over a rock or

tree root. In my experience, turning away from or attempting to completely dominate uncomfortable conversations feels the same as walking uphill backwards — it seems to be a momentary release from irritation, but you come to find out that it is short-lived and the challenge still looms, waiting for you to face it.

Progress is made by meeting those challenges. In some cases, dialogue with people who are different from you ideologically can lead to a productive sharing of ideas and a connection to humanity. When it is easy to label someone as your enemy, we skip over a fundamental factor of political discourse and risk losing the societal virtues that have allowed us to make it this far. Politics is first born through productive conversation between ordinary people; not on a podium, campaign, or in a legislature.

You are not immune to polarizing rhetoric. Have real conversations with people who are different from you, and try to understand why they believe what they do. No matter how brainwashed you think the “other side” is, odds are you are more similar to them than you are to the leaders and thinkers you side with.

Of course, it would be naive to believe that everyone on every side of the political spectrum is up for a well-rounded and reasonable discussion about morals and values. It is easy for folks to toss absurd comments back and forth for the sake of a reaction rather than share an interest in mutual understanding. When face-to-face with ideas that diametrically oppose yours to an extreme, taking a step back to save yourself from anger or despair can be the safest bet. However, I ask that you consider how one might reach their opinions. We oftentimes have the same basic concerns as everyone else, but disagree on how to find the right solution.

No one is asking you to be friends with people

who discredit or outright disrespect your closely held values, but how are we to move forward in any positive way when we cannot even listen to others speak before we label them as friends or foes? Understanding and empathy can bring us closer to having a shared vision for what comes next in our global society.

Kirk’s assassination should serve as a wake-up call not only to Americans, but to anyone who catches themselves feeding into the conflict-driven ecosystem that allowed him to thrive. In other words, healthy dialogue is essential to success. Progress is an uphill battle. If we let ourselves be daunted by the trailhead, we will never see the view at the summit.

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“Whirlpool” by Brendan James
Estimated Difficulty: 1/5

Golden Leaves and Silent Science: The Season of Fall

BY NISHA CHOUDHARY

The Earth has officially taken a different course of season. Fall is finally here and its arrival marks more than a change in color of leaves around you — it signals a complex transition across the planet’s different systems, from atmospheric to biological to ecological. This seasonal shift not only affects the external factors but it also brings many changes in human bodies and brains. This article explores the science of autumn, uncovering how nature’s most colorful season reflects both change and renewal.

Astronomically, seasons are based around the equinoxes and solstices, though there are two viewpoints: one where the equinoxes and solstices mark the start of a season, and the other where they mark the middle of the season.¹ During the equinox, the Sun shines directly on the equator, so both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres receive nearly equal amounts of daylight and darkness. This balance begins to shift after the equinox due to the Earth’s axis being tilted at an angle of about 23.5 degrees. As the Earth continues its orbit around the Sun, this tilt causes the Northern Hemisphere to receive less direct sunlight, leading to cooler temperatures and shorter days. As a result, places like Canada begin to experience the gradual transition into fall.

Around the equinoxes, the same tilt of Earth makes it easier for solar wind to interact with Earth’s magnetic field. Due to the Russell-McPherron effect,² more charged solar particles enter Earth’s atmosphere instead of being deflected. As a result, geomagnetic storms increase, leading to more frequent and brighter auroras near the poles.

Beyond the skies, the Earth’s surface also responds vividly to autumn’s arrival. We all recognize fall due to the major phenomenon of leaves changing their color. But what’s the reason behind this change? Leaves already have their autumn color in them during summer months. These colors are hidden under the well known substance chlorophyll, which plants use to turn light into sugar that makes a leaf look green. As the season shifts, these leaves receive less sunlight which breaks down the chlorophyll and reveals the beautiful vibrant colors like the yellows and oranges which are called xanthophylls and carotenoids.³

The red color in many trees comes from anthocyanins, pigments that form in the leaves during autumn. When days are sunny and nights turn cool, sugars get trapped in the leaves because the flow of nutrients between the tree and its leaves slows down. These sugars help produce anthocyanins, giving the leaves their bright red and purple colors. As the tree takes back the last of the nutrients, the leaves die and eventually fall to the ground. These fallen leaves aren’t wasted — they still contain sugars and nutrients that feed fungi, bacteria, and insects as they decompose. Over time, the breakdown of leaves improves the soil by adding fiber, helping it retain moisture and drain better. So, the next time you see colorful leaves on the ground, remember they are part of a vital recycling process in nature.

Just like trees, animals also prepare for the coming winter, as they sense the temperature dropping faster than humans do. In the Okanagan, bears, deer, and coyotes in-



Photo by Sabhya Arora, 2025.

crease food intake to build fat reserves for hibernation, while squirrels store food and many birds migrate south. Meanwhile, fungi take advantage of autumn to reproduce, producing fruiting bodies and spreading spores.

Humans also go through several changes during the fall months. The cooler weather and shorter days can affect us both mentally and physically, often making us want to stay cozy indoors. Temperature fluctuations, along with allergens like dust and mold, can challenge our respiratory systems. Reduced sunlight may impact our mood and disrupt sleep patterns as our bodies work to maintain balance. Cooler temperatures have been linked to improved memory and better cognitive recall, making fall a great time to study and prepare for exams.⁴ Additionally, our heart rates tend to speed up, and many of us feel the urge to sleep more as the season

changes. All these transitions symbolize a continuous cycle of decay and renewal central to ecosystem balance. As nature prepares for winter, it reminds us that change is both inevitable and essential for growth. So, as the world slows down for winter, we too can pause — to learn from the trees, breathe in the cool air, and find comfort in simple joys, whether that’s a quiet walk or a warm pumpkin spice latte.

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2 Lea, R. (2024, September 23). Equinox increases chances of geomagnetic storm from solar eruption this week. Space.com. <https://www.space.com/sun-geomagnetic-storm-equinox-exploding-sunspot-september-25>
3 Why do leaves change colour in autumn? (n.d.). Forestry England. <https://www.forestryengland.uk/blog/why-do-leaves-change-colour-autumn>
4 Sun, T. (2018, September

From Dams To Your Devices: The Power Story You Never See

BY NISHA CHOUDHARY

Recently, in one of my physics classes, I got to conduct an experiment on wireless power transfers. It was nothing short of magic to me, sparking a light of curiosity to understand every bit of its working. Physics isn’t a true magic though — it’s wired with logic and wonder, where simple falling water creates energy that enables you to use your phone today.

Have you ever truly wondered how electricity is generated and how it actually flows to power our everyday devices? Most of us learned the basics in school, but in this piece, I want to explore its journey once again, from its very origins to the moment it powers up your devices.

Electricity is the flow of energy. It is not something that is sitting and waiting for you to use. It is produced the instant you turn on your light switch, flowing instantly from its source to power your bulb. Such energy-packed sources range from falling water to very hot steam from burning fossil fuels to nuclear atoms, and from the sun to wind energy. Canada is one of the leaders in hydroelectricity where 60%¹ of its energy comes from it while British Columbia produces 90%.²

Now think of a dam, in which water stored high up holds potential energy. When the water is released and rushed down, it spins the turbines, changing that energy to kinetic energy. Those turbines further rotate a generator, which then converts the mechanical motion into electrical energy. Inside the generator, spinning magnets create changing magnetic fields, which through electromagnetic induction generate electric fields that push electrons in the wire throughout the grid and create electric current. In our power lines, the electrons don’t

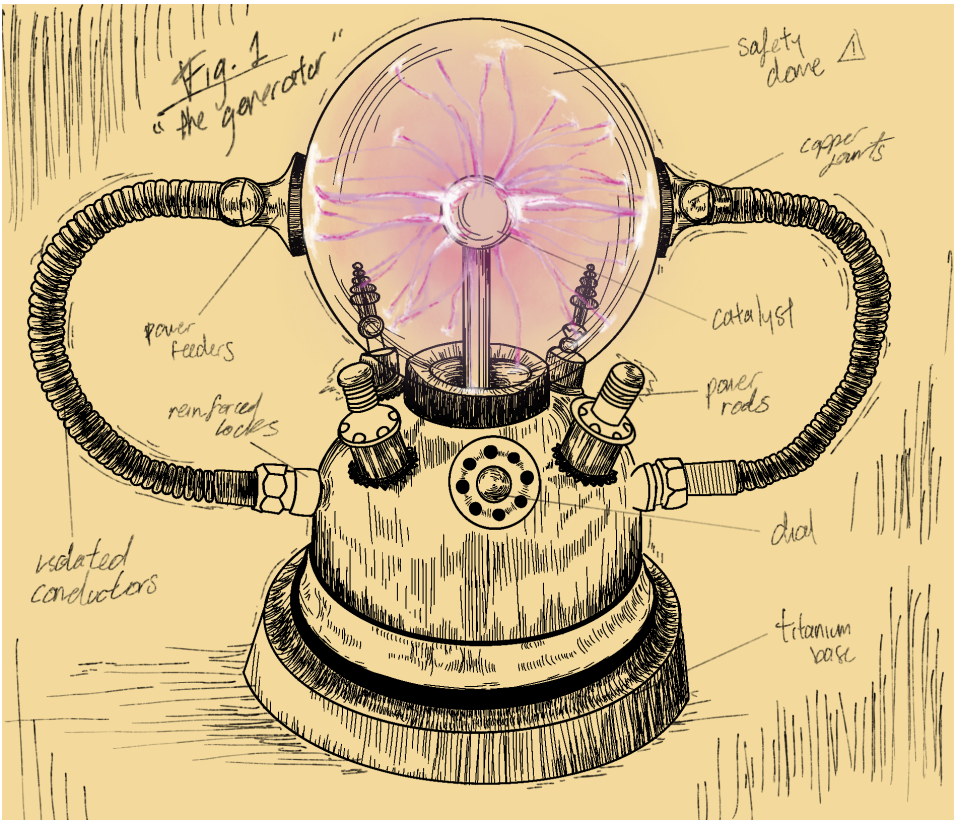


Illustration by Iso Maaud Rodriguez

move in just one direction, but they actually shift back and forth at about 60 times per second, which is usually called alternating current (AC).

But the electricity made at the dam isn’t ready for your home yet.³ Transformer stations change the low voltage to high voltage by giving the electrons more push through stronger electric fields, so it can travel long distances through power lines without wasting energy through heat. Then, when it reaches our cities it is again stepped down to low voltages which range between 120V - 240V. Finally, when the electricity reaches your home and you flip a switch,

that energy flows through your bulb and is transformed into light and heat energy. Along the way, energy is never lost, only converted into different forms. This is all the law of conservation of energy at work — nothing created, nothing destroyed, just smart transformations all along the way.

All traditional forms of electricity require insulated wires or cables for smooth transmission, except for the wireless power transfer I previously mentioned. That works differently. The alternating current flows through the coil of wire, it creates a changing magnetic field around it, which in turn induces the current in the nearby coil

through the same principle as the generator we discussed before.⁴ But both coils need to resonate at the same natural frequency to increase the efficiency of transfer. I am sure you might have come across the wireless charging in smartphones, where it gets charged without any cables.

At UBC Okanagan, research clusters are also contributing to advances in power technology. For example, the Energy Systems and Power Electronics Lab⁵ focuses on improving power electronics — a key technology that supports modern energy systems. Meanwhile, the Solar Energy for Net Zero Research Excellence Cluster⁶ is working on affordable materials for large-scale solar production, improving devices that turn sunlight into electricity and fuels, and solving power grid challenges related to solar energy integration.

As science and technology evolve, the way we understand and use electricity continues to become more efficient, innovative, and exciting. From flowing through wires to traveling wirelessly through the air, it keeps redefining what’s possible and reshaping the world. Though electricity has always existed in nature, but what made the difference is humans ability to harness that into more usable forms and turning a natural force into something almost magical. So here I end my article with one of the quotes by master of electricity himself Nikola Tesla:

“Invention is the most important product of man’s creative brain. The ultimate purpose is the complete mastery of mind over the material world, the harnessing of human nature to human needs.”

— Nikola Tesla, My Inventions

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Elcano Royal Institute, 2 Oct. 2025

Community Reflections: Public Art

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

In the town where you grew up, you might remember some kind of public art, whether that be a massive statue, mural, or an installation. These pieces of public art often stand in front of large community buildings and landmarks, tying themselves to whatever town they may be in. But what is the significance of such art in a community, and how does that relate more specifically to the public art you see here in Kelowna?

Both on and off campus, you will see statues dotting major areas of the city. On a little shortcut to the Queensway exchange bay, just in between the Rotary Centre for the Arts and the Kelowna Art Gallery, you can see a handful of different exhibitions: giant concrete fruits with mosaic innards, light projections with animal sounds, piled up car bodies in white paint, and the like.

I will never disavow the funding of art. The public art here represents the city better than any metaphor could, with huge commissioned sculptures standing right next to scratched off stickers and pen graffiti — all of which I would define as public art. Kelowna is a city of dichotomies, with the ultra-rich next to the ultra-poor, tourists next to the oldest of locals, students bus-sing tables for retirees, and the downtown reaching up in the bowl of mountains and nature. As with any seeming opposites, they have more complicated relationships with each other than any outsider looking in could really understand. Artists and art help communities understand each other and bring to light concerns and thoughts

of the public, as well as entertaining and providing them an escape from everyday stressors.

Both commissioned and graffitied public art aim to describe an experience within a community. The perspectives of these experiences are widely different, but that is a huge part of the beauty of all art.

However, when a government funds art, especially public art in a tourist heavy town, there is ample reason to be skeptical. Governments who receive lots of money from tourism want to continue to receive that money. Many people I had met before coming to Kelowna describe it as their favourite place to visit. People I have met that live here often have a much different opinion.

Public artists have a unique opportunity to communicate these differing perspectives to locals and visitors alike, as well as collaborate together to create pieces that represent the thoughts and feelings of the community at large. So why do we seldom see these collaborations on our everyday walks? Well, you do, but for a couple different reasons, these collaborations are not particularly long-lasting.

One night on my walk home from the bus I noticed in passing that someone had spray painted colour onto the grey skin of the concrete peach and apple, a representation of Kelowna’s strong agricultural community. I thought it was a wonderful branch between the worlds of graffiti and

commissioned arts. Later in the week, I found that someone had scrubbed all the paint from the fruits. This attitude seems to reflect the far greater problem governments have with discussions between the previously mentioned ‘opposites’.

Obviously I do not know the whole story — and I will not try to say every piece of graffiti is meaningful — but it seems to me that the two forms of art have been placed so far away from each other that any attempt to cross the two becomes an offense. So where do these other perspectives go? They are created and scrubbed away just as easily, and budding artists with no other canvas are tossed away.

In university, you are barraged with success stories of people who have made it despite the odds, but what happens to those who do not? What happens to the people who try but never seem to figure it out? Everyone knows someone that is struggling in one way or another. When we are so far away from the people that are struggling that we do not even register their experiences and needs, our community falls apart.

When your neighbour just starts looking like a burden, you have removed yourself from your community. The art that we make is a reflection on our subconscious and conscious feelings about the world around us. When governments only fund art that they believe serves the purpose of simply beautifying a community for the sake of tourism, they are not fostering an art community in their city, they are fostering the look of art. This will ultimately cave on itself and leave only the abstractions of Kelowna’s culture: agriculture, work, cars, and dreams of light on pathways to the bus.



Photo by Sabhya Arora, 2025.

Archival Ships on The Sea of Information

BY WENDELL ZYLSTRA

In recent years there has been a substantial rise of digital archival accounts on Instagram. These accounts aim to document certain parts of internet history, one of the more contemporary approaches to archiving the long and sprawling internet. Accounts like ihategum, t.archivist, and feb.20.1995 focus on many different events throughout history. These events often fulfil a general purpose of catering to current internet news, and also being somewhat jarring to look at (somewhere in the vein of clickbait). These archives, though each has a different focus, are all generally tied by the string of uncovering alternative histories.

Though these accounts post some pretty outrageous and bizarre things, the maintenance of an archival gaze — where everything is often posted with the cold detachment of an analyst — is necessary for these accounts. This attitude generates a viewer’s feelings of simply gazing at an art book rather than being forced to form an opinion on everything by a dramatic headline. It’s the kind of experience one might have looking at Andy Warhol photos of naked people in the most famous Canadian gallery — as opposed to if you found those same photos in your friend’s sock drawer. This is the magic of archives.

These views of alternative histories do scratch the very western itch of viewing the ‘bizarre’ — which I believe garners the accounts a large portion of their followings — but can also serve the much greater purpose of documenting largely undocumented histories.

If you are a queer person at all interested in your own history, you may have realized that researching said history is like trying to read the dictionary off a melted piece of swiss cheese — that is to say: spotty, confusing, and a little gross. These modern attempts at digitizing general histories have also



Photo provided by Pexels, 2025.

been used to archive very specific histories, especially those of queer people. Accounts like thearquives, sexchange.tbt, and queer.cinema.archive all attempt to document and digitize the existence of queer people throughout history.

As with anything on the internet, there is so much lost in the sea of information that it still continues to be difficult to know what being queer — through the perspective of a queer person — was really like throughout history. Often what we’re left with is simply that it was painful. This is a very negative reality and doesn’t provide the whole range of experience of individuals throughout history.

Through these archival websites, we are presented with the reality that yes, it has been hard, but regardless, many live their lives full, long, and fulfilled. The individual stories of real people who have lived in their personal lives gives a beautifully varied perspective.

These archive accounts bring to the front those stories by scanning and posting older magazine pages and articles. Archival in this way also provides great bridges between modern and older queer culture, directly communicating with people from those

older populations who had direct experience with the topic of said articles and magazines. Connections like these are wonderful and build stronger bonds between the generations, allowing the often obscured histories to be told straight from the mouth of those who lived through them.

There is this perception that the gap between older and younger generations is inevitable and occurs across all communities and stages. Part of this comes from advancing technology and the general disinterest and inability to learn new forms of technology, mainly the modern methods and forms of social media. However, the gap is one that is easily bridged when genuine interest and accommodation of social ground is had. The relationships between generations become incredibly important especially for historically marginalized people. Knowing where you come from is paramount to knowing where you may go next. It also helps us be aware when political and social tides start changing and what we can do about it.

In the modern queer internet, discourse about the most ridiculous things is constantly force fed to everyone to make both a mockery of queer people to outsiders, and also to distract from the far greater issues many face to this day. Something that always personally helps me when I feel stressed about the future is to look back and realize what I have already done and see how my thoughts have changed throughout the years, but also the things that have stayed the same all throughout.

These archives achieve this goal in spades and provide me with great comfort, even during the slurry of —what may feel like a neverending— political foolishness. Maybe these accounts can do that for you as well.

The Paper that Speaks: The Legacy of The Phoenix

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

Long before the age of online news feeds and social media, campus newspapers provided the first place where students saw their own stories in print. These papers document protests, advocate for change and share important stories that defined their eras. The University of British Columbia Okanagan has had its own student voice for more than three decades: The Phoenix News.

Founded in 1989 at Okanagan College, The Phoenix emerged after earlier Kelowna publications like The Goliard faded. When the college became Okanagan University College (OUC) in 1993, the newspaper adapted, covering the growth of a new university in the B.C. interior. The most dramatic shift came in 2005, when OUC was dissolved and UBC Okanagan opened.

The OUC board itself was not warned of its closure in advance, and the transition left students with fewer services and a rapidly changing campus identity. Through this upheaval, The Phoenix continued publishing, providing continuity in a time of uncertainty.

In its first years after UBCO opened, The Phoenix reflected the realities of a small but growing campus. Its layouts were dense, text-heavy, and advocacy-oriented, sprinkled with grainy photos and black-and-white comic strips. As the campus community expanded, the paper diversified into opinion pieces, arts and culture sections, and student-submitted columns.

By 2009, The Phoenix was capturing big campus changes: the Students’ Union Okanagan’s (UBCSUO) “drop fees” campaign (aimed at mitigating additional costs for students), the installation of two resource centres in the new University Centre, and the closure of the original Well Pub in our Admin building – later reopened in the UNC with much excitement.

Between 2011 and 2012, our news-
I Jones, C. (2014, November 19). UBCO student union removes The Phoenix from campus. Info-

paper captured a blend of serious reporting and lighthearted stories. This included sustainability initiatives like the new geothermal system to heat and cool campus buildings, alongside stories of the first steps toward implementing the U-Pass and food bank support as well as major improvements made to the transit system – specifically the launch of Route 4 linking campus to Pandosy Village.

In a 2012 issue, there’s an entire page dedicated to the “Bieber fever”, a phenomenon that swept through campus and advertisements for a new section of private student residences that we all now know as Academy Hill.

Like most student newspapers, The Phoenix has always operated on a thin budget. That vulnerability became clear in 2014, when the UBCSUO announced plans to remove the paper from its long-time office in the UNC. The union argued that the space was not being used efficiently and that the paper had become a financial burden, running annual deficits that exceeded \$16,000 at one point.¹

The consequences were immediate. The budget fell by nearly one-third, from \$81,000 to \$58,000. Staff positions were cut, pay scales reduced, and the number of print issues dropped from 16 to 14 per year, with shorter page counts and fewer colour pages.¹ Without an office, writers worked out of apartments or coffee shops, making it difficult to coordinate event coverage or recruit new contributors.

This episode revealed the precarious place of student journalism. The Phoenix remained vulnerable to shifting priorities and financial pressures within the SUO.

Despite these difficulties, The Phoenix has been a vital training ground for students. With no journalism program offered at UBC Okanagan, the paper often provides the only space to learn the basics of
tel News. https://infotel.ca/newsitem/ubco-student-union-removes-the-phoenix-from-campus/it12432



Photo by Sabhya Arora, 2025.

reporting, editing, and layout design.

A 2016 feature on women in Canadian campus newsrooms noted that of the 16 staff members at The Phoenix, 11 were women. Coordinating editor Alexandra Barberis described the experience as her first exposure to professional journalism, calling the newspaper “UBCO’s only source of journalism training.” That year was also notable because it marked the first time in nearly a decade that the paper operated without a deficit.²

This pattern reflects a wider trend across Canadian universities. Campus newspapers often give students their first bylines, instill editorial independence, and prepare them for careers in media, even if journalism courses are not available on their campuses.

Over the decades, The Phoenix has reflected the changing priorities of UBC Okanagan’s student body. While print runs of approximately 3000 copies continue, the paper also maintains an online archive and digital distribution. This gradual evolution shows its effort to adapt to new reading habits while preserving the permanence of print. Each era of design and tone reflects not only campus events but also the generational

voice of students at any moment in time.

The struggles and persistence of The Phoenix mirror those of student newspapers across Canada. Rising costs, reduced advertising, and competition for attention have forced many campus facilities to scale back or move entirely online. Some have folded altogether.

The fact that The Phoenix continues to print in 2025 is a testament to its resilience and to the commitment of students who keep it alive, often on volunteer hours, too. At its core, the paper has always been more than budgets or page layouts. It has been a voice for students in Kelowna, offering a unique record of student voices across institutional change. From activism to tuition fee hikes, the paper has truly chronicled the rhythms of the campus community.

Over three decades, The Phoenix has recorded the lives of Okanagan students – from the days of OUC to the halls of UBCO today. It has faced financial crises, lost offices, rebuilt itself, and continued to publish. Even in 2025, the paper continues to speak for students. True to its name, The Phoenix rises again for yet another exciting academic year.

in the campus newsroom. The Navigator: <https://thenav.ca/features/from-bc-to-nb-women-in-the-campus-newsroom/>

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The Class Rule: Lessons from a No-Phones Classroom

BY JUHI SARVAIYA

When I first walked into this class, I thought the rule sounded almost absurd: no phones, no laptops, no devices – at all. For a university that thrives on screens and gadgets, this class felt like stepping into another era. Thirty-five students, notebooks, pencils, and printed readings. No one hiding behind a glowing screen. The class I’m talking about is *Gender and Women Studies 340: Writing the Self in Theory and Practice*, a course that focuses on “life writing” and blending academic seminars with creative writing.

I’ll admit, during the first two weeks, I was restless. My fingers kept reaching for a phone that wasn’t there, my thoughts drifting to unread notifications. Whenever the lecture went over my head, I caught myself missing the ease of distraction - online shopping, texts, the comfort of half-attention.

However, a month later, that discomfort has evolved into something entirely different. It is a sight to see.

Without screens, the environment in class feels pleasantly different. The classroom buzzes with conversation instead of keystrokes, people doodle in the corners of their pages, gaze out the window, flip through their readings, or simply just look up... at each other.

“If you’re on your phone,” says course instructor *Melissa Jacques*, who has been teaching for almost 30 years, “you’re going to miss the conversation.” In a chat with her, I found out that she has kept her classrooms tech-free since long before smartphones became an extra limb. What began as a habit has become, in her words, both a teaching method and a statement about the world we live in.

Jacques describes her courses as seminar-style: spaces for dialogue rather than silent note-taking. “All it takes is one notification to lose someone’s attention,” she says. “Technology becomes a barrier. People use it as protection from being seen or from participating.” I know what she means. In my other classes, the glow of laptops creates small islands of isolation. Someone’s shopping, someone’s answering emails, someone’s half-listening. Here, with only pens and paper, everyone is part of the same present moment. I find that I don’t need to take exhaustive notes because discussions stay with me. When I’m doing my assignments, I’m able to easily recollect themes, voices, and musings because I was actually there for them.

Jacques says she notices the difference, too. “When students first encounter the no-tech rule, there’s resistance,” she admits. “Some spend a lot of time looking at the clock. But once they settle in, something shifts. They start knowing each other in ways they don’t

when technology is available.” She laughs when recalling how easily community forms under those conditions. “When I was a student, I met my friends in classes — I even met someone I dated — because we didn’t have phones. We talked to each other. Now, during breaks, everyone just stares at their screens. In my classes, students recognize one another, learn each other’s names. That’s how a classroom becomes a community.”

This course is designed to explore life writing and autotheory and asks students to write about their own lives while analyzing how identity is constructed through text. It’s an environment that thrives on openness, vulnerability, and trust; conditions that screens can easily flatten.

“Through art and writing, we understand ourselves better,” Jacques tells me. “We often think we know who we are, but we don’t. Technology trains us to curate a version of ourselves for others. It’s much harder to en-

counter your real self when everything you do is mediated through a device.”

Without that mediation, something remarkable happens. I notice classmates tracing the edges of their notebooks, reacting with their whole faces when someone reads aloud, or enjoying the feel of their printed memoir in their hands. Focus is manifested. There’s no tab to click, no feed to refresh, only thought in motion.

Of course, the rule isn’t absolute. Students with Disability Resource Centre accommodations are considered, and Jacques makes that clear. What matters to her is intention: choosing to be present. “You can’t make people be invested,” she says. “But removing technology gives them a better chance to be.”

It’s not an easy adjustment. I was called out once for sneaking a glance at my phone under the desk in week two. I haven’t touched it in class since. In a way, this class exposes what the rest of the campus hides: our dependence on divided attention. Most of UBCO now exists in a half-online, half-offline rhythm: hybrid lectures, Discord study groups, AI tools, Canvas discussions. We live through our digital shadows, fragments of ourselves projected across platforms. In this course, that shadow disappears.

I’ve started to notice how different the world looks when you’re not looking down at your phone – the ideas that surface, the honesty in discussions, the personality that emerges in our writing.

On a campus filled with digital shadows, maybe that’s what it means to truly *write the self*.



Provided by Flickr

Becoming Unforeign to a Foreign Language

BY GABRIELA CHAN

It was almost nine p.m.. My mom, dad, brother and I walked into a local restaurant near our hotel on Jeju Island. We were hungry and tired after having hiked up Seongsan Ilchulbong. A lady sitting at a round grilling table by the door put down her bottle of Soju and called out a name. A second lady in a black apron stepped out from the kitchen. Now it was time for me to put my Korean speaking skills to use.

It was my third time visiting the country as a non-native Korean speaker, my sixth year since self-studying the language, so ordering food was a walk in the park. I was familiar with the hierarchical levels of speech: speak formally by using honorifics with strangers and your elders; dispense honorifics only when the person you are speaking to is the same age as you, or if they give you permission to do so.

This lady in the apron took one look at my family and I. She yelled loftily, “*mwo?*” which was an informal word, no honorifics attached. That word was not a polite “welcome” or “how may I help you?” It meant, “what?”

Maybe it was nothing other than poor customer service, but earlier that day at another restaurant, I had spoken Korean to the owners only to be assigned Mandarin-speaking servers after I code-switched to Cantonese with my family. Not only was my Chinese dialect conflated with another, I was also denied the opportunity to converse with the locals in their own tongue.

I was baffled: why did I not remember this kind of thing happening two years ago when I had travelled here? However, I quickly realised that it probably *had* happened before. I just never noticed because my understanding about the Korean language and its culture was not as acute as it was now.

That is not to brag about my language skills, but to pose a question central to this article:

How does one’s relationship to a foreign culture change in the process of learning that culture’s language?

A language is made up of not only words but also bodily gestures and tone. What is more, the meanings of a word are culturally constructed. Linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure coined the terms “signifier” and “signified”¹ to distinguish the difference between a symbol, such as a word, and its meaning.

For example, since it is a cultural norm in South Korea to speak formally with strangers, especially in customer service, when the lady in the apron spoke the informal word “*mwo*” (“what”), it signified disrespect and meant something along the lines of “I assume you will not understand me, so I can speak however I want to you.” On top of that, her lofty tone and nonchalant stance communicated those ideas even more clearly.

I took a blow from that “*mwo*” and resorted to pretending like I did not know Korean. I ordered our takeout by pointing at the menu and saying in English, “this and this, please,” as a tourist should, then stepped outside to wait in dejected silence. When my mom asked me why I looked upset, it occurred to me that no one else in the family had picked up what I had. Not understanding the language, my family saw no problem in the lady’s attitude towards us. They thought I had switched to English merely because I was tired.

In truth, that dejection came in tandem with six years of written grammar

practices, watching K-dramas and K-reality TV, reading about South Korean culture, and visiting the country. Those six years had pulled me so close to the culture that when we had landed at Jeju International Airport the day before, I felt quite at home, but I was only so close.

Language is a crucial part of most cultures. It enables written and spoken forms of communication, allowing people to document their lived experiences as well as express their ideas with one another. Therefore, a good way to connect with a foreign culture is to acquire their language. However, that is not all it takes. Culture is also formed by collective memory, such as time spent together and shared histories.

At that moment in the restaurant, I shared no collective memory with the local staff and it showed. I looked ethnically dif-



Illustration by Iso Maad Rodriguez

ferent, dressed differently, and spoke a different mother tongue with my family than they did with theirs. While I was decently fluent in their language, I probably used the wrong words here and there, which was easy to spot for a native speaker. Hence, I was not much more than a foreigner to them.

Learning Korean allowed me to form connections with certain parts of the culture. I could resonate with song lyrics by my favorite K-Indie band, JANNABI; follow a recipe for Kimchi Jjigae and make myself a pot of authentic-tasting Kimchi stew; enter a pharmacy in Jeju and ask for a pack of cough drops — yet my positionality remained starkly different from that of a native speaker.

The recurrence of locals in Jeju speaking Mandarin or English to me despite my efforts to converse in Korean also made me realise that perhaps in recognising that I was a tourist, the locals had wanted to practice their foreign language skills, just like I did.

We got caught in this back-and-forth of opposing positionalities, trying to engage with one another’s cultures but not quite landing on the same page.

There appears to be an inherent gap between locals and foreigners even when speaking the same language. This gap is worth our attention, because what if you are not a tourist in South Korea but an in-

ternational student in Canada? Compared to visiting a country for tourism, forming kinship in a foreign culture becomes much more important when studying abroad.

If you are among the 20% international students at UBC Okanagan,² you were most likely required to submit some proof of English proficiency in your university application. Universities want to ensure that students are capable of completing their academic degree using English, which is usually not the primary language of instruction in an international student’s home country.

At the same time, most 20% of you know that getting a 6.5 or above in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is just the first step to feeling included in Canada. Inclusion and kinship in a culture are not guaranteed by language

proficiency. An international student who aces their IELTS can still take the bus for the first time in Canada and not know that it is proper etiquette to say “thank you” when getting off. That is, you can know the words yet be unfamiliar with when and where to use it.

Last week, I spoke with a third-year Bachelor of Fine Arts student at UBC Okanagan. Originally from Nepal and having lived in Canada for four years, she reflects on how the language barrier has influenced her sense of belonging. Since Nepalese is her first language and English her second, studying in English has often been challenging for her:

“I find it difficult to fully express my ideas in assignments, class critiques and exams, or join conversations with local students. It sometimes makes me feel a little left out.”

Considering this student’s perspective, not only does a language barrier limit one’s academic potential, but it also makes friendship or deep conversations with locals less accessible.

Within language, there exists subcategories such as academic jargon and slang. Surely, even students from Canada can relate to reading an academic paper for the first time in their lives and feeling like they cannot understand the English language. Now take that feeling and double it:

that is how a first-year international student might feel.

Navigating the English language as an international student means having to dissect theoretical terms like “cognitive dissonance” in a psychology class, then feeling equally confused when a classmate ends the group discussion with “slay!” Someone new to North American culture would not know how to respond let alone emanate the sassy, confident tone that must accompany the term “slay.”

Language is exclusive — even English, the primary language of at least 46 countries³ in the world. For instance, in Canada, you can ask someone, “Wanna go to Timmies?” and “Timmies” would easily be understood as the local coffee chain, Tim Horton’s, but if you ask the same question in Australia, the response might be, “Who is Timmy and why would I want to go to their place?” This goes to show that language is extremely specific and tied to place.

Culture-specific terms become intimidating and isolating for a newcomer. Moving to a foreign country is scary enough, realizing that your grammar textbooks did not teach you the load of jargon and slang that pervades this foreign language is even scarier. So how does one overcome this multilayered language barrier?

There are a couple of solutions. First, UBC Okanagan offers an English Foundation Program that helps students develop their English language skills, critical thinking ability, general knowledge, learning strategies, and intercultural competence.⁴ This includes English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses as well as labs and tutorials for added support.

Secondly, the Nepalese student whom I spoke with finds that Youtube videos, music, podcasts, and movies are fun ways to improve her understanding of English in the context of popular culture. She adds that “these things have helped me feel connected to a new culture.”

Finally, the simplest and best advice: do not give up. Returning to this article’s central question, “How does one’s relationship to a foreign culture change in the process of learning that culture’s language?” The truth is, during most of that process, you are going to feel like an outsider. Even after learning Korean for six years, I felt more excluded than included while travelling in Jeju Island, and it remains challenging for the international student from Nepal to find her voice in an English-speaking environment. However, there have also been experiences that encouraged her to continue honing her English language skills:

“The first time I felt rewarded [for learning English] was when I answered my teacher confidently in a class discussion. I was happy that they understood me, and this gave me confidence in my communication skills. Moments like these make me feel heard and respected, and they remind me that my hard work is paying off. This encourages me to keep improving.”

While learning a language may not necessarily give you a sense of belonging to a new culture, you reap many benefits in the process, including better confidence, communication skills, and most significantly, a broadened perspective. We live in a world of diverse cultures; learning languages helps us listen, understand, and converse with one another. It makes parts of the world that seemed once foreign not so foreign anymore.

¹ Chandler, Daniel. (2019, July 31). *Semiotics for Beginners*. Princeton University. <https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~chazelle/courses/BIB/semio2.htm>

² UBC Okanagan. (2025). *Facts and Figures*. <https://ok.ubc.ca/about/facts-and-figures/>

³ World Population Review. (n.d.) English Speaking Countries 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/english-speaking-countries>

⁴ UBC Okanagan. (n.d.) English Foundation Program. <https://education.ok.ubc.ca/degrees-programs/english-foundation-program/>