

Thursday, January 30, 2025

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COLUMN:
Megachurches prioritize celebrity, profit over the Gospel.



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BASKETBALL:
Aliyah Matharu finds success, community with Baylor WBB.



A&L | A5

FURRY FRIENDS:
Foster a dog for the day through Pet Circle Waco, a no-kill animal shelter.

In case you missed it...

Celebrity chef rings in lunar new year on campus

Penland Dining Hall held its annual Lunar New Year celebration on Tuesday, one day ahead of the holiday. Students were given the opportunity to have a traditional red envelope embroidered by local artist Jamie Wong Baesa, watch dance performances from the Baylor Lion Dance Team and Indonesian Culture Center, and try some of Food Network celebrity Chef Jet Tila's cooking.



Men's tennis topples SMU, 4-2 on road

Baylor men's tennis bounced back from a two-game losing streak, notching its 26th consecutive win over SMU, 4-2, Sunday at the Styslinger/Altec Tennis Complex in Dallas.

The Bears (3-2) secured their first road win of the season over the Mustangs (4-1) after a pair of top-5 losses to No. 4 Wake Forest and No. 2 TCU over the weekend. The green and gold lost the doubles point in each of those matches, but came out swinging on Sunday.



Film's biggest night: Oscars predictions

As the 97th Academy Awards approaches, the eagerly anticipated ceremony on March 2 will bring monumental shifts in film. From "Anora" to "The Brutalist," this year's lineup will surely be the first of many changes within movie creation.

While Timothée Chalamet is making waves for his eclectic press run on his film "A Complete Unknown," "The Brutalist" is also making headlines for the controversial use of AI in the film.

Whether you disagree with the headlines or not, here is a list of predictions for the top five categories.



Bird flu could make prices, illness soar

COLE GEE
Staff Writer

The bird flu, or H5N1, a pathogen known to affect mammals, birds and — in rare cases — humans, has been slowly chipping away at America's poultry industry since the strain was detected in the country around 2022 in wild birds. While the virus is small in its damage and effects, failure to contain it quickly could lead to another pandemic, according to some experts.

Dr. Pedro Piedra is a professor at

Baylor College of Medicine and studies respiratory viruses. According to Piedra, the country has slowly begun to "put a lid" on the virus's spread, but recent mutations may make it a more challenging ordeal.

"I want to say that we've been lucky so far in the sense that we have not seen true human-to-human spread," Piedra said. "But then that becomes very worrisome because that means it can readily spread within an environment that is full of susceptible individuals."

Moderna recently received \$590

million to help develop vaccines to fight the virus. Their protein-based vaccines have had great success against other pathogens such as COVID-19, and having them in great supply could help quell any future pandemic.

"Antivirals become very important as well, and we saw that the lack of antivirals early on with SARS-CoV-2 proved to be tragic because many, many people died," Piedra said. "And so we do have antivirals against the current H5N1. We need to make sure that we have adequate supply

should we need it."

While it's still slowly being contained, the aftereffects of the virus are being felt everywhere, especially in American kitchens. Eggs for many Americans are a staple in their household diet, and thanks to recent bird flu outbreaks, it's highly likely to see a large rise in price across the country.

According to the Associated Press, "More than 145 million chickens,

FEELING SICK? >> A8

Trump's trusty Texans

Three cabinet positions could be filled by the Lone Star State's own.

EMMA WEIDMANN
Editor-in-Chief

As the second Trump administration comes out of a first-week frenzy of executive orders and a fair share of controversy, the president's cabinet picks face Senate confirmation.

Three of the positions in the cabinet could be filled by Texans — one has secured confirmation, and two others await a decision. With these picks, Texas joins New York and Florida as the states with the most members tapped for the new cabinet.

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

Brooke Rollins of Glen Rose, former deputy general counsel and policy director to former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, is President Trump's pick for secretary of agriculture.

She graduated from Texas A&M University in 1994 with a degree in agricultural development, then earned a law degree from the University of Texas at Austin. She served as domestic policy chief during the first Trump administration, which included agriculture policy, though that was not the primary focus of the role.

In 2021, Rollins founded the America First Policy Institute.



Associated Press

TEXANS GO TO WASHINGTON Brooke Rollins, Scott Turner (left) and John Ratcliffe (right) are three Texans tapped to occupy positions in the Trump cabinet.

The institute's 10-pillar agenda includes support for American manufacturing, improvements to the healthcare system through opposition of the Affordable Care Act, rejection of cancel culture and "Big Tech," more restrictive abortion policies and more. In her dozens of Op-eds on the institute's website, none focus primarily on agriculture.

Rollins is a skeptic of climate change, having asserted that CO2 is not a pollutant and advocating for Trump's withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement, one of his day-one executive orders.

She laid out four top priorities during her Senate confirmation hearing:

distribute the \$10 billion in economic aid for farmers approved last month, stop the spread of animal diseases like bird flu, "realign" and "rethink" the USDA and promote the long-term success of American farmers through trade.

CIA DIRECTOR

John Ratcliffe, former director of national intelligence under the first Trump administration, is now director of the CIA.

Ratcliffe had been a prosecutor and the mayor of

SOUTHERN SECRETARIES >> A8

Student loans safe from freeze

COLE GEE
Staff Writer

The White House administration released a sweeping memo Monday that sought to put a "freeze" on federal loans, grants and aid. In a statement from the United States Office of Management and Budget, they say the motivation behind the freeze is to root out policies that are contrary to the new administration's broader agenda.

"The use of Federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve," the memo reads.

U.S. District Judge Loren L. AliKhan blocked the freeze before it went into effect Tuesday night, and the administration now faces lawsuits from 22 Democratic attorneys general across the country.

Research grants and student loans were the focal point of the controversy, as many rely on FAFSA to attend college. Universities relying on federal grants for payroll and research endeavors feared the worst. However, recent clarifications state that federal student loans and Medicaid aren't expected to be affected.

Lori Fogleman, a

spokesperson for the university, provided an email statement from Dr. Kevin Chambliss, vice provost of research at Baylor.

The email said Baylor is working to "obtain more definitive information" regarding the freeze through its governmental relations team and the American Council of Education, of which President Linda Livingstone is a member.

"As for now, many details remain unclear," the email stated. "We acknowledge that such news is extremely disrupting not only for Baylor, but also for researchers across the country...We pledge to strongly advocate for the continuation of research and scholarship supported by the federal government as quickly as possible."

As of Wednesday, the initial memo from the OMB has been rescinded, but White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the administration is still seeking out a freeze.

"This is not a recession of the federal funding freeze. It is simply a recession of the OMB memo," Leavitt said. "Why? To end any confusion created by the court's injunction. The President's [executive orders] on federal funding remain in full force and effect, and will be rigorously implemented."

Vehicle inspection business offers free checkups

BLAKE HOLLINGSWORTH
Staff Writer

As of Jan. 1, Texas' mandatory car inspection requirement is a thing of the past, according to the Department of Public Safety. Gov. Greg Abbott signed House Bill 3297 into law in 2023, abolishing the Vehicle Safety Inspection Program for non-commercial vehicles.

While many automotive diagnostic businesses have responded by doing away with the service altogether, Chris Hilliard, owner of Fresh Start Center, formerly Just Stickers, took a different approach by continuing to offer inspections — for free.

"There's a lot of other inspection places in McLennan County that have walked away

from doing the safety check," Hilliard said. "We, on the other hand, decided that we were not going to leave the community at bay like that."

Hilliard's decision is deeply rooted in the values instilled by his father, who founded Just Stickers 33 years ago.

"Regardless of what [Texas legislators] do, his idea was safety first, and I've continued the process of doing inspections for free because the state has done away with the paperwork for having them done," Hilliard said.

Texas previously required a \$7.50 vehicle inspection fee, but Hilliard waived it to encourage drivers to prioritize safety.

"It's about more than dollars and cents," Hilliard said. "It's about making sure people feel safe driving their cars."

Furthermore, Hilliard said that many drivers won't bother getting their vehicles inspected now that it's optional, leaving them unaware of potential dangers.

"Most people just get in their car and drive off without thinking about safety," Hilliard said. "We're here to make sure that things like brakes, tires and lights are functioning properly. It's not just for their safety but for everyone else on the road."

By offering free inspections, Hilliard said he aims to help those vulnerable to underlying vehicle issues, including Baylor students who come from out of state.

"A lot of the Baylor students are not from Waco, and we do those inspections



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

SAFETY OVER SALES Office manager Rosa Moore checks the treads on a tire during a free routine inspection.

DRIVE SAFE >> A8

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

We want to hear it. Send us your thoughts: Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu

Megachurches are failing to teach Gospel

MARY THURMOND
Photo Editor

Many of us grew up in a church, whether it be Baptist, Methodist, Catholic or nondenominational. But when you think of the modern church, what comes to mind? For many, it's not cute little chapels in the countryside, but huge establishments with coffee shops, bookstores, concert-like worship services and sermons broadcasted to thousands every Sunday.

These megachurches, with members often numbering in the tens of thousands, have become a defining feature of modern Christianity. But honestly, are they truly embodying the Gospel, or have they drifted from Christ's teachings in pursuit of money and success?

Megachurches often operate like corporations, with multimillion-dollar budgets, marketing strategies and religious leaders treated like CEOs. They focus on attendance numbers, donation totals and social media reach. While there's nothing inherently wrong with a church growing, Scripture warns against prioritizing wealth and influence.

Matthew 6:24 states, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." When the church begins to mirror a business rather than the body of Christ, we risk shifting our focus from the eternal to the material.

Another trend is the rise of celebrity pastors, whose influence extends far beyond their congregations. These leaders often amass enormous wealth, living in mansions and driving luxury cars, all while preaching about the humility and sacrifice of Christ.

Paul the Apostle says in Philippians 2:3-4 to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

Joel Osteen, the pastor of Lakewood Church, owns a \$10.5 million mansion with six bedrooms, three elevators, a guest house and outdoor pool. Acts 20:35 reminds us, "It is

more blessed to give than to receive." Instead of using their resources to help the less fortunate, they spend exorbitant amounts on luxury items. This creates a troubling image that can alienate believers and non-believers alike. Can pastors with extravagant lifestyles truly model Christ-like humility?

Placing so much emphasis on one individual risks turning the congregation's focus from a perfect God to a flawed human. When these pastors inevitably falter, whether it be through scandals, moral failure or burnout, entire communities are left spiritually alone and confused. Jeremiah 17:5 cautions, "Cursed



Megachurches often pour resources into maintaining their massive property and producing professional-grade media, leaving less for local outreach and missions. Yet James 1:27 reminds us, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

How often do megachurches, with their wealth and influence, invest in the marginalized, the poor and the oppressed? Are they fulfilling their biblical mandate to serve their communities, or are they too busy building their brands?

It's not too late for the church to course correct. Megachurches have the potential to do so much good, but only if they prioritize the Gospel over growth, humility over fame and service over spectacle. This means holding leaders accountable, ensuring transparency in financial practices and refocusing on the spiritual nourishment of their congregations. Above all, it means looking to Christ's example: a life marked by humility, sacrifice and unrelenting love for the least of these.

One potential solution is for megachurches to redirect their overwhelming amount of resources toward local and global missions. Instead of funding extravagant facilities and lavish lifestyles, they could invest in community programs, shelters for the homeless, food banks and educational initiatives. Churches could also adopt a model of decentralized leadership, where no single pastor becomes the face of the congregation. This would not only reduce the risk of idolizing individuals, but also encourage a more collaborative and humble approach to ministry. Ultimately, the church's goal should be to embody Christ's teachings in both word and deed, making a tangible impact on the world around them.

As Christians, we must ask ourselves: are we drawn to these churches because they bring us closer to God, or because they make us feel good? Are we following Jesus or following the crowd?

It's not too late for the church to course correct. Megachurches have the potential to do so much good, but only if they prioritize the Gospel over growth, humility over fame and service over spectacle.

is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord."

Megachurches are often criticized for watering down their teachings to appeal to broader audiences. Sermons become more about self-help and inspiration than repentance and discipleship. Worship services resemble concerts, with fancy lighting and sound systems designed to evoke emotional responses rather than true spiritual encounters.

While attracting newcomers is important, we must remember that Christianity isn't about comfort or entertainment. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Are we truly equipping believers to carry their crosses, or are we offering feel-good messages that demand little sacrifice?

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Political extremism is out; it's OK to disagree

MACKENZIE GRIZZARD
Staff Writer



American politics are messy. It's almost a self-fulfilling prophecy when you combine that much money, power and influence. But now, Americans are looking down the barrel of a completely different monster, and it's not liberal versus conservative — it's much more extreme than that.

We're living in a world where a figure involved with the new administration does a Nazi salute at the presidential inauguration, books about government censorship are being banned by the government and cities are destroyed during "peaceful" protests. We've seen this unfold before. Make no mistake, political extremism is alive and well, feeding off strategically placed propaganda running rampant through our media.

Although there are several political parties in America other than Democrat and Republican, the resilience of the two-party system and the general failure of minor parties like the Libertarian and the Green Party simply rests in the voter base.

Britannica says the definition of centrism is a "political ideology that advocates for a balanced approach to maximize electoral support."

While I agree that political centrism is primarily used to garner electoral support from a voter base that's not 100% sold on a particular ideology, the most dangerous misconception about centrism is that it is a "happy medium" between the right and the left.

Centrism completely rejects the extreme ideas presented by the right and the left.

On the right, fascism, neo-Nazi movements and white supremacy are the ideologies classified as "extreme," according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. In recent years, the CSIS reports that far-right wing extremist attacks have more than quadrupled from the 2010s, reaching the peak with the infamous Jan. 6 insurrection on the Capitol.

You can believe in whatever you want to. I'm not here to tell you any different. But if you pull back the political party label and look at the facts, an armed mob storming the Capitol building should ring alarm bells.

Even though it might come across as such, this column isn't an attack on the Republicans of America. The intolerance the left has for the right and vice-versa is concerning and frankly unproductive. The beautiful part of America is that we can believe, worship and live how we want. However, I don't extend that same courtesy to extremism.

Democrat versus Republican is fine. Fascism versus Socialism, etc. is not. When it's at a point where we cannot agree on a single issue and resort to violence to prove a point, it's time to re-evaluate what we believe is right.

Far-left ideologies are just as concerning as far-right ones are. When I see on social media that people my age and younger are promoting socialist and communist ideologies for America's government, I sincerely wonder if propaganda awareness is still being taught in schools.

The millions that have died under communist, socialist, fascist and Nazi regimes would be horrified to learn that those ideologies are being practiced — and worse — promoted. As someone whose family immigrated to America to escape the persecution of those ideologies, it doesn't matter if those ideas are packaged with a bow to make it more palatable; we should be increasingly weary that the roots of extremism are dragging down our country.

As a collective, we're rightfully concerned with threats from other nations. From Middle Eastern terrorist groups, Russian nuclear stockpiles and TikTok, we've done a lot to protect America from dangerous outside influences. But if we continue to ignore the ticking ideological time bomb from within our walls, we are going to be a much more vulnerable and divided nation.

The National Institute of Justice 2024 Domestic Terrorism Report details the concerning nature of extremism within our country, highlighting the number of far-right extremist attacks that have outpaced the far-left and even radical Islamic extremists for ideologically-motivated homicides since the 1990s. In this same period, far-left extremists have also committed an alarming number of ideologically-motivated attacks.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security labeled domestic violent extremists as an "acute threat" in the NIJ's report and highlighted "long-standing ideological grievances" as how these attacks are justified in the minds of extremists.

Our ideological disputes run deeper than a simple "agree to disagree." We are so polarized in both directions that our inability to compromise is being used as justification for domestic terrorism.

It's OK to meet in the middle sometimes. Democrats, you don't have to believe everything your Republican counterpart says, and conservatives don't need to be altering their values to fit a liberal viewpoint. You don't have to be best friends, you don't even have to like each other most of the time.

But you have to understand what lurks in the corners of our ideological spectrum. Fear-mongering aside, as we stray further from political centrism, we start looking eerily similar to the governments we've fought to overturn.

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Opinion

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Lariat Letters

To submit a Lariat Letter, email Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu. Letters should be a maximum of 300 words. The letter is not guaranteed to be published.

LUNAR NEW YEAR



TRADITIONS The Betawi Traditional Dance group performs a traditional "Ondel-Ondel" at Penland Dining Hall to celebrate Lunar New Year.

Maggie Meegan | Photographer



SIC 'EM Chef Jet Tila took many meet and greet opportunities with Baylor students in attendance.

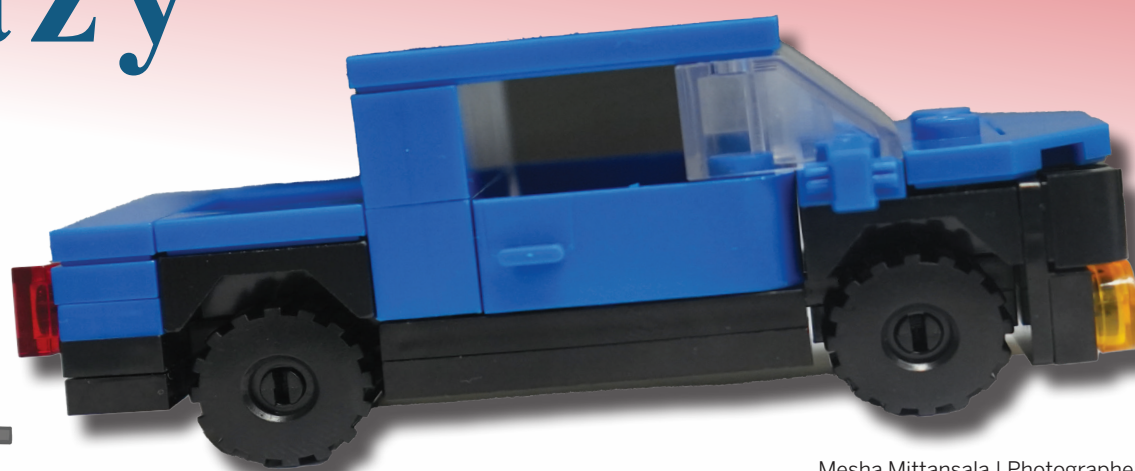
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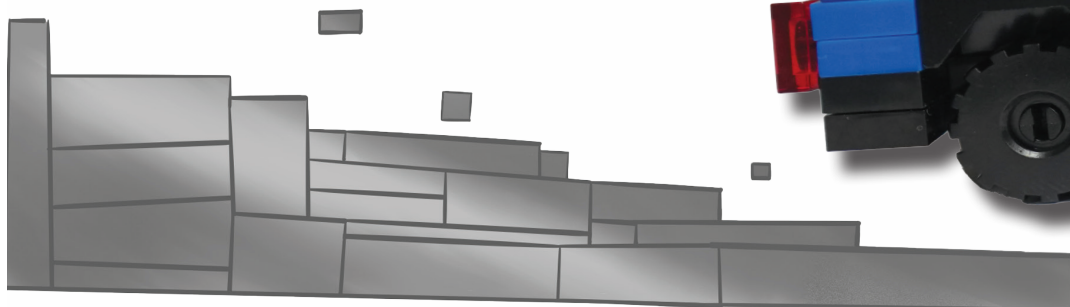
STAR CHEF Celebrity Chef Jet Tila cooks cultural dishes to celebrate Lunar New Year.

Maggie Meegan | Photographer

Lego Crazy



Mesha Mittansala | Photographer



BUILD IT UP Students embrace their creativity in the Union Board's "Lego Crazy" event at the Bill Daniel Student Center.

Mesha Mittansala | Photographer



EVERYTHING IS AWESOME Students take a break from studying to build legos as a team.

Mesha Mittansala | Photographer

Find a furry friend at Pet Circle Waco

SHANE MEAD
Staff Writer

If you pull into the parking lot of Pet Circle, a no-kill shelter just off the La Salle roundabout, you'll see a capacity sign with an arrow pointing toward 100%.

To be exact, Pet Circle's dog capacity is at 94%, and they're currently taking in more dogs than are being adopted, with 59 intakes in the last seven days compared to just 41 adoptions in that same time period.

"We've been at almost full capacity since we transitioned from the Humane Society to City of Waco," said Samuel Lamkin, Pet Circle's outreach specialist. "It's just been nonstop dogs coming in and low adoption rates."

A recent sponsored adoption event courtesy of Graceland Real Estate helped alleviate the overloaded capacity, generating 13 adoptions in just two days, Lamkin said. But even then, the intake rate remains unsustainably high and the idea of Baylor students helping out is something Lamkin says could be crucial to their efforts at Pet Circle.

"We would absolutely love that," Lamkin said. "We've actually been discussing how we can dip our toes into the Baylor bubble."

Lamkin explained that it's understandably tough to expect students to adopt, considering the time and financial obligations it would require. But things like "Bark Breaks" or "Sleepover Rovers" that he says are common of Baylor students also provide lots of help.

Bark Breaks are a service where people can take one of Pet Circle's dogs and spend a day together before returning the pup in the evening.

"It helps with getting the dog socialized and gives them a way to stimulate their mind without them having to be in here all day," Lamkin said.

Sleepover Rovers act as an extension to Bark Breaks and typically happen when someone is more seriously considering adopting a dog. This allows an interested owner and dog to spend time in a house setting and get a better understanding of how the dog responds to the new environment.

"We love seeing animals go out and have fun, just away from all the shelter life," Lamkin said. "As many dogs as we can get out for whatever amount of time it is, whether it's a couple hours or a couple days or forever."

San Jose, Calif. junior Ananya Bommareddy recently gave a cat she found via Pet Circle her forever home after finding her profile on Pet Circle and getting her from a foster family.

"I think it's a great opportunity," Bommareddy said. "I think if students want to adopt or get any animal that they should get them from a rescue center or adoption place."

She said fostering was also a great idea since it would be



Camie Jobe | Photographer

PUPPY LOVE Adopting and fostering aren't the only ways students can help alleviate overflowing shelters. They can choose instead to bring these pups home for a week or even just a day to spend time with the animals and see if the pet parent life is right for them.

temporary, making it more convenient for students who travel back and forth between their hometown and Waco before every break.

Since fostered animals are being cared for outside of Pet Circle, this would open up extra kennels, proving crucial for an adoption center that's close to full capacity, she said.

"If [students] need to go home for breaks or they graduate, they don't have to have the responsibility of taking it home with them," Bommareddy said. "It's a great temporary way to have a

pet. I think it's super important."

Now that Pet Circle is associated with the City of Waco, Lamkin said it's been common for people to mistake them for the Humane Society.

"We're lacking the audience after the transition, and we're starting to build it back up," he said. "Even if you're not able to foster or adopt, sharing our social media posts and signing up for our newsletter and forwarding it to people who are interested in fostering or adopting would be greatly appreciated."

The best is yet to come 'Balloonerism' marks Mac's finale



Photo courtesy of Spotify

KASSIDY TSIKITAS
Photo Editor

The long-awaited "Balloonerism," along with a corresponding short film, dropped on Jan. 27, marking this as Mac Miller's seventh and possibly final album. The album is composed of recordings done by the late artist in 2013 and 2014. "Balloonerism" explores the tragedy of human expectations of reality and the battle of facing your past, present and future. Here are some of my favorite songs from the album, analyzed.

"DJ'S CHORD ORGAN (FEAT. SZA)"

SZA's feature on this album is reminiscent of her earlier work, like her EP, "Z," and how far she has come in her music career. SZA has mentioned Mac being the first person she met while moving to Los Angeles and this album showcases some of her vocals. The song incorporated an actual chord organ from Daniel Johnston which was acquired by Miller in 2013. The lofi beat distracted me from the fact that the song is about someone getting high and getting

sucked into the pressures of addiction. "I know you miss your lifetime" feels haunting, alluding to the nature of Mac's lifestyle in this time period.

"FRIENDLY HALLUCINATIONS"

This track introduces us to a world of growing up and using drugs as a way to get away from the realness, inviting us into a period of escapism and self-reflection. "And if love is just a fantasy, then what's the problem if you fall in love with fantasy?" highlights the human desire to find a deeper meaning in everything, as well as the tragedy of us not accepting life as is. This song is an utter reflection of the battle between the mind and reality. The song, much like his other work around this time, is Miller unraveling his thought processes.

"EXCELSIOR"

"Excelsior" is a Latin word that means "higher," a meaning which suggests trying to grasp the need for more life. The song talks about children growing up too fast and not letting go of their inner child. Mac has a theme in his work to incorporate a child's point of view where he struggles

to transition into adulthood — how he stays true to himself.

"RICK'S PIANO"

This song was definitely in my top three most-played on this album. This track serves as a tranquil mindset for Mac and sets the tone for a possible new beginning. The figure of "Rick" creates a sense of peace and sadness and that not everything is fixed in your life. Emotions will overcome you, but there is peace in knowing you'll be okay. "The best is yet to come" follows up about thoughts of death and paints the scene of spiraling emotions on what comes next in life. Maybe death is the sweet release from a harsh reality.

"TOMORROW WILL NEVER KNOW"

Depression and self-doubt are heavily displayed throughout this 11 minutes and 54 seconds filled with the overthinking of life, death and the fear of past, present and future.

"The lake's frozen over, look down at yourself / What's starin' back doesn't please you."

I feel like a lot of people can relate to this line because we truly don't know where we will end up. What is all the hard work for? Paying homage to The Beatles' song "Tomorrow Never Knows," aimed at a light-hearted feel to get out of the trenches, Miller created the opposite effect and validates the "in limbo" feeling.

"Balloonerism" still carries the same feel as Mac's other albums but is different in the sense that it probably won't be liked by your average Joe. Instead, you might relate more if you are going through some of the experiences that are highlighted in the songs. This album was leaked a few years ago, but I am glad I listened to it once officially released.

This album is a great finale of the late Mac Miller's work. His experimental sounds and vulnerability within his lyrics create a safe place. Miller's innovative taste and drive to create something different gives me hope for the future of music. After listening to the same three albums for the past six months, I'm happy to say I have a fourth one in the rotation.



Mesha Mittanasala | Photographer

Get global: Which study abroad program fits you?

BELLA WHITMORE
Intern

Have you ever considered studying abroad through Baylor but never quite knew where to start? With the vast international opportunities offered at Baylor, it can be overwhelming to choose a program that best suits you. The study abroad information sessions are commencing soon this semester, so you'll want to get a feel for where you might want to go. Here are some interest-based recommendations.

FOR THE BUSINESS SAVVY

What better place to take business courses than one of the biggest business hubs in the world? With your primary residence being in London's prestigious Imperial College for Baylor in Great Britain, you'll be fully immersed in the fast-paced and vibrant Square Mile. It can be incredibly beneficial to be fully surrounded and influenced by all the major businesses and companies that a city like London has to offer. English being the official language of the country can also aid with comprehension and familiarity. This is a month-long summer program that spans from July to August.

FOR THE SPANISH STUDIERS

Being in Central Texas, Spanish is one of the most popular minors for students at Baylor. Studying and mastering it abroad can be beneficial in all professional sectors. Seville, the fourth largest city in Spain, boasts the rich and colorful Spanish culture without being too overwhelming and hectic like Barcelona and Madrid. Studying in Seville offers a wide spectrum of course options that range from communications to exercise classes, all backdropped by immersion into the Spanish language and culture.

FOR THE MED SCHOOL HOPEFULS

It's widely known that the pre-health track can be one of the most rigorous and labor intensive academic routes to take. So why not ease your troubles by taking your challenging classes in a beautiful city surrounded by expansive green hills and historic castles? It

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Photo Courtesy of Baylor Athletics

BONAFIDE BALLER Florida mid-year graduate transfer Aliyah Matharu is averaging 6.4 points on 13.5 minutes per game across eight appearances with the Bears. Matharu has scored in double figures three times as her role increases with the green and gold. The guard has averaged 11.7 points per game across her five year collegiate career at four schools.

Mid-year transfer Matharu settles in with BU

KALENA REYNOLDS
Staff Writer

When graduate guard Aliyah Matharu joined Baylor women's basketball as a mid-year transfer in the fall, she not only accomplished a long-time goal of joining the Bears but also settled in with her team and the community, leaving her with a feeling of unity.

"They've always been a top program, especially in women's basketball," Matharu said. "So ultimately, when I entered the portal, I kind of already knew where I wanted to go. Which is crazy, but I actually watched a lot of Baylor women's basketball last year."

Matharu was first drawn to Baylor for the style of play and ability to defend every position from guard to center. As the 2023-24 leading scorer in the SEC, Matharu was able to take her knowledge from previous years and apply it to the quick-paced environment within the green and gold.

"I love the style of play, the offense, ball screen... playing with good post players and just the versatility that we have even before I got

here," Matharu said. "Everyone is so versatile. You could switch one through five, one through four. It doesn't matter. Everybody can play multiple positions."

When Matharu began the transfer process, she recalled the honesty that head coach Nicki Colleen had with her on and off the court, and how that ultimately helped her mesh into the team and continue to gain momentum on game days.

"She was very honest with me, and that's ultimately what brought me here," Matharu said.

On the track of honesty, Matharu mentioned that she was nervous to make such a big move from Florida with the season quickly approaching. However, Matharu found she fell into place with the other girls on the team quicker than expected.

"I was very shy and very nervous about going somewhere new at such an awkward time," Matharu said. "But, you know, just playing for the person next to you, I built the bond with these girls in such a short time that I just want to go out there and do the best that I can for them, for our team, in any way possible."

To join the team dynamic as quickly as possible, Matharu immediately began reviewing film and studying the Bears' gameplay and unique style.

"I did my part; I watched film; I studied the game and tried to come in with as much knowledge as I could," Matharu said. "And they were able to just feed into me a little bit more with that because, obviously, learning a whole new offense in the middle of the season can be tough for anyone. But like I said, it's about the people; these are amazing people to be around, and every day is a testament to that."

Colleen said that in practice, they have focused on imitating gameplay activities

and ensuring that Matharu is confident in her abilities as well as trusting her teammates' skills.

"Her greatest challenge right now is really raising the level of what she's doing in practice, so that what I think is going to happen in the game is what happens," Colleen said. "I don't fear that she's going to confidently take an open shot. But I want to know that she's going to play downhill and make the right read. That she's going to be in the right spot at the defensive end, that she can amp up and guard the ball really aggressively without fouling."

After college, Matharu hopes to go pro with a selection in the WNBA Draft but first wants to ensure that she is able to make an impact on the team and leave her mark on the girls she gets to play with.

"My goal is moving forward, obviously, I want to get drafted," Matharu said.

"That's always been my number one plan, and I just try to influence the people younger than me because I've been to a lot of different places, so I have a lot of good knowledge that I've been able to soak up, and my biggest thing has always been just trying to pour into others."

The Bears will be back in action against Cincinnati at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Foster Pavilion.



Alyiah Matharu (9)
Photo Courtesy of Baylor Athletics



Camie Jobe | Photographer

CATCHING FIRE Freshman VJ Edgcombe joined Keyonte George as the only two Baylor freshmen to score more than 20 points in three straight games in the last 20 years. Edgcombe is averaging 26.3 points on 54.3% from the field during the stretch.

Catchings fire: BYU topples Baylor MBB in overtime thriller, 93-89

JACKSON POSEY
Sports Writer

When Danny Ainge took his seat at the J. Willard Marriott Center Tuesday night, he knew to expect fireworks.

Ainge, the Utah Jazz's CEO of basketball operations, was scouting a pair of potential top-5 picks in Provo: playmaking BYU guard Egor Demin and slashing Baylor wing VJ Edgcombe. He got them -- and a whole lot more -- in an overtime thriller, as fellow freshmen Robert O. Wright III (Baylor) and Kanon Catchings (BYU) put on a show in the Cougars' 93-89 overtime victory.

Catchings, the nephew of WNBA legend Tamika Catchings, was blazing hot from beyond the arc. The 6-foot-9 freshman forward scored a career-high 23 points on 8-of-8 shooting, becoming the first Division I player this season to score 20-plus points on 100% shooting. A waning crescent hovered overhead, but the basket loomed as large as a full moon: both teams shot at least 50% from the field and 38% from three.

After missing five of their first six shots, the Cougars (14-6, 5-4 Big 12) proceeded to hit 10 of their next 13.

The Bears (13-7, 5-4 Big 12) trailed by as many as 13 in the first half but managed to cut the deficit in half behind

strong performances from Edgcombe and junior center Josh Ojaniwuna. Freshman guard Robert Wright, the only Baylor player with a positive first-half plus-minus, hit a last-second isolation layup to drop BYU's lead to eight, 44-36.

Fifth-year big man Norchad Omier scored on Baylor's first two offensive possessions in the second half — then tossed a lazy inbound pass that set up Demin for a streak-breaking 3-pointer. Demin, who finished with 15 points and six assists, overcame a continued cold streak from beyond the arc with his signature brand of creative playmaking.

Between highlight plays, Edgcombe continued his hot streak, scoring 28 points (a career-high for a road game) and a career-high six made 3-pointers. With nearly three dozen NBA scouts in attendance, he showcased several skills — left-handed finishing, contested 3-point shooting, playmaking as a primary initiator — which had been questions coming into this season. Before long, it was a two-point game; 90 seconds after that, Catchings pulled up from long range to hit 18 points on the night.

Omier picked up his fourth foul with 6:40 to play; Edgcombe picked up his fourth a minute later. Then senior combo guard Jayden Nunn toppled into the stanchion, absorbing the contact for an

and-1. But a bloody nose forced him out of the game, too.

Injuries. Whistles. Blood. Back in November, Baylor's closing lineup featured Omier, Edgcombe and Nunn alongside guards Jeremy Roach and Langston Love. With five minutes to play in Provo, only Edgcombe was on the court.

Wright picked up the slack. The former five-star recruit scored the Bears' final 14 points in regulation, including the game-tying free throws after drawing contact on a reverse layup attempt with five seconds to play. BYU's Dallin Hall didn't release his deep 3-pointer until after the final buzzer and had to watch the ball slice through the net with triple zeros on the clock. 78-all. Overtime.

BYU scored early and never looked back. With just over a minute left, Omier fouled Demin on a pull-up 3-pointer, sending Omier to the bench and Demin to the line. The freshman hit 2-of-3 to give the Cougars a 91-86 lead.

The Bears never led after 6-3, just over two minutes into the game. On a night when they missed eight free throws and lost the bench points battle 45-7, they dropped their fourth conference game of the season, 93-89. They'll return to action at 3 p.m. Saturday against No. 11 Kansas (15-5, 6-3 Big 12) at the Foster Pavilion.

VONLEH, BEARS DOWN UCF, 75-64



Lariat File Photo

BOUNCING BACK Senior center Aaronette Vonleh tied a career-high with 22 points on 11-of-12 shooting during the Baylor women's basketball's 75-64 win over UCF Wednesday night at Addition Financial Arena in Orlando.

