



# Deep in the heart of Baylor, country culture takes center stage

**ELLIOTT NACE**  
Assistant News Editor

The Barfield Drawing Room may not be a proper barroom, but its doors are swung wide open.

The Country Dance Club at Baylor, which has hosted events with upwards of 800 participants and boasts almost 250 members, meets every Wednesday from 9 to 10 p.m. in the Bill Daniel Student Center.

The club teaches beginners and veterans alike a variety of partner dances, aerial tricks and line dances, inviting students into Baylor’s appreciation for country culture while creating a community of its own.

Houston senior and Country Dance Club President Rylee Flynn said one of her favorite memories from the club came from a dance competition she attended her freshman year.

“Country Dance Club offered a dance competition where it was mostly just [for] participation, and I was the only female lead out of everybody who was competing, and I got third place,” Flynn said. “The president pulled me aside and told me that it was really impressive that I had the confidence to go out and still lead.”

Flynn said attending weekly meetings also led her to form friendships within the club.

“We’re not just coworkers,” Flynn said. “We’re friends, and we enjoy each other’s company.”

Plano sophomore Dylan Favre, a member of the Country Dance Club, said “you can’t help but get acquainted” with people who return to dance week after week.

“My freshman year especially, I met a lot of great fellow leads, guys

who were really interested, but also a lot of followers, girls, who I’d see Thursday night at Melody’s to go dance, so I’d always have a dance partner there,” Favre said.

The dancing does not stop when the club leaves the SUB. Favre said members regularly migrate to Melody Ranch on Robinson Drive Thursday nights.

“The officers have their own table at Melody’s,” Favre said. “They also lead dances at Melody, so they’ll be on stage.”

Houston senior and Vice President of the Country Dance Club Jacob Moore said the club also makes a special yearly trip to the Fort Worth Stockyards to dance at Billy Bob’s Texas, which labels itself as the “world’s largest honky-tonk.”

“Texas has such great country dance culture,” Moore said. “There [are] so many different places you can go to just dance and have a good time.”

Closer to home, the Country Dance Club performs at major university events such as Howdy at the Hurd and creates a float each year for Homecoming.

Moore said last year’s Homecoming, which included hauling hay bales and preparing the club’s float, culminated in a day that has stuck with him.

“We had so many members there and so many community members that [were] there just wearing our shirts and ready to go and dance all the way down Austin [Avenue], all the way through campus, and just have a great time,” Moore said. “They were soaked in sweat by the end of it. But all day we’re just sitting there making jokes, laughing, listening to music.”

Flynn also recalled last year’s Howdy at the Hurd, where the club taught country dancing onstage before headliner Ty Myers began his set. The club later filmed a music video while line dancing to Tucker Wetmore’s “Brunette” to accompany his performance at the Paul and Alejandra Foster Pavilion last October.

For Flynn, those experiences stem from a love of country music that began long before she joined the club. Calling herself “a cowgirl at heart,” Flynn said her first country anthem was “Ready to Run” by the Chicks, which stayed in constant rotation on her first iPod.

“Coming to Baylor reignited my love for country music because in

high school I definitely listened to a lot more rock and roll ... but the second that I got introduced to the Country Dance Club, it reopened my love for country music, and it’s been an incredible journey ever since,” Flynn said.

Flynn said that renewed love for country music eventually led her to country dance — a style that was completely foreign to her after growing up with ballet and tap.

“Any prior dancing that I [had] experience in is with a team or more solo-wise,” Flynn said. “So, to get a chance to not only learn a new style but also multiple variations of partner dancing reignited that love.”

For Moore, country music and family tradition go hand in hand.

“My grandparents lived in a small town called Levelland, Texas, which is west of Lubbock, and I grew up going out there, surrounded by cowboys and two-stepping, boot-wearing ranch hands, [with] my granddad being one of them,” Moore said. “My parents are choir directors. My granddad was a musician ... so music was a big part of my life, but so was the country culture, and I grew up listening and loving all of it.”

Between his grandfather’s records of Lefty Frizzell and the Carter Family, his mother’s country music from the 1970s and 1980s and his

**TWO STEPPIN’ >>> Page A3**



**COUNTRY CHARISMA** Lead singer of Old Dominion, Matthew Ramsey, leads the crowd in the band’s bluesy song “No Hard Feelings” at Foster Pavilion Friday night. Country singers have headlined a number of Baylor concerts.

Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

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# 5 questions to ask before midterms

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It seems as though each year the importance of election season grows, with 2026 being no exception. With the ever-growing political tension and scrutiny between parties, the responsibility to build bridges falls on us — those with the power to vote.

If you're struggling with where to begin, here are five questions to help get you on the right path.

### 1. HOW WILL I NAVIGATE MY OWN BIASES?

Regardless of whether we like it or feel they are warranted, we all hold biases that determine the way we think.

Perhaps we take after Thomas Aquinas, the philosopher and priest perhaps best known for refining the Scholastic Method of thought. This method guides the thinker through a process of placing contradiction and opposition against a held belief until the truth is revealed.

When we consider who and what we believe in, holding a perspective of scrutiny and skepticism is vital to reaching a legitimate understanding. Rather than placing what politicians and commentators say as the utmost truth or a complete heresy, running an in-depth fact check and challenging our thoughts is crucial.

### 2. IS IT SAFE TO VOTE WITH MY RELIGION IN MIND?

For the Waco community, many of us find ourselves wanting to be Christlike. Under the Constitution, we are set in a nation that protects the religious liberties of all. So the waters become muddled when it comes time to find a candidate that checks all our boxes.

Using religion as a way to appeal to the public is a tactic that isn't uncommon for politicians to use. Claiming to be of strong faith may be a way to position themselves as a god-fearing, dedicated follower of Christ in an attempt to seem more relatable and trustworthy.

"The fact that something is political does not mean that it is not religious and it may be better described as the political manipulation or use of religion," reads a piece by Religious Freedom Institute. "Much of this manipulation is done by people who are not especially religious, hence one of the main antidotes to the politicization of religion can be strong, committed religion."



Sarah Jane Mattek | Cartoonist

Our political candidates should be the ones whose honesty we should question the most. When we don't, we run the risk of falling for a campaign that claims to be running off the guidance of Christ, when really it's just a vehicle to attract a following.

### 3. WHAT DETERMINES IF A CANDIDATE "CHRISTIAN ENOUGH" FOR ME?

Currently, the two main candidates for the U.S. Senate boast their Christian faith loud and proud. Both Ken Paxton and James Talarico, however, have faced scrutiny for their beliefs and actions not representing the religion well.

Paxton, the Republican nominee, has faced criticism for alleged adultery, an act renounced in the 10 commandments. Additionally, his approach toward immigrants seeking refuge in Texas has been debated, as many claim his approach is unwelcoming to foreigners.

Talarico, the Democratic nominee, has

stirred the pot with his pro-choice stance on abortion. Additionally, some have disagreed with his pro-LGBTQ+ positioning, specifically regarding the transgender community.

Recognizing that politicians may be using religion as a vehicle to appeal to the masses is an important step. It may be that you find neither nominee fits your ideal representation of a Christian leader, the standard of which seems to differ vastly voter to voter.

### 4. HOW WILL I INTERPRET MEDIA COVERAGE?

Whether we like to admit it or not, many news sources align with one side of the political spectrum. Biased news is not hard to come by, making it ever so important we know how to decipher what is reliable or not.

Organizations like the Associated Press, The Hill and the BBC are widely recognized as nonpartisan and objective. However, perhaps the best approach is to read articles from multiple outlets and never forgetting to read

anything without a grain of salt.

### 5. WHAT ALL AM I VOTING FOR?

Many of us have a set of few issues that we feel particularly passionate about. Whether it be a specific social issue or economic policy, we may feel drawn toward a certain candidate because they align closely with a set of beliefs of our own. However, focusing on the promises regarding a single issue might come at the detriment of the rest of our communities who are affected by all the stances of our politicians, not just one.

An easy way to vote is to see the party name in parentheses by a candidate and use that as your sole reason to mark the box. An educated voter looks past the party line to what the candidate stands for.

Fully researching a candidate and all they stand for is the only way to be fully informed. Start with what you're passionate about, then work your way through their campaign promises.

# The naked truth about Sydney Sweeney's ad

LAYLA BAZAN  
Photographer

Sydney Sweeney is no stranger when it comes to controversy. From the shows or movies that she has starred in she has raised eyebrows for many, but her latest advertisement is starting to raise questions on whether she went too far.

In her latest ad for Novig, a sports gambling company, you see a pan out of Sweeney almost completely nude with only various sports balls and athletic gear covering her most intimate parts. This ad continued an already sensitive narrative of women not being taken seriously in sports.

As someone who is pursuing sports media as a career, I believe that this type of advertising can cause so much harm to the image of women in the world of sports. Women have worked so hard to gain credibility and respect in this male dominated industry, and I believe advertisements such as this one can, and will, undermine that process.



Sweeney was quickly called out by not only athletes but also women who work in sports marketing, sports media, athletic trainers and more. Many women who work and partake in sports, were angered by the campaign and believed that her ad has set back women who are involved in the sports world.

"It's not a joke when your whole life is centered around being a female athlete and being sexualized for not being taken seriously," said Olympic Skier Cassidy Gray in a TikTok post.

Although she upset many, some women still came to her defense stating that her ad is no different from ESPN's magazine "The Body Issue," where athletes, both male and female, pose in the nude to show off their athleticism, scars and progress over the course of being an athlete.

Sweeney would build off this tactic and post the magazine covers on her Instagram stories, which led to her getting even more backlash with people stating that she was selling her body, not selling athleticism.

World Champion Boxer, Skye Nicolson would go on to comment for ABC News Live, "There's a big difference between looking 'sexy' because you do sports compared to using sex to sell 'sports'."

“She ignited a frenzy and passion that women in this field have for their jobs to prove that they are more than their bodies.”

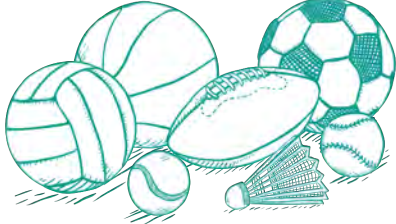
2021 would also resurface. Taken from an Instagram live, in regards to her American Eagle campaign, you can see Sweeney being very emotional about the backlash that she was receiving from her ad.

"I think it's really important for people to see how words actually affect people," said Sweeney.

As that statement resurfaced many women took it upon themselves to restate, from her own words, that words in fact do affect people and that's why she should've never made the sports ad in the first place.

Though her actions may seem harmless in her eyes, she ignited a frenzy and passion that women in this field have for their jobs to prove that they are more than their bodies.

Sweeney left a big statement on how women could be portrayed in the sports world. Many women rightfully took the initiative to start sharing about their roles and contributions, proving that they aren't just a pretty face, but a vital factor to the world of sports.



Over the course of the drama she would lose more than 200,000 followers on her social media platforms.

Following this, a video of Sweeney from

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# NEW SONG, OLD TRADITION

*Baylor University Golden Wave Band weighs in on update to Fight Song*

ABBY RATHBURN  
Staff Writer

Baylor’s fight song may sound a little different this football season as the university introduces a new arrangement designed to secure ownership of the nearly 80-year-old tradition.

According to an official statement from Baylor, copyright ownership of the university’s fight song has been unclear since the 1940s, with Southern Music Publishing claiming the copyright. In recent years, the university became aware of the legal risk and decided to create its own arrangement.

With the new arrangement, “Baylor Fight: Bear Down, You Bears,” the original melody, lyrics and harmonies remain intact. Isaiah Odajima, associate professor and associate director of bands, said the new rendition carries the same spirit and tradition as the original fight song, but with updated voicings.

“When you do a change in arrangement, you’re not changing the song, but you’re changing some elements of it, and it’s got to be distinctive enough that it sounds somewhat different,” Odajima said.

Updates included correcting existing instrumentation issues, adjusting the tempo of parts of the song and tweaking the introduction and ending, along with other minor stylistic changes. Although the changes may be subtle, Odajima said students may notice differences in where the melody appears.

“It feels different because when the low brass have the melody, or the low, low voices have the melody, it’s very powerful,” Odajima said.

In other words, Odajima and his team followed what he called “the Taylor Swift story.”

“She made her own arrangements, and that’s essentially what’s happened to us,” Odajima said. “We needed to make our own official arrangement of what we’ve got so that we could fully own it.”

Ultimately, these adjustments led to Baylor’s goal: creating an arrangement musically distinct enough for the university to own while preserving the spirit of the 1947 composition by Frank Boggs and Dick Baker.

The new arrangement now belongs to another generation of Golden Wave Band members who will be responsible for bringing the updated composition to Baylor game days.

For Montgomery sophomore and clarinet player Haley Conner, those traditions begin before the first game. Golden Wave Band members spend preseason learning the techniques, traditions and routines they will carry onto the field throughout the season.

“Preseason week is getting you into the routine of how to march,” Conner said. “Not every school, not every high school or college does it the same way. Everyone has to be watching techniques with your feet, how you march, the way you stand, your posture angles because everyone does it differently.”

Comprised of more than 300 members,

80% of whom are non-music majors, the Golden Wave Band brings together students from across Baylor.

McKinney senior and tenor saxophone player Nathan Hunter said that as an engineering major, he wasn’t sure he could balance band with his course load. However, he said the band’s manageable rehearsal schedule let him stay involved without compromising his academics.

“It’s something that I can go to where I don’t have to think about the other troubles that I have, whether it’s school or anything outside — like family,” Hunter said. “Even though it might take some of my time away from other things or it’s exhausting on Saturdays, it makes everything worth it.”

Hunter and Conner both attribute that feeling of escape to the community the band offers.

“It ended up being the best decision I’ve ever made,” Conner said. “Everyone’s just so wholesome, and there for each other. Even if I’m not close to everyone, I know that if I call someone, they’d be there for me in a heartbeat.”

For more than a century, the Golden Wave Band has fostered community among its members while serving as a symbol of Baylor tradition. Now, its members are carrying a newly arranged version of one of those traditions onto the field.

“Between the spirit squads and the marching band, I don’t think there’s any student group who gives more to the university with regard to spirit and loyalty and their love for the university,” Odajima said.



Minneapolis junior Finn Rintamaki



Lariat file photo  
**HONKY TONK** Members of the Country Dane Club participate in the 2025 homecoming parade.

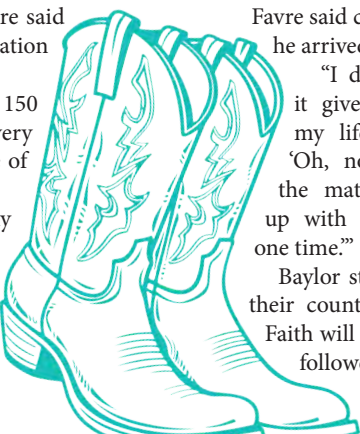
## TWO STEPPIN’ from Page A1

older brother’s love of modern country, Moore said generations of influences shaped his appreciation for the genre.

“I tell people my country music playlist is 150 hours long, and I know every single word of every single song on it, and I love every single one of [them],” Moore said.

Favre said country culture was similarly familiar by the time he arrived at Baylor.

“I grew up in the South,” Favre said. “My dad’s from Mississippi, and it’s a cultural icon. It’s part of the fabric of our very culture ... you get to enjoy the soul of southern culture that isn’t necessarily as vibrant as it used to be, especially in big cities.”



Favre said country culture was similarly familiar by the time he arrived at Baylor.

“I didn’t think I’d be as good as I am today, and it gives me a lot of confidence in other areas of my life, like schoolwork,” Favre said. “I was like, ‘Oh, no matter how hard this test is, I can learn the material because I learned how to pick a girl up with one arm and not drop her, except for that one time.’”

Baylor students will have plenty of opportunities to put their country spirit to use in the coming weeks. Carter Faith will headline Howdy at the Hurd Friday at 8:30 p.m., followed by Pat Green at a postgame concert outside McLane Stadium Saturday. Braxton Keith will take the stage at the Foster Pavilion Oct. 2.



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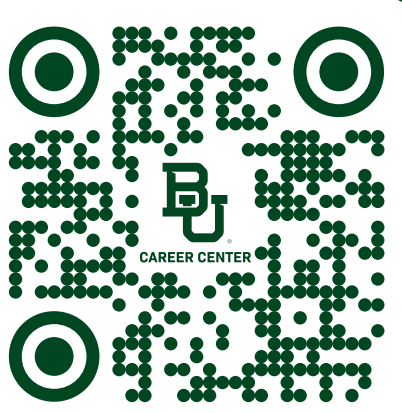
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# CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS ACROSS WACO



2011

Robert Griffin III wins  
the Heisman Trophy



2018

YouTubers Brooklyn and  
Bailey start their  
freshman years at Baylor



2026

Willie Nelson performs  
at Baylor Ballpark



1993

"The Office" star  
Angela Kinsey  
graduates



2013

Chip and Joanna  
Gaines' "Fixer Upper,"  
debuts on HGTV



2025

Glen Powell was  
spotted at a Starbucks  
location

LARIAT FILE PHOTOS, BAYLOR ATHLETICS, CREATIVE COMMONS

## TOP 3 CELEBRITY APOLOGIES

### 1. COLLEEN BALLINGER

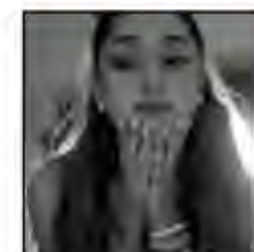


Colleen Ballinger, a Youtuber best known for her character Miranda Sings, faced the heat July 2023 after uploading a video performing a tune coined "Toxic Gossip Train." While strumming her ukulele, Ballinger denied the pressing accusations of having inappropriate relationships with minors. The choice of singing a song in response to accusations of this nature makes this apology particularly memorable, and most unhinged.

Perhaps next time, Ballinger will put down the uke and pick up a few more age appropriate friends.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF YOUTUBE

### 2. ARIANA GRANDE



TMZ got its hands on scandalous security camera footage of Ariana Grande licking a donut left on the counter of a bakery. Following backlash regarding Grande's lack of concern for public health and respect for the shop itself, she issued an apology on Youtube titled "sorry babes." Through a black and white filter, Grande apologized for her actions and claimed she was disgusted with herself. Next time you find yourself hungry in Los Angeles, might I recommend you opt for pastries stowed safely behind a glass case.

### 3. MARIO BATALI



Celebrity chef Mario Batali issued an apology following four accusations of sexual misconduct in his email newsletter. After admitting his behavior was wrong, Batali plugged a recipe for "pizza dough cinnamon rolls," creating quite a contrast from the original intent of the message. While most of us love any treat made with plenty of butter and sugar, this apology might have been better served without a sweet treat to pair.

SOPHIA MONSON | OPINION EDITOR

# Top 5 most legendary love stories from fiction

**REIGHA WEAVER**  
Arts & Life Writer

As we grow up, our ideas of love are shaped by the examples set before us, like our parents, Cinderella and Prince Charming or Belle and the Beast. However, as we get older and start reading and watching our own movies, our ideals get more complex and the “me and whos” start getting more frequent.

In my many years of consuming media, I’ve fallen victim to this numerous times, but that has also made me a self-proclaimed expert on love in fiction. So I have made the ultimate list of the most legendary love stories.

**5. GINNY WEASLEY AND HARRY POTTER, “HARRY POTTER”**

For lukewarm Potterheads (those who haven’t read the books) this might seem like a weak pick, but let me be the millionth person to tell you: read the books.

Ginny and Harry are much more than an awkward kiss; they are a beautiful love story woven throughout the books.

Ginny is immediately awestruck by Harry, so much so that she doesn’t talk to Harry until the second book. It’s in “Chamber of Secrets” that Ginny becomes her own character, which only grows.

By the fifth book, Ginny is an accomplished quidditch player and witch; and by book six, Harry and Ginny become friends and have a

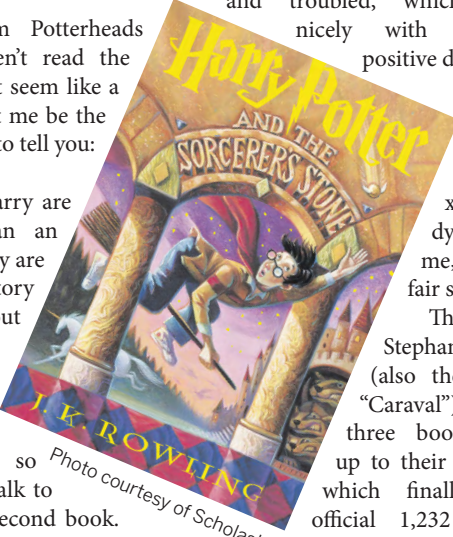


Photo courtesy of Scholastic

comfortable rapport. It’s also in the sixth book, “The Half-Blood Prince,” that Harry stops looking in Cho Chang’s direction and starts looking in Ginny’s.

Then, by the seventh book, Ginny and Harry have fully realized their feelings, and 19 years later, they send their own kids to Hogwarts. A classic “she fell first, he fell harder.”

**4. EVANGELINE FOX AND JACKS, “ONCE UPON A BROKEN HEART”**

I am operating under the assumption that most do not know about this wonderful book series. Allow me to be a broken record and say, yet again: read the books.

Evangeline and Jacks have a slow burn like no other. Jacks, as a character, is so complicated and troubled, which contrasts nicely with Evangeline’s positive disposition.

Yet this isn’t your classic “grumpy x sunshine” dynamic (trust me, I’ve read my fair share).

The author, Stephanie Garber, (also the author of “Caraval”) spends three books building up to their relationship, which finally becomes official 1,232 pages in. It’s hard to describe just how great their relationship is without spoiling all the good stuff, but trust me, the expert, when I say this love story will change your life. And don’t even get me started on the apples.

**3. PEETA MELLARK AND KATNISS EVERDEEN, “THE HUNGER GAMES”**

“You love me. Real or not real?” I tell him, ‘Real.’”

If you want to talk legendary, Peeta and Katniss, or Everlark, need to enter the conversation. Peeta, who has been in love with Katniss since childhood, tries to send signals to Katniss throughout the books. Katniss takes 99% of these interactions as a personal offense, which is a common theme for the rest of the list.

While “The Hunger Games” tackles way bigger issues and criticisms than love, Katniss and Peeta’s relationship and shared trauma grows with the heavy subject material. It wasn’t rushed, it wasn’t forced; it was perfect from the moment Peeta threw Katniss his burnt bread.

**2. ELIZABETH BENNET AND MR. DARCY, “PRIDE AND PREJUDICE”**

Quite possibly the most popular and classic love story of all time, and for good reason. I mean, he’s pride and she’s prejudice; it just works.

And even though Darcy’s first proposal was disastrous, their story is the pinnacle of romance. For those who hold yearning in high regard,



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

this whole list will do you justice, but you can’t outdo the original. Elizabeth’s inability to see how desperately Mr. Darcy is trying is hilarious but adds to the tension. Their clashing personalities mixed with the ever so romantic Regency Era make a beautiful, timeless love story that has certainly shaped my perception of love.

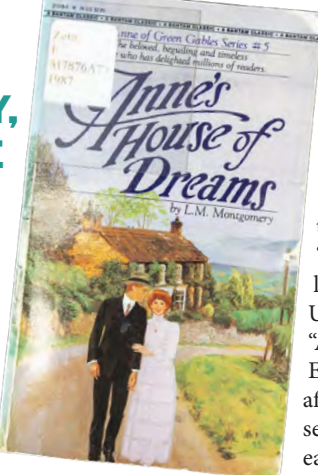
There are many kinds of “Pride and Prejudice” fans, some prefer only the books, some the 1995 BBC miniseries and others the 2005 movie. While all are spectacular, I tend to lean towards the 2005 movie, with Matthew Macfadyen as Mr. Darcy. For those whose Darcy of choice is Macfadyen, the hand flex is something that definitely cannot be ignored.

**1. GILBERT BLYTHE AND ANNE SHIRLEY, “ANNE OF THE GREEN GABLES”**

Whether you’ve read the books, watched the 1985 series or binged “Anne with an E,” one thing is for certain: Anne and Gilbert are the ideal. Their story is a pseudo-enemies to lovers, in the way that Gilbert could never hate Anne.



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor



Caleb Garcia | Photo Editor

Gilbert and Anne’s relationship isn’t fully realized until the third book, where Anne goes to college and Gilbert, after confessing his feelings once, gets typhoid fever. The illness shakes Anne to her core and she realizes she also has feelings for Gilbert.

The books before “Anne of the Island” are almost torturous, with Anne constantly seeing Gilbert’s signals as threats. But what is yearning without a little torture? And if anyone can yearn, you bet it’s Gilbert Blythe. Eventually, in the sixth book, Gilbert and Anne get married.

Any way you watch or read it, Anne and Gilbert have a love story that transcends all. If you loved the books and want something that stays on course, I’d watch the 1985 series. But if you want the best Gilbert and Anne adaptation, I’d recommend “Anne With an E.” Keep in mind, it does stray from the books more.

However, without straying so far away from the book plots, “Anne with an E” wouldn’t have given us that wonderful “Diana, what letter?” scene. Unfortunately, “Anne with an E” was canceled after only three seasons, so to ease the pain, you should probably read the books.

## Walden researches romantasy

**ARDEN BERRY**  
Arts & Life Editor

Academic reading and popular stories find their elusive overlap in Dr. Sarah Walden’s research and class.

Walden, director of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, researches BookTok and Bookstagram. She also teaches Remixing the BIC: Booktok, Literacy, and New Media, a BIC capstone course.

Currently, Walden is working on publishing “Feral: Romantasy and Its Readers” with co-editor Kacy Tillman, professor at the University of Tampa, an edited volume of research that attempts to understand why people read romantasy.

“What kinds of things do they get out of it?” Walden said. “So my research is focused very much on fandoms, it’s on readership and the way that we, in my particular work, the way we access that through social media.”

The collection will include several branches from the central theme of romantasy, with a chapter on how romantasy connects to modern dating practices and a piece on romantasy in terms of therapy. Walden said her focus on social media can be researched in many different ways.

“I tend to do a combination of, depending on the questions you’re asking, looking at specific hashtags and how people use them,” Walden said. “I think it’s actually more helpful to do what we call a walkthrough method where you ... create a research account in one of these things and then you over time curate your algorithm.”

However, Walden said there is a tendency in academia to assume that popular things are not worthy of study.

“If something is popular, figuring out why and what it’s doing for people is actually a really interesting way to understand the human condition,” Walden said.

And BookTok is popular. According to Forbes magazine, as of 2025, #BookTok had over 370 billion views combined.

“People are reading,” Walden said. “Reading creates empathy. Reading creates emotional regulation.”

Walden said students looking to read romantasy should consider what they last read for enjoyment and go from there.

“I think if you like fun ‘Divergent’-type things, if you liked that sort of novel, ‘Hunger Games,’ you’ll probably like something like the ‘Crowns of Nyxia’ series, so ‘Serpent and the Wings of Night’ by Carissa Broadbent or ‘The Daughter of No Worlds,’” Walden said.

More generally, Walden recommends “Fourth Wing” by Rebecca Yarros, “The Knight and the Moth” by Rachel Gillig and “Legendborn” by Tracy Deonn, which is on her reading list for her capstone class.

“While not exactly a romantasy because the



Mim Robbins | Photographer

**REQUIRED READING** Dr. Sarah Walden, director of the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, researches BookTok and Bookstagram.

romantic part is a little bit more of a subplot, I think it’s a great starter series to get into it because you really get this well-built fantasy world,” Walden said.

Walden also recommends “The Adventures of Amina al-Sirafi” by Shannon Chakraborty, another book on her class reading list.

One student in the class, Prosper senior Bella Cloud, said the class has group debriefs to connect books to previous BIC readings halfway through reading, and then students complete a book review project in a form of their choosing once the book is complete.

“A big emphasis from Dr. Walden is how to engage with pop culture,” Cloud said. “... We’ve had a group do a podcast, I did a mix between making an inspired playlist and also some TV show recommendations ... it’s just a way of seeing how we can engage with literature that we’re reading outside of the classroom, and how it realistically manifests in popular spaces.”

Chicago senior Carter Wright, another student in the class, said he read a lot of fantasy growing up.

“Then whenever I got to like college and like later high school, I started to have to read for school ... that kind of killed the reading for pleasure bit,” Wright said.

He said the class allowed him to read for fun while also doing his classwork.

“It merged those two things and I was like, ‘Oh man, I get to do fun stuff, but say it’s for like schoolwork,’” Wright said. “... It was a bunch of books that I hadn’t heard of before and were fantasy vibes.”

Walden said one of the main things she wants students to know is that “fun doesn’t mean not academic.”

“We forget that things that are exciting, things that are enjoyable are also valuable, and they’re not just valuable because they’re enjoyable, but because you’re learning something about yourself,” Walden said. “... It doesn’t mean you throw academics out the window, but it also means that you don’t dismiss things that are fun.”

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# Baylor Creative takes action from field to feed

CARSON VERCOE  
Sports Writer

From game-winning touchdowns to highlight-reel plays, social media has made these special moments easily accessible for many Baylor fans. Videos, photographs and graphics are spread all across the internet for viewers to relive the action.

Before a post reaches the public, a team quietly works behind the scenes to deliver these once-in-a-lifetime moments to people's feeds.

Meet the Baylor Creative team.

The team creates videos, graphics, posts and more to tell the stories of more than 30 of the university's athletic programs. From Instagram posts to hype videos on the jumbotrons at football games, the team works hard to produce as much content as possible for each team.

Within the creative team, Baylor football has its own team dedicated to video production, photography, graphic design, recruiting content and social media.

"We're really all just 1845 Studios," Senior Director of Football Creative Jay Crain said. "We're really just one entity that's 1845 Studios. Our team just specifically works with football."

The football creative team includes four full-time staff members and 10 student interns. All members have specific roles that help content flow easily on game days, but Crain feels those roles often change.

"We've got videographers, photographers, designers and recruiting," Crain said. "Each one of us kind of has our own area that we lead, but at the end of the day, we all overlap with each other and just make content and do whatever it takes to help the program."

The team's work goes beyond simply snapping pictures for an Instagram post.

Graphic designers create graphics for game days, photographers capture moments from practices and games and videographers produce clips and large projects.

The number of members grows mightily on football game days.

"I think it's around 40 people



Photo courtesy of Addison Jarecki

**FIELD TO FEED** Associate Director of Video Jake Rosas takes photos of Baylor soccer during its trip to South Bend, Indiana, for the second and third rounds of the 2025 NCAA Tournament.

that are involved in the creative process on a game day," Crain said. "And that's everybody from editing video to editing photos, shooting the photos and video, and then doing the social content."

The process of getting something onto socials begins the moment it happens.

"It's putting the photos on a laptop into, like, a shared folder," Crain said. "It's running video cards to our editors for them to be able to edit those clips in game. And then I, who helps her on the social side, will ingest all that stuff, figure out where it goes and what the captions are and make sure it hits the timing right, so nothing goes out too much after whatever happens in the game."

This process isn't limited to football. The creative team spotlights

all programs online, whether the sport is well known or receives less attention.

Director of Video Production Matthew Kirchner works primarily with men's basketball while also covering other sports.

"I'm on what we call our all-sports creative team, and that handles basically all the other sports other than football," Kirchner said.

Kirchner works with four others to create video across several Baylor sports, so the team's responsibilities can shift at different times of the year.

"We all sort of have to pitch in on different sports," Kirchner said. "But we're all one big team, and we all help each other out."

The creative team also gives students hands-on experience with

photography, videography and editing to build their skills. This lets the creative team cover Baylor's many sports effectively.

"We have probably about 10 or so videographers on our student team, so that really spreads out our coverage," Kirchner said.

One of the people who oversees these students and helps them gain experience is Associate Director of Video Jake Rosas.

"Right now, we have a newer team, a young team," Rosas said. "I've been working with them a lot, trying to get our team at a higher level, trying to produce more."

Rosas believes that the new group is vital for the push to cover other sports more consistently.

"I definitely think here at Baylor Athletics, we should do a lot more

for our teams, and I think the student team plays a big part in that."

While creating content for various sports, the creative team maintains a consistent approach but knows each sport has its own personality.

"We try to maintain a somewhat standard look and feel across the athletics department," Kirchner said. "But we also recognize the fact that different sports have different personalities on their teams."

The goal, though, remains to tell the program's story in a unified Baylor identity.

"At the end of the day, we're one athletics department, so we all want to be unified in how we present ourselves," Kirchner said.

Every team comes with its own set of challenges, and for the Baylor creative team, that challenge is time.

Early mornings and late nights are a regular occurrence for the creative team, arriving hours before the game and staying hours after the game ends.

"A lot of people work a lot of hours, whether it's us in communications, marketing, facilities," Kirchner said. "When you go to a game for two or three hours as a fan, most of the people working there, whether it's me or somebody in communications or facilities, they're probably at the arena for eight to ten hours that day."

The creative team constantly works to deliver content, whether it takes two seconds to film something time-sensitive or three months of prep to create.

For Kirchner and other team members, the time spent on the work is something they're grateful for.

We work with a great team; that makes it a lot of fun," Kirchner said. "I've been blessed for the athletes that I've worked with. They've all been super receptive and super appreciative of what we do, so that makes it worth it."

For many fans, the team's finished products appear with a simple scroll, but behind that video, post or graphic are countless hours of hard work from people who want to put Baylor Athletics on the map.

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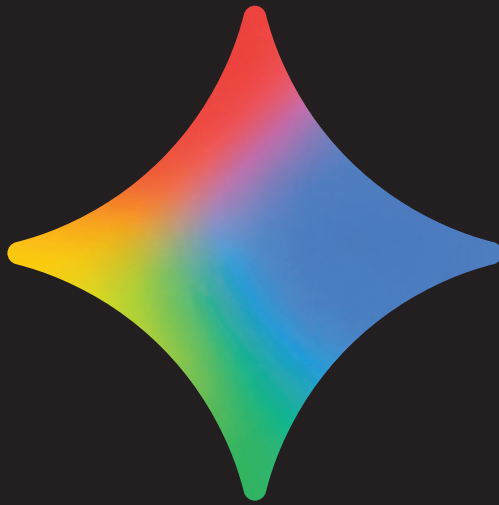
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