BIRDBRAINED SCIENCE

El Niño and you

by Colin Hamilton
COLUMNIST
HE/HIM/HIS
cjz24004@uconn.edu

We haven't discovered the solution to climate change yet, but we're pretty sure we're getting warmer. At least, our oceans are. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to trap heat in Earth's climate system, our oceans have absorbed much of the excess heat. Every few years, however, a natural climate phenomenon called El Niño shifts the distribution of heat, with impacts felt around the world.

As a consequence of climate change amping up the cycle's worst effects, El Niño has taken over our newsfeed: scientists warn about it, politicians argue about it and the global community braces for it. But what is El Niño? And what do you need to know?

To begin, El Niño was first christened by Peruvian fishermen in the 1600s when they noticed periods of unusually warm water in the Pacific Ocean. In full, they named it El Niño de Navidad, or "the Christ Child," due to it falling around Christmas time.

El Niño itself is a natural weather pattern that occurs roughly every two to seven years. It typically develops in the spring or summer and grows stronger in the fall before peaking in the winter. It represents the warm phase of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, which rotates between El Niño, its counterpart La Niña (the cool phase) and more neutral, day-to-day conditions. Under normal conditions, trade winds — the permanent east-west winds in Earth's equatorial region — push warm surface water toward Southeast Asia and Australia. Upwelling subsequently causes cold, nutrient-rich water to rise along the west coast of South America. During El Niño, however, these trade winds weaken. Warm water is pushed back east, toward the west coast of the Americas. The accompanying shift in tropical rainfall and thunderstorm activity fundamentally alters atmospheric circulation.



LOGO BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

The resulting impact is similar to dropping a boulder into a stream: the rock's energy is quickly transferred to the stream on impact, sending violent ripples outwards, far from the sight of initial impact. With El Niño, the water is our atmosphere, and the ripples cause our planet's jet streams to shift, disrupting weather patterns thousands of miles away.

This year's cycle is remarkably strong. So strong that it has been referred to by some as a "super" or "Godzilla" El Niño. The World Health Organization for the first time declared this El Niño a health emergency, while scientists have warned that unusually strong El Niño seasons have historically been correlated with over 100,000 annual extra heat-related deaths worldwide. Looking at the charts, it's easy to see why.

"El Niño and indeed the state of the global climate in 2026 gives new meaning to the phrase off the charts," World Meteorological Organization Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said in a statement. "El Niño doesn't add new heat to the planet. It releases heat from the ocean, which is the warmest ever measured. There is simply more heat available to release."

True to Saulo's point, El Niño has already given the contiguous United States its hottest summer on record this year and boosted Pacific hurricane activity with rare, damaging storms near Hawaii.

With El Niño's warmer water, marine life off the Pacific coast is also affected. The weakening of the upwelling process under El Niño causes a lack of nutrients to be brought up from the ocean floor. This in turn leads fewer phytoplankton — the backbone of the marine foodweb — to be found off the coast, threatening the food sources of countless marine species. These species come under further stress when warmer waters attract competing tropical species, like yellowtail and albacore tuna, into areas that are normally too cold for them.

Simultaneously, El Niño keeps hurricanes away from the Atlantic, causing the Caribbean to be drier than usual. These droughts can cause regions worldwide to face increased food insecurity as crops begin to fail. In other regions, sustained flooding can cause similar damage. The World Food Program, for instance, warned that our current El Niño might push an additional 49 million people into acute food insecurity by the end of 2027, taking the total number to 274 million. Drier air is likely to cause Australia, Southeast Asia and Southern Africa to face increased wildfire risk, raising dangers to human life.

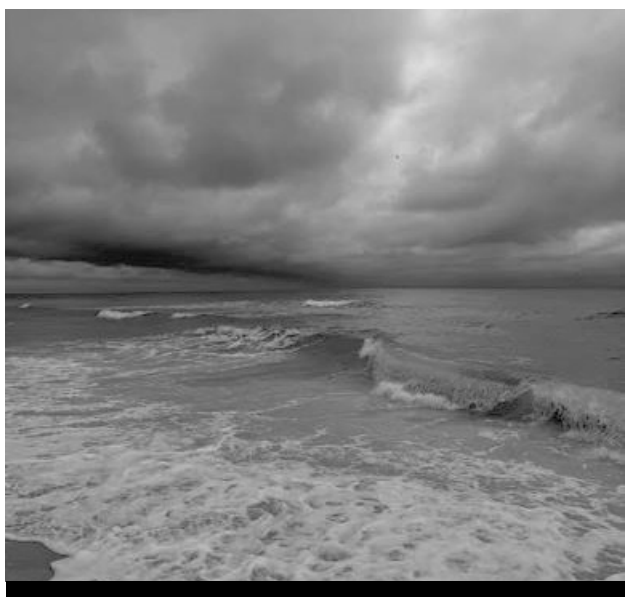

El Niño causes a warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. This shifts global atmospheric circulation and jet streams.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @FLORIDACOASTALCAPTURES ON INSTAGRAM

Disease rates are expected to rise as well. In Africa, cholera rates have already begun to rise, while areas in South America and the southern U.S. brace for respiratory illness and the spread of insect-borne illnesses as warmer weather increases the range of vector species. Flooding is also expected to bring water-borne illnesses as overflow sweeps into contaminants and destroys local preventive infrastructure.

Connecticut, however, will likely remain relatively tame and experience a more mild and wet winter. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, El Niño is expected to bring more frequent coastal storms and nor'easters to the Northeast, increasing the likelihood of heavy precipitation and localized flooding. Although warmer-than-average temperatures are likely to reduce overall snowfall, individual storms could still bring some snow depending on their origin and available pockets of cold air.

El Niño is a natural phenomenon, but our changing world has caused its worst effects to be exacerbated. As climate change continues to raise global temperatures, increasingly intense climate fluctuations carry consequences that we cannot afford to ignore. We cannot prevent El Niño. We can, however, band together as a global community to prepare for its effects, protect vulnerable communities and work to limit our own emissions to limit the impact of future El Niño events.

'THE BODY': DANCING WITH THE DEVIL

by Crystal Thacker
CAMPUS CONTRIBUTOR
SHE/HER/HERS
ngk24001@uconn.edu

Halloween may be over, but that doesn't mean our craving for all things horror is; Netflix knows this, and released "The Body" on Wednesday, Nov. 11.

A psychological drama and horror series, "The Body" follows the St. Mark's Lions, in need of a new member of their dance team after one suffered an injury. Come All Hallows Eve of 2004, they have their new member facing her initiation, but something goes wrong. Is she dead? Was the initiation drug really pure? "The Body" is a confusing show full of manipulation, sexual confusion and of course, a hefty dose of religious guilt, which helps to inform our characters' decisions.

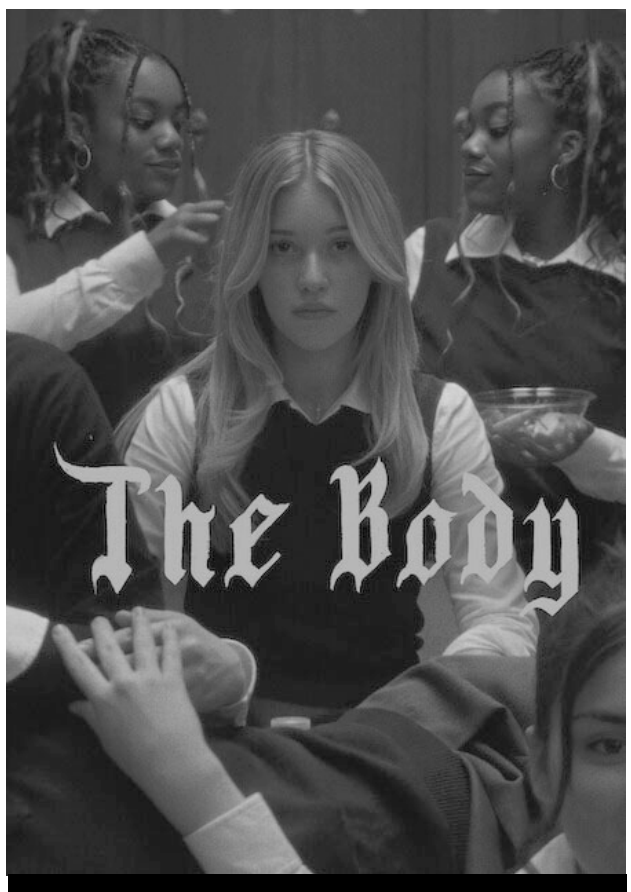
High school is, for many, a peak in our lives. We really only have classes and drama among friends to worry about. But the St. Mark's Lions might disagree. Captains Anya and Elise, played by Kristina Bogic and Sara Boustany, have to figure out how to calm the team after an initiation gone wrong.

Little does Elise know, Anya has a little birdie on her shoulder named Lisbeth. Lisbeth, played by Geena Meszaros, is a senior who tried out for the team but initially didn't make it. After helping Anya cheat on a test, she's invited to the initiation to drink with them, then finds Grace's, played by Sofia Wylie, convulsing body with Anya. On the way to the hospital, Grace stops breathing, so they decide to drop her off at her house and not tell anyone about it. Elise, despite being Anya's best friend, becomes more and more distant, while Lisbeth gets closer and more manipulative, despite Anya having constant anxiety attacks.

Created by Quinn Shephard, "The Body" draws inspiration from classic movies and books like "Carrie" and "Jennifer's Body," with the hysteria level of "The Crucible." In "Carrie" we see a similar religious tone, and in "Jennifer's Body," we see similar sexually confused characters. In the first few episodes, Anya can be seen expressing sexual confusion and frustration, because she's doing what she knows she's supposed to do, but she wants to do something else. However, all three of these movies share at least one trait: female rage. Jennifer getting back at men after being sacrificed, Carrie getting revenge on those who bullied her and in "The Body," we see it on the whole team. This can be seen consistently as the girls yell at each other and others, not just to be heard, but because they're angry and stressed because of Grace's coma.

I am all for some drama, but when it comes to visions, drugs and alcohol, maybe it's just too much, because at a certain point, "The Body" got to be confusing. At the initiation, Grace is forced to take ecstasy, also known as MDMA, and she was also drinking while there. After she took the drugs as a prank, the rest of the team asked Satan to "take this virgin sacrifice," and she ended up in a coma after dying for a short period of time. But while in the coma, all of the girls on the dance team had visions of Grace. Now, it could be that they don't want to be left out of what's going on with the other girls, but it could also be that something is actually going on. Whatever it is, it's a lot to keep up with along with the regular drama occurring in the show.

To wrap it up, I think this is a great, fairly convoluted series so far that could be enjoyed by anyone. Shephard does a great job making sure it sticks to the initial plot with the Catholic dance team without being disrespectful towards Catholicism. While I'm not usually a fan of short series like this, I would watch it again as well as recommend it to others. There are moments that left me confused. However, this could simply be because I don't have much knowledge on Catholicism. It's a great show if you're looking for something not too scary, but maybe to rattle you for a few hours.



The Body is a coming-of-age psychological drama supernatural horror created by Quinn Shephard. The series premiered on November 11, 2026 on Netflix.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NETFLIX

RATING

★★★★☆

SUBOG Weekly Events:

November 9th – November 15th

November 9th - Heated Rivalry Trivia @ 7pm in the Student Union Theatre

November 12th – Potato Fest Food Truck Edition @ 2 pm on the SU Mall

Any questions?
Email subog@uconn.edu