

FINALS

SURVIVAL GUIDE

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FINALS | A4**

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Sam Gassaway | Photographer

Editorial Board’s favorite festive media

The holiday season has officially arrived, meaning it's time for everything holly and jolly, too much eggnog and the annual return of the Christmas media multiverse.

So in the spirit of festive nostalgia, The Editorial Board is sharing our personal holiday favorites song's and films for the Christmas season.

Foster Nicholas Editor-in-Chief

While there are no ingrained unique holiday traditions in my family, we always go back to watching “The Polar Express” around Christmas. With timeless animation, catchy tunes, my favorite of which shares the name of the movie and a significant message.

Ashlyn Beck News Editor

When it comes to Christmas songs, Elvis Presley’s “Blue Christmas” is an all-time favorite. The jazzy ballad is the perfect song for a cozy Christmas evening in. And it can only be followed with the best Christmas movie ever, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Memories of watching it with my family as “Auld Lang Syne” plays in the background always gets me a little teary.

Mackenzie Grizzard Asst. News Editor

With a Spotify Wrapped age of 68, I’ve come to embrace my old soul tendencies. “A Christmas Story” and “It’s A Wonderful Life” were on repeat in my mom’s house during Christmas, and Bruce Springsteen’s cover of “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” was always belted out by my dad on our way to Christmas Eve Mass.

Olivia Turner Arts & Life Editor

If there’s anything that gives me instant nostalgia, it’s Michael W. Smith’s 1998 “Christmastime” album. For as many Christmases as I can remember, my mother would blast these songs from our well-weathered beige Sony CD player as we decorated the tree and the rest of the house with lights, ornaments and garlands.

Kalena Reynolds Opinion Editor

There’s a few things that I reserve simply for the joys of Christmas. Most of them I keep them tucked neatly in a back drawer until Christmas time. Those things are: glasses of egg nog,



James Ellis | Cartoonist

“National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation” and “Last Christmas” by Wham!.

Hannah Webb Focus Editor

My favorite Christmas music will always be the soundtrack of “The Nutcracker.” The moment those first notes drift in, it’s like someone opens a tiny slow globe in my memory and I am eight years old again. It’s nostalgic in the best way: a reminder of childhood Decembers spent

dancing in kingdoms of snow and sweets.

Braden Murray Executive Producer

As one of the newsroom’s resident old-heads, I’d have to say my favorite Christmas song is Bruce Springsteen’s cover of “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.” I really don’t know what it is about this song that does it for me, maybe the saxophone solo, but I’ve loved it since I was a child. As for my favorite movie, “Home Alone.”

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Here's what professors wish you knew about finals week

MACKENZIE GRIZZARD

Assistant News Editor

It's an all too familiar time of year. As campus Christmas lights twinkle in the cold night, the bright fluorescents of Moody Memorial Library seem to echo the exhaustion and futility felt by its caffeine-fueled students.

Finals season has arrived, and its effects are felt through every corner of campus. Cold and flu cases surged in just the past two weeks, and ongoing construction makes Moody Library more cramped than usual.

Psychologists and universities around the country have released research on the most effective study methods, ranging from the Pomodoro Method to other forms of active recall. With so many different ways to study and a plethora of health advice during this season, students often find themselves overwhelmed by how to study and struggle with the material.

Senior lecturer in Baylor's English department Dr. Clay Butler recalls many conversations he held with students about finals week pressure when he served as faculty-in-residence at Martin Hall.

With a schedule filled with back-to-back exams, Butler emphasized the importance of not just making a study plan, but sticking to it.

"Don't just wing it," Butler said. "Write down all your exam times, figure out which ones carry the most weight, and create a study schedule."

Particularly for more difficult subjects, Butler stressed the importance of studying "smarter, not harder." Utilizing flashcards and explaining a subject out loud will always beat staring at notes for hours on end, he said.

"Mix it up — alternate subjects, change locations and various study methods," Butler said. "Variety helps your focus stick."

Dr. Doug Weaver, chair of the religion department, urged students to stay realistic during finals season, especially



Brady Harris | Photographer

STUDY SESSIONS San Diego junior David White (left) and Dallas junior Jack Farley (right) study intently for fast-approaching finals.

when faced with cumulative exams.

"If you haven't read all throughout the semester, you are not going to get it done in two or three days right before finals," Weaver said. "By that time, you need to make the best use of the time you have left and study what you have from your notes."

Don Carpenter, clinical associate professor and 2303 program coordinator in Baylor's Hankamer School of Business, concurred with Weaver.

"Be realistic when taking finals; your time is limited," Carpenter said. "Know which finals are likely to change your grade — either help or hurt — in a class, and concentrate on those."

According to Weaver, finals week is always the most stressful and

overwhelming time of the semester. More often than not, regular schedules and routines are disrupted, but it's not permanent.

"Finals week is not the time when you are going to get your beauty sleep and your exercise routine in every day," Weaver said. "Better said, you won't get them done and the studying you need to do."

Despite daunting workloads, late-night cramming and schedule disruptions, Butler emphasized that students should try their best to cling to normalcy by studying smart and efficiently.

"Sleep, eat and shower — stick to your normal routines," Butler said. "No single exam, class or semester defines who you are."

Pen is mightier than keyboard for studying, experts say



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

LOCKING IN San Antonio sophomore Abbie Green is hard at work in Moody Memorial Library Monday.

READ MORE HERE!



Do sweet treats work?

Students spell out tricks, treats for finals

ARDEN BERRY
Staff Writer

As the finish line of finals looms over students, some are using “sweet treats” to motivate themselves through the final lap.

Frisco junior Ada Khoja said she plans study or post-study ice cream sessions with her friends to give herself incentive during finals season.

“It motivates me to get some actual work done,” Khoja said. “So that way when I’m actually getting ice cream later and treating myself, I’m not as stressed about getting a chance to rest. So that’s my little way to cope with the struggles of junior year.”

She said she goes to J-Petal and Poke so consistently that every employee knows her by name and order — and the sweet treat actually helps her focus on her work better.

“I know I’m going to get a reward,” Khoja said. “I might as well put in proper work and really concentrate and lock in. So I think it’s very motivating to know that I have something that I can reward myself to and also motivating in the sense that I feel a bit more obligated to do better.”

Dayton freshman Eleanor Williams said she buys a drink from Starbucks, then takes a sip whenever she gets a certain amount of work done.

“Otherwise the drink will be gone too quickly, and I struggle with instant gratification,” Williams said. “So if the drink is sitting in front of me, it feels like I already have that gratification of having a drink. And the sips themselves are the real reward.”

Marietta, Ga., sophomore Shelby Grace Sparrow said while she is not reliant on sweet treats, she likes to budget her Sic ‘Em



Alyssa Meyers | Photographer

STUDY REWARDS Some students use the vending machines on Moody Library’s second floor to grab a quick snack while studying.

Swipes so that she can have a Starbucks drink during the week.

“As a [reward] for the end of the week, like on Fridays, sometimes I’ll treat myself to it after my last class because I got through a week and I have a Sic ‘Em Swipe left, might as well use it,” Sparrow said.

According to a 2025 paper by Lisa Bardach and Kou Murayama, scholars have debated over whether extrinsic or external rewards are effective for long-term intrinsic study motivation.

“Rewards act as reinforcers and have the potential to produce learning,” Bardach and Murayama write. “Rewards are attractive; they are motivating, prompting approach behavior and decision making. Also, rewards have the potential to evoke positive emotions. Put simply, rewards make people come back for more; they are needed for survival, used for behavioral choices that maximize them and make people

feel good about them.”

They conclude extrinsic rewards are useful entry points for engagement that can become intrinsically rewarding through motivational transformations, though later extrinsic rewards can disrupt this process and undermine long-term engagement.

When the long-term goal seems far off, however, Khoja said her short-term ice cream breaks help her stay motivated.

“I think that combination of just socializing and being able to rest and enjoy something that’s my favorite treat is what really keeps me going,” Khoja said. “It gives me a space to just relax away from my academic life. I would say having that in place is super important because otherwise, it just becomes work, work, work, and it’s very easy to lose track of what your goal is in the long run.”

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Consult zodiacs to make gifting your forte this Christmas

OLIVIA TURNER
Arts & Life Editor

Don't know what to get that one friend for Christmas this year? Look to the stars — or more so, hop on Google and figure out what their zodiac is. Then, look no further than this page for a perfect gift.

Keep reading to discover the ultimate (wallet-friendly) holiday gift guide, based on the 12 astrological signs.

ARIES

We're kicking it off with Aries, the daring adventurer. This one will need plenty of energy drinks to fuel their adventures and give them some exciting flavors to try. Chances are, they need a new portable charger and their water bottle is looking a little dented from all the times they dropped it while running around campus. Hydrojugs are all the rage right now, if they care about trendiness.

Lastly, Aries will get bored if they don't have something to do at all times. Throw in a mini pack of playing cards, or maybe a new, fun, fast-paced card game.

TAURUS

Tauruses are arguably some of the easiest people to shop for, since they're notoriously the comfort kings and queens. Fluffy blankets and cozy slippers are always a safe bet to keep them warm during their daily Netflix binge. Pair that with a cozy candle, preferably vanilla or brown sugar-scented. Their favorite gourmet snack will be the cherry on top of this comfort-coded gift.

GEMINI

The not-so-secret is out — Geminis are typically the social butterflies of the friend group. Gift them a portable Bluetooth speaker (brownie points if it's waterproof) to provide background noise for their outdoor hangouts. If they like to frequent campus during their downtime, get them a light, packable hammock so they can relax and chat with passersby, or a boardgame so they can play with friends.

If they're still living the dorm life, find a cute mini whiteboard for their dorm door, complete



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

with colorful dry-erase pens, to make friends with any neighbors who might walk by.

CANCER

On the other end of the friend group spectrum are Cancers: the mom friends. Similar to buying a gift for your mother, sentimentality matters most. Something thoughtful like a photo collage or a heatable stuffed plush in the shape of their favorite animal will melt their heart. Or if they're a tea-drinker, consider buying them a steeping mug. Cute stationery or pens are also a safe bet because you best believe they write thank you notes.

LEO

It's hard to find people who are more iconic than Leos, which obviously makes them the main character friends. So get them something that will enhance their character. A statement tote bag that screams "them" is one way to go — fun accessories like jewelry, hats, pins or hair clips are another.

An LED vanity light will accompany their lengthy morning routine nicely, and a plug-in phone fan will keep them cool throughout the day. Wouldn't want this diva to break a sweat!

VIRGO

Most people with Virgos in their lives

know them as the organized intellectuals. Get them some gifts that will help to further their orderliness and professionalism. An academic planner for next semester won't go unappreciated — just make sure it's not too flashy.

Potted plants or flowers will satisfy their nurturing side and watering and caring for it will add something fun to their daily routine. Lastly, Virgos are easily vexed (though they might not show it), so a gift card to places like Pinewood or Dichotomy will keep their energy up.

LIBRA

For Libras, their personal space is their happy place, making them the aesthetic designers. Add to their aura-esque decor by getting them a poster of their favorite indie artist, some fun throw pillows, a candle warmer or a pretty book for their coffee table. Speaking of coffee, cute coasters and trendy cups will add to their look.

SCORPIO

It's no easy feat to really know a Scorpio, but chances are, they're somewhat of a mysterious bookworm. Visit your local Barnes & Noble and get them the latest hot thriller novel, or try a more obscure find and a niche subject. While you're there, pick up a leather-bound journal if they have any. Lastly, if they're the type, a beautifully-designed

deck of tarot cards will make their day. Otherwise, a true crime mystery game will keep their mystery alive.

SAGITTARIUS

If your friend group has a token traveler, I'll bet they're a Sagittarius. These friends don't like to stay put. Instead, they prefer to explore, so purchase some travel items for them, like cute bag tags, carabiners or a fanny pack. Travel-sized goodies like lotion, perfume and hand sanitizer are also welcome gifts. Lastly, to complete their travels and preserve the memories that came with it, get them a reusable film camera.

CAPRICORN

Ah, yes, Capricorns. The ones who work too hard and won't stop, even if you tell them to take a break. These academic overachievers would thrive if gifted things to support their laborious endeavors: a multi-setting desk lamp to illuminate the countless rows of text they'll read, a lapdesk for their late-night study sessions and a Bluetooth mouse so they can work just as efficiently on the go.

AQUARIUS

They're quirky, they're strange, they're eccentric geniuses. There's no gift too weird for an Aquarius. They'll love a funky graphic tee, custom neon signs in crazy colors to hang in their already slightly messy and oddly decorated room, and random trinkets to put on their shelves, like crystals, bookends or Smiskis — cute, minimalist Japanese collectible figurines.

PISCES

Lastly, we have Pisces — the hopeless romantics. Give them fairy lights to warm up their space and create mood lighting. For them, it's the little things in life that matter, so consider buying a mini watercolor kit to capture beauty on the go or a pocket poetry book to carry with them to brighten up their bad days.

Baylor strengthens recruiting ties in Central Texas

JEFFREY COHEN

Sports Writer

Four-star wide receiver London Smith announced on Wednesday that he would follow in his parents' footsteps and don the green and gold.

"His mom ran track at Baylor, his sister's at Baylor and his dad also was a heck of an athlete at Baylor," University High School head coach Charles Foster said. "It's like it stayed in the family tree."

Smith became the highest-rated local recruit to sign with Baylor under head coach Dave Aranda. He joins a group of eight high school recruits from Waco and the surrounding areas who have joined Aranda and the Bears.

That list includes redshirt sophomore running back Bryson Washington (Franklin), sophomore wide receiver Jadon Porter (Lorena) and redshirt junior defensive lineman Devonte Tezino (Killeen Ellison).

"Baylor was his second school [to offer a scholarship], they were all for London when he was a freshman," Foster said. "For him to stick to his words, stick to his commitment, just

shows how loyal he is."

Smith unwavered in his commitment to Baylor, even while the program's top three recruits flipped within days of the Bear's season-ending 31-24 loss to Houston.

"Way happy for the guys that we got and excited about the guys that want to be here and want to be able to make this place a winning program again," Aranda said. "A few of those guys, local obviously, are London Smith and Davion Peters."

Peters, a three-star from Temple Lake Belton High School, is the Bears' fourth-ranked signee. He and Smith, who ranks third, are the Bears' top-ranked wide receivers in the 2026 class.

While Peters has a smaller frame than Smith at 5-foot-11 and 165 pounds, Aranda has compared him to former Bears receiver Monaray Baldwin.

"He reminds me of Monaray Baldwin in a lot of ways," Aranda said. "There's a great start and stop with him, and there is ability to make plays after the catch."

Baldwin is another one of Aranda's local signees, hailing from Killeen Shoemaker as a



Brady Harris | Photographer

GREEN GRASS AHEAD Redshirt sophomore running back Bryson Washington breaks off a big run in Baylor's conference opener against Arizona State. The former Franklin recruit ran for 111 yards in the Bears' 27-24 loss to the Sun Devils.

three-star in the 2021 class. He finished his Baylor career with 99 receptions for 1,673 yards and 13 touchdowns as well as fourth-team All-Big 12 honors as a sophomore.

Smith and Peters are the newest strands in Baylor football's increasing ties to Central Texas high school football.

The Bears' 2026 class has continued to be Texas-heavy, with eight of the 12 signees residing in the Lone Star State.

"The coordinators, [Jake] Spavital and [Matt] Powledge, they did a really good job of trying to keep the Central Texas talent in Central Texas," Foster said.

Central Texas football has been overshadowed by powerhouses programs in the Houston and Dallas areas. Foster believes that the Bears' regional attention shines a light on guys that do not get the same recognition as peers

at the bigger schools.

"I like keeping the talent in Baylor, keeping talent in Waco, because Central Texas football is a hidden gem," Foster said. "There's a lot of good schools around here, and I feel like they need to stay at home and continue to make Baylor successful."

The Bears' focus on Central Texas has created a strong bond between them and programs throughout the area. Foster and other coaches have supported the way Baylor connects with the athletes.

"To have that relationship when they're visiting schools is a really big aspect for Baylor," Foster said. "I do appreciate it, man. They just come in, just act like it's home."

The pipeline from Central Texas high school football to Baylor is a driving factor for the communities around the schools and their teams. The players staying home,

like Smith and Peters, allow their families and schools to show up and support them more easily.

"Our kids want to be close to home," Foster said. "To have Baylor right in the central heart of Texas is pretty amazing for not just our kids, but all the surrounding area schools that their families get to come and watch them play."

The pipeline extends to coaches as well. Kaeron Johnson, who preceded Foster at University High School, left in March to become Baylor football's Assistant Athletics Director for Player Relations. In 2021, former China Spring head coach Brian Bell joined the Bears as a quality control coach. He joined his brother Shawn Bell, a former Baylor quarterback and high school coach in Clifton and Round Rock. (The brothers now coach under Willie Fritz at Houston.)

Local recruits moving up to

Power Four football at Baylor also serve as inspiration for up-and-coming high school players. Some high schoolers dream of playing under the lights of a Power Four stadium, and guys like Smith and Peters serve as examples that it is possible to make that a reality from their respective schools.

"London just paved the way for all these young athletes, because they all look up to him like he's Superman," Foster said. "Deep down inside, London, he's just a laid-back student-athlete that just wants to win."

Cornerback Davontrae Kirkland committed to the Bears in June. He'll look to follow Smith, his Trojan teammate, in the class of 2027.

Aranda said on signing day that both Smith and Peters will have opportunities to step up throughout the spring and find the field during their freshman campaigns.



Sam Gassaway | Photographer

REVIVALRY Sophomore receiver Jadon Porter finds the end zone against TCU. Porter is a former three-star from Lorena.

Colleen continues to rewrite blueprint in 5th season

MARISSA ESSENBERG

Sports Writer

When Nicki Colleen arrived in Waco, she stepped into more than a head coaching job — she stepped into legacy. Baylor women's basketball had become synonymous with dominance, and Colleen, coming from the WNBA's Atlanta Dream, knew immediately what she was inheriting.

A fifth-season collegiate head coach now entrenched in the rhythm of the Big 12, Colleen has done what few could: honor the past while fearlessly building toward her own vision of what Baylor basketball can be.

"I am thrilled to be the head coach at Baylor University," Colleen said after accepting the position in 2022. "I believe it is the top job in the country for women's basketball. The success of this program speaks for itself, and I will begin working to ensure Baylor women's basketball continues to be a program that excels at the highest levels."

Her path to Waco wasn't the usual climb. Before turning college programs around, Colleen spent three seasons guiding the Dream, crafting a 23-11 record and earning WNBA Coach of the Year as a rookie in 2018. The Dream made a run to the WNBA semifinals, cementing her as a coach who could excel under pressure and elevate rosters quickly — qualities that proved even more valuable as Baylor navigated the transition from longtime head coach Kim Mulkey, now at LSU.

Colleen delivered.

In her debut season, Colleen recorded the most wins by a rookie head coach in the country (28) and kept Baylor's conference streak alive, pushing the Bears to their 12th consecutive regular-season title and extending their top-two NCAA Tournament seeding streak to 11 seasons.

Her recruiting class soon followed suit, ranked No. 9 nationally by ESPN HoopGurlz, with her second year producing producing multiple all-conference honorees and the unanimous Big 12 Freshman of the Year in Darianna Littlepage-Buggs. Now as a senior, Littlepage-Buggs stands as one of the most decorated players in program history.

Now 111-37 at Baylor, Colleen's journey isn't just lined with accolades, it's built on years of layered experience. Nine seasons as a Division I assistant shaped her coaching backbone:



Mary Thurmond | Photo Editor

ULTRA COMPETITIVE Pictured with senior forward Darianna Littlepage-Buggs, coach Nicki Colleen has led the Bears to a 9-1 through Dec. 9.

stops at Colorado State, Ball State, Louisville, Arkansas and Florida Gulf Coast taught her the power of adaptability and detail. Long before that, her identity was forged as a floor general at Purdue and later Marquette, where she led Conference USA in assists as a redshirt junior and senior.

"Much like the women who preceded her, Colleen is a fiery competitor with a big personality," said ESPN analyst and former NCAA champion Rebecca Lobo. "She is a nice fit for Baylor."

That competitive fire is matched by something else: connection.

Her influence stretches well beyond Waco, echoed by colleagues who've seen her journey up close. Among them is Karl Smesko — once her fellow coach at FGCU, now the head coach of the Atlanta Dream.

"Nicki has a brilliant basketball mind and a tremendous ability to connect with players," Smesko said. "She's high-energy, self-motivated

and ultra competitive."

Connection is the heartbeat of Baylor's program, and Colleen's approach to fostering it is intentional.

"I still have a lot of teaching to do with this group," Colleen said. "But that's my job, that's what I get paid to do."

She'll say it with a smile, but the honesty never fades. She knows the pressure that comes with Baylor. She's felt it. Embraced it.

"There's a lot of pressure on this job, but it doesn't mean I'm not grateful every day that I coach this game," Colleen said.

And yet, for all the expectations, Colleen always returns to the beauty of the game itself.

"My favorite part about coaching a basketball game — and it was when I was a player — is when they start pointing at one another," Colleen said. "That's when I get my most joy from coaching, seeing them be unselfish," she said.

Her team mirrors that mentality. After an upset win over Duke in Paris, she pointed to the

culture more than the scoreboard.

"We have a good locker room and a good practice setting," Colleen said. "Kids compete on the practice floor; they're coachable."

She knows what sharing the basketball represents — balance, trust, identity. But with success comes pursuit. She doesn't hide from that either.

"You get wins like this and the target gets bigger," Colleen said after the Duke game on Nov. 3. "I don't think anyone comes to Baylor and doesn't think there's a target on your back. From here on out, we're going to get chased."

Five seasons in, Colleen has secured more than wins. She has carved out a renewed standard: one that blends grit with joy, pace with purpose and pressure with gratitude.

And the chase, it seems, only fuels her more.

Colleen and the Bears will close out their five-game homestand at 11 a.m. Tuesday against Alabama State at Foster Pavilion. The game will be streamed on ESPN+.



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Here are 3 ways to lock in this finals week

MARISA YOUNG
Staff Writer

Creating successful study habits feels like an uphill battle, especially in the midst of finals season. Information overload makes it tempting to procrastinate or give into distractions instead of focusing. Finding the perfect study method looks different for every student, so here are three well-researched methods that are shown to promote learning and memory recall.

POMODORO TECHNIQUE

This technique is a method that involves studying in brief cycles and scheduling short breaks in between in order to boost productivity. Typically when using the Pomodoro Technique, students should set a timer to study for 25 minutes, then take a five minute break.

After four of these cycles, students should take a longer, 20-30 minute break, then repeat the process as necessary. This technique is largely successful because the self-regulated breaks allow students to sustain their focus, according to scholars from the British Journal of Educational Psychology.

Additionally, the same research study shows that the systematic breaks used in the Pomodoro Technique help students avert distractions and stay concentrated. This studying technique may be best fitted for students who struggle with procrastination or have difficulty concentrating on their material for long periods of time.

SQ3R METHOD

Another research-proven technique is the SQ3R method, which stands for survey, question, read, recite and review. The SQ3R method is beneficial in helping students create notes from their lesson content, which allows for deeper reflection and retention, according to the Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning.

Each step serves a purpose in aiding the learning process. Surveying occurs before in-depth reading and involves looking at titles, summaries and graphics for a big-picture idea of the content. In the question stage, students should formulate questions for themselves to



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

TIPS & TRICKS Sophomores Alan San Miguel, Abbie Green and Naina Uppal study on the second floor of Moody Library Monday afternoon.

answer before diving into the reading. As they read, they should answer these questions and take note of any significant information and large themes.

Reciting these notes back to oneself out loud helps students solidify and internalize the information. Finally, reviewing the notes aids in longer-term retention. This method is best for students who need to create study guide-style notes or synthesize large amounts of written content.

LEITNER SYSTEM

This method makes studying a tactile process, using notecards and a series of boxes. In this technique, all the flashcards of content that must be learned starts in Box 1. If the student knows the information, the flashcard gets moved to Box 2, then Box 3 and so on. If

the student does not know the information, they keep the flashcard in the box it is currently in.

Each box has a specific frequency that students should review it. For example: Box 1 every day, Box 2 every three days, Box 3 every week. Scholars note that this system is successful in aiding learning due to its usage of spaced repetition. The Leitner System is best for students who need to memorize a vast amount of terms or concepts.

Spring freshman Maggie Thompson said her ideal style of learning involves the physical action of writing information down.

"I am really tactile," Thompson said. "I do really well when I write things down."

Additionally, she noted that organizing information visually helps her to retain it best.

"When it's in colors, I'm flying," Thompson said. "If I can write something down or type it

out and just get it in my head, that's what works best for me."

For Orono, Minn., freshman Jocelyn Glenna memory recall strategies are the best option.

"I like to get my study guides and make them into quizzes, and then I quiz myself on it," Glenna said.

In order to stay focused on her studying, Glenna avoids taking breaks entirely.

"If I take a break, it's going to turn into three hours of doom-scrolling," Glenna said. "So I just have to go with no breaks."

Thompson, on the other hand, said she benefits from integrated study breaks.

"I'll do like an hour on and then 15 minutes off," Thompson said. "And then I'll incentivize myself; I'll be like, 'If I get this assignment done, then I'll go get a coffee.'"

How to balance books, spiritual life during finals

MADISON HUNT
 Staff Writer

As finals loom larger by the day and each study session becomes more essential, spiritual life leaders say staying grounded in faith means choosing presence over panic.

During this time, students are obsessed with grading metrics, but religion offers a different compass — purpose, belonging and a steady peace that anchors students when outcomes feel uncertain.

Dr. Devan Stahl, associate professor of bioethics and religion, gave insight into how students who choose to participate in faith can reconcile intellectual reasoning with theology. Stahl said every inquiry that students have is directly correlated with God.

“Our faith in God is the starting point rather than the end point of our knowledge,” she said. “We use our reason to illuminate our faith. And because God created everything, there is no academic discipline that cannot help us to better understand God.”

Associate Professor of Religion Dr. Sameer Yadav said it is extremely important for students to ask questions that challenge their faith in an academic setting.

“The whole point of difficult questions and critical thinking, it seems to me, is to take some responsibility for our faith, to hold ourselves accountable to reality as best we are able so that we can cling to what is true and beneficial and reject what is illusory and harmful,” Yadav said.

Baylor operates with a Christian mission, allowing students to fully embrace their faith without judgment. The role of a Christian university is to support students’ academic and spiritual growth, Stahl said.

“At Baylor, there is no need to hide or shed your religious beliefs to engage in academic study,” she said. “That is a real gift that Baylor offers to students. Professors may not start every class with their faith beliefs, but students can be assured that all their teachers are faithful people who do their work for the enrichment of both Baylor and their faith communities.”

Stahl explained that faith beyond the classroom is a crucial part of a student’s journey through Baylor. Not only will students experience temptation and doubt in day-to-day life, but their time at Baylor will eventually end, leading them



Caleb Garcia | Photographer

TIME FOR PRAYER Students gather in the SUB Bowl for Vertical’s Monday ministry.

on to new adventures that will inevitably present challenges of their own, she said.

“Keep going to church,” Stahl said. “There are many access points to spiritual life on Baylor’s campus that students can and should take advantage of, but don’t forget that church should be the central place for living out our faith and nourishing ourselves for our work in the world.”

Although it can be difficult in any busy season, Orange sophomore and Antioch life group leader Camille Kelly said she often catches up with her to-do list but falls out of spending consistent time with Jesus.

“However, I’ve also found that what gets me through finals is relying on God, which in turn can strengthen my faith,” Kelly said.

From coping strategies to a relationship and from striving to surrender — these things shape the next chapter of students’ faith journey. Dr. Charley Ramsey, dean of Spiritual Life, said during his junior year of college, he experienced clarity of his relationship with Jesus.

“I felt like somebody took a bucket of like warm oil or warm water and just poured it over me, and I just had this incredible experience at peace, the presence of God,” he said. “I wondered if this feeling last forever — and it began this transformative journey in my life.”

Yadav said maintaining a connection with God is important to staying connected to one’s faith.

“Maintaining a strong spiritual life in the midst of all of these different and demanding activities requires students to regard them all as spiritual activities — as avenues for loving God with all that one is and loving one’s neighbor as oneself,” Yadav said.






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Latino students embrace cultural traditions during Christmas

ALEXIA FINNEY
Staff Writer

Nearly 35% of Waco's residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, a demographic that comes to light during the Christmas season when families prepare festive food, drinks and decor.

Oklahoma City senior Andrea De Leon said her family's Christmas preparations begin immediately after Thanksgiving when her father transforms their house.

"Our house is really wide, and we have a lot of trees," De Leon said. "My dad does all the trees, so it looks like a Christmas light show. It's like a full-on show."

De Leon said her family keeps their holiday food and drinks traditional, ranging from hot chocolate to ponche, a warm fruit-based drink, to atole de arroz, which DeLeon described as "a milky water you pair with sweet bread."

"We definitely eat tamales," De Leon said. "Sometimes it's tamales with rice [or] tamales with potatoes. It depends on who's cooking."

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Whenever I think about Christmas, it's always tamales. ... It makes the memories better. You look around and think, some of these people won't be here one day. And one day, I'll be the one teaching everyone else.

YANIRA LEYVA
LATINX COALITION INTERN



Sam Gassaway | Photographer

¡MUY DELICIOSO! Houston sophomore Yanira Leyva, a LatinX Coalition intern says that "whenever I think about Christmas, it's always tamales."

As Christmas approaches, De Leon said her family's kitchen becomes home to multiple generations preparing food and taking in each other's company.

"When everyone comes together, it's at least 100 people," De Leon said. "You'll see first cousins, second cousins, just everyone. Big families are normal. My grandparents had six kids, and that's middle ground."

Houston sophomore Yanira Leyva, a LatinX Coalition intern, said she enjoys her family's tamalada, an all-day tamale-making tradition held every Christmas Eve.

"Whenever I think about Christmas, it's always tamales," Leyva said. "Everyone's complaining while we do it, like, 'Why

couldn't we just order them?' But it makes the memories better. You look around and think, some of these people won't be here one day. And one day, I'll be the one teaching everyone else."

Leyva said the tradition has taken on a deeper meaning as she watches her grandparents grow older.

"It brings them happiness because they know they're not alone," Leyva said. "Passing down traditions is how they stay with us."

De Leon said many cultural events, like Fiesta or multicultural festivals, go unnoticed by a majority of the student body.

"You don't hear about it unless you're in those programs," De Leon said. "If professors

brought in speakers or if popular organizations promoted events, more people would know."

But Leyva hopes to help increase cultural visibility in her role as a LatinX coalition intern.

"I know Baylor does Nacimientto for Christmas on Fifth, but I'm not fully informed on what else there is," she said. "It would be nice to see more. Even something simple like a mini-posada with Abuelita hot chocolate. I think it would make people feel seen."

For Leyva, continuing these traditions isn't just about food, but about carrying her family's traditions forward.

"One day I'll be the one teaching everyone how to do all this," Leyva said. "I think that's really sweet — keeping the love going."

Bears' favorite flicks

What Baylor is watching this Christmas



Photos courtesy of IMDB

COZY NIGHT IN The movies Baylor chooses each December reveal not only what people watch, but how they view Christmas.

O'CONNOR DANIEL
Reporter

With finals approaching and the Christmas spirit beginning to infiltrate campus, Baylor students and professors are settling into the movies that define the season, from black-and-white classics to childhood favorites and family traditions passed down for decades.

For many, Christmas films serve as the unofficial start to the holiday break. Orlando, Fla., senior Charlotte Weir said her family's Christmas Eve tradition always centers around "Elf."

"My favorite Christmas movie is 'Elf' because my family watches it every Christmas Eve and quotes the entire movie," Weir said. "I think anyone else would hate watching it with us because we are so annoying with how much we quote the lines."

Weir said the tradition also connects to her mother, whose birthday is on Christmas Day.

"This has been such a constant tradition in my life that I can't even think of the first time I watched it," she said. "I just know I was in my matching Christmas

PJs sipping hot chocolate with my family. I don't have a single bad memory attached to this film."

The Classic Christmas film genre continues to reappear each December, sustained by the themes at the center of the holidays.

Film and Digital Media professor Corey Carbonara said classics like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Miracle on 34th Street" continue to return each year because they reflect the purpose of Christmas.

"I believe the reason why these classics and other films that I consider to be classic Christmas movies that continue to come around every single Christmas is because of their underlying theme: the wonderful gift

“
The reason why these classics and other films that I consider to be classic Christmas movies that continue to come around every single Christmas is because of their underlying theme: the wonderful gift of giving and loving, which is what Christmas is all about.”

COREY CARBONARA
FILM AND DIGITAL MEDIA PROFESSOR

of giving and loving, which is what Christmas is all about," Carbonara said. "Giving and loving stem from the fact that God is love and these stories bring to the screen the best of who we are, made in God's image and

wonderful movie that is a favorite of mine is 'A Christmas Story' and the lovable way of seeing Christmas and family through the eyes of a child," Carbonara said. "One other movie

given the ultimate gift of all — his Only begotten Son. Jesus Christ, Our Savior."

It is in 'It's a Wonderful Life' that we are given the incredible insight to see first-hand how we actually make a difference in other people's lives," he said. "And in 'Miracle on 34th St.' we see the impact of Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, who by his very nature teaches us to be kind and generous to all and that the greatest gift given is love."

He also pointed to a few personal favorites. "Another wonderful movie that is a favorite of mine is 'A Christmas Story' and the lovable way of seeing Christmas and family through the eyes of a child," Carbonara said. "One other movie

that I really like to watch during Christmas is the biblical epic 'King of Kings' where the true meaning of Christmas shows how Jesus is the reason for the season."

Finally, one of the most impactful movies I love to watch at Christmas and I think it's really truly a classic is 'The Nativity Story,' a film for the entire family that is both inspirational and entertaining, and also one that shows the true meaning of Christmas."

As campus quiets down and winter break approaches, students and faculty alike seem drawn to films that offer comfort, tradition and a reminder of the values that define the season — generosity, joy and the hope at the center of Christmas.

Whether it's George Bailey running through the streets of Bedford Falls, Buddy the Elf shouting Christmas cheer or the Nativity brought to life on screen, the movies we choose each December reveal not only what people watch, but how they view Christmas.

Baylor connects alumni with campus circle through Advent devotionals

JOSH SIATKOWSKI

Staff Writer

In anticipation of the coming Christmas holiday, Baylor's advancement office is encouraging alumni with daily Advent devotionals, featuring reflections from 24 Baylor staff, faculty and students, plus an introductory message from President Linda Livingstone.

Livingstone's comments highlight the purpose of the program: to share the light of Christ with the alumni community, while also inspiring alumni to shine light on others in a recursive pattern.

"If you've ever attended a candlelight service, then you know the power of a single flame," Livingstone said in the video. "One light spreads to two, then 10, until the whole room glows ... our world needs that light."

Following Livingstone, two dozen members of the Baylor community write their own reflections on selected Scriptures, with each of the four weeks highlighting a theme of Advent.

The first week, which ended Dec. 6, discussed hope, and was headlined by essays from Student Body President Landon Self and Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain Dr. Charles Ramsey.

The second week focuses on faith. It features Baylor Board of Regents Chairman Bill Mearse on Dec. 11, and words from professors, like Dr. Linda Olafsen of the electrical engineering department.

The third week sees writers like Dean David Szymanski of Baylor's business school and Medical Humanities professor Dr. Jason Whitt reflect on the theme of joy. And in the last four days of the Advent season, the attention shifts to peace. Ending the 25 days of devotionals is Dr. Todd Still, the dean of Truett Seminary.

Still, a Pauline scholar, wrote the final message on John 14:27, which reads, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

In writing his reflection — which he has done for the Advent devotionals for the last few years — Still compares the worldly definition of peace with the peace



Brady Harris | Photographer

CELEBRATE The Christmas tree, located in the atrium of the Paul L. Foster Campus for Business and Innovation, is the centerpiece of decor in the business school.

of Christ.

"The first thought that flowed into my mind is that peace is more than a concept," Still said. "Peace is a person. For the Christian, peace is found in the person of Jesus Christ."

But the peace in Christ, Still said, can be hard to find, as it often competes with the transitory "faux peace" of the world. Lack of war and stable governments — as good as they are — do not compare to "the gift of God that comes from embracing the Prince of Peace," as Still writes in his essay.

"It's important for us to recognize that peace is not necessarily the absence of conflict or challenge or change," Still said. "Governments, regardless of how good they might be, are ultimately not lasting. Circumstances — our own and those of others — regardless of how good they might be, are going to change."

While Advent originated around 1,500 years ago, many denominations,

including some Baptists, do not closely observe it. But Still, a 1988 Baylor graduate, said even though people celebrate Advent differently, the devotionals are valuable from the perspective of building an alumni community.

"Even if someone doesn't think that Advent is meaningful to them, devotions on hope and faith, and joy and love, certainly should be," Still said. "So I think it is a tremendous gift to the Baylor community."

For Business Fellows Director, economics professor and 1987 Baylor graduate Dr. Charles North, the same is true.

"This is one really good way to reach out to our alumni base at a very busy time in their lives and remind them that they're part of that community," North said. "People connect to different communities in different ways. And Baylor is not a single place, it's a multitude of places drawn together in one."



Sam Gassaway | Photographer

MAN OF THE HOUR New Athletic Director Doug McNamee speaks to the Baylor and Waco audience alongside President Linda Livingstone during his introductory press conference Monday at the Hurd Welcome Center.

Doug McNamee held his introductory press conference as Baylor's athletic director Monday





Alyssa Meyers | Photographer

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS Holiday decor lines the shelves of Target in advance of the holiday season.

Rising holiday prices welcome students home this December

JULIANA VASQUEZ
 Staff Writer

Long wishlists and tight deadlines aren't the only things stacked against consumers this holiday season. Prices are rising due to a policy put in place by Washington over the past year.

Politics and the economy go hand in hand, with the policies enacted by those on Capitol Hill playing a role in the cost of items you shop for at H-E-B.

Chair of the Economics Department Dr. Van Pham said the largest policy changes that will impact consumers are regarding the Liberation Day tariffs and the increase in immigration enforcement.

"The tariffs are the big one ... it's a tax on all goods coming into the U.S., so it's going to raise the cost of goods that retailers see," Pham said.

Frank Enriquez, a political science professor who also studies immigration policy, said the crackdown on immigration will affect food and labor industries.

"The loss of the workers in that supply chain comes the inability of these companies ... to dish out as much product as they used to," Enriquez said. "So that's where you'll see probably less supply

with the continued demand, especially in the holidays."

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 2023, 29.1 million of the U.S. labor force consisted of foreign-born workers, including undocumented ones. Additionally, the Center for Migration Studies stated "to deport all undocumented persons in our nation, such an operation would cause a severe strain on U.S. citizens, as labor shortages would accrue and inflation would rise." This is what consumers are beginning to see now.

The price increases restrict the discounts retailers can provide, which Pham said was reflected this past Black Friday and Cyber Monday. CBS News identified a business owner who had to scale back discounts, with the owner "noting that the decision was '100%' related to tariffs."

For immigrant communities, tightened immigration policies will dramatically influence the holiday spirit, particularly for those who know someone who has been deported, Enriquez said.

"You want your loved ones to sit next to you and enjoy a family meal or go to a holiday concert or something, but [they] can't even

do that anymore because their loved one is somewhere else," Enriquez said.

As students go into the holiday season and holiday shopping, Pham said these price changes will impact a wide variety of industries, including technology, toys, food and apparel.

"I would say everyday consumption and stuff that you usually buy for gifts [is affected]," Pham said.

Dr. Patrick Flavin, chair of the political science department, said these shifting policies and rising prices are a stark reminder for students to pay attention to what's happening in Washington.

"Politics is not just something that plays out in Washington, D.C., that we see on the news," Flavin said. "The choices made by the people that we elect to represent us really have immediate consequences."

With rising prices, though, Pham hopes maybe the expenses will remind consumers of the reason for the season.

"I hope maybe there's a silver lining here that this brings us back a little, getting away from the consumption and just enjoying the spirit of Christmas," Pham said.

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