

A Pioneer in the Explorers Club

BY JAMIE VAN DER MERWE
Staff Writer

Sacred Heart alumnus Tomas Koeck, an environmental photographer and filmmaker, was recognized on the Explorers Club 50 (EC50). He is one of 50 extraordinary people who are doing work to promote science and exploration, but remain under the radar and out of the limelight.

According to the Explorers Club website, the organization has been supporting scientific expeditions of all disciplines for over a century.

“Every single major event involving exploration, Mariana Trench, moon landing, North Pole, South Pole, Everest have all been done by Explorers Club members,” said Koeck.

He was inducted into the society a few years ago.

“I got a note that I was nominated, then I got a note that I was a finalist, and then I got a note that I won and I was so, so stoked,” said Koeck.

“He’s done some incredible work and he’s an important force in the national history world, and I think this award is a great recognition of all the amazing work he’s been doing over the last couple years,” said fellow SHU alumnus Collin Moura ‘25, who has worked with Koeck previously.

Koeck is dedicated to performing ethical storytelling in the environments he goes to, careful not to disturb the natural order of the things he captures on his camera.

“Those lines get crossed all the time and I see that and I’m like; I don’t want to be that. I don’t want to be the production company that’s crossing those lines,” said Koeck. “If we wanted to make films and make a difference, it’s pretty contradictory to negatively impact the wildlife that we’re filming in order to help the wildlife.”

Koeck hopes to inspire others, help the environment and make as big of an impact as possible through his work.

“One of the biggest reasons I chose filmmaking is to spread awareness and optimism, to get people excited and involved in creating community and



Tomas Koeck (center) walking onto stage before a packed audience.

Contributed by Tomas Koeck, SHU Alumni

sparkling empathy within us all,” said Koeck.

While he had been into nature his whole life, Koeck only found his passion for showcasing that through story telling at SHU.

“It was soon obvious that he was headed for more ambitious projects,” said Prof. Joseph Alicastro, in the School of Communication, Media and the Arts (SCMA).

Koeck assembled a comprehensive outline for his plans, known as a treatment, and brought it to his professors.

“He proposed doing a nature documentary on the great white owl, which would take him to Minnesota in the dead of winter. That project expanded into a documentary about the Boreal Forest,” said Alicastro. “It was an immensely successful undertaking, especially for an undergraduate.”

Koeck would then go on to make several other films at the university, such as “Flyway of Life” and “Keepers of the Blue.” He encourages current Sacred Heart students to take the same risks he did as a student.

“If you have an idea that you want to pursue, if you have a topic that you think is important, that people need to know about, sit down and start typing in your treatment,” said Koeck.

“If a student comes along they’re like ‘Yeah I’m ready I want to do this,’ there’s nothing stopping that student from doing it,” said Prof. Keith Zdrojowy of the SCMA.

Koeck is currently premiering a new series, “Ocean State: Rhode Island’s Wild Coast,” which can be streamed on PBS.

The Sounds and Scores of SHU Sports

BY ASHLEY HILLIARD
Staff Writer

The Pep Band performed their annual “Pep Band on Ice” performance during the SHU men’s hockey game against the College of the Holy Cross at the Martire Family Arena on Feb. 21.

“It’s one of the really unique performance opportunities the band has, to perform in front of a sold-out crowd of fans who are so supportive is an incredible experience,” said Keith Johnston, director of band and orchestra. “This is not something that every band gets to do, so we’re really grateful that SHU athletics and hockey support this.”

Whether it’s on the ice or the court, students say that the Pep Band adds consistent energy, especially in moments when the arena might otherwise fall silent.

“They bring a whole other layer to the sporting atmosphere in the sense that they’re the ones creating the energy,” said sophomore Elena Chaplin.

“The atmosphere would be dull and mundane because without the music, there wouldn’t be an immersive experience,” said sophomore Adelyn Furlong.

On March 6-7, half of the Pep Band took to the ice to support the men’s hockey team during the Atlantic Hockey America (AHA) tournament. Meanwhile, the other half of the group traveled to Atlantic City to perform at Jim Whelan Boardwalk Hall for the 2026 Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) men’s and women’s basketball Championships, which took place on March 5 and March 6.

“I was excited to see how our men’s team would do,” said senior Daniel Greene, news editor for Spectrum and member of the Pep Band. “I came in when the winning team went for March Madness and seeing them go to MAAC for the first time is really cool to see these things full circle.”

The band joined the MAAC last year and went viral with one of their performance

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BY ASHLEY HILLIARD
Staff Writer

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songs.

“It was really cool that someone watching made a tweet about us playing ‘Take Me Home, Country Roads’ and that made us kind of viral,” said Greene. “Being able to continuously show we’re one of the best bands around is something I’m very proud of.”

Andrew Kolar, associate director of band, says he feels that college bands are one of the most important aspects of a university.

“College band programs are often the tradition keepers at universities,” said Kolar. “They make collegiate sporting events feel different and special with the sound of live music carrying an energy in the room that cannot be replaced and duplicated.”

“Getting fans to sing along, dance, or just bounce in their seats is a great feeling no matter when it happens in the season,” said Kolar.



Instagram, @shu_band

The Pep Band performed on the ice on Jan. 25, 2025, with Keith Smith (bottom middle) as the director.

Oh the Places You’ll Go

BY CASEY MCGRATH
Staff Writer

“Senior Week is an opportunity for the graduating class to celebrate their accomplishments before they walk across the stage and get their diploma,” said Raymond Mencio, executive director of Campus Life.

Senior Week is a long-standing Sacred Heart University tradition taking place this year between May 5 and May 8. Graduating seniors can register to participate in events and trips on and off campus with their fellow graduates prior to commencement.

“Senior Week will give students the opportunity for one more lasting moment as undergraduate students where they don’t have to worry about presentations, finals or assignments and can truly celebrate their peers and everyone who made this experience at SHU memorable,” said Mencio.

Seniors can dine at Stonebridge Restaurant and visit the Mohegan Sun and Avalon Night Club all while living in Seton and Merton Halls for the week. Additional events include a commencement ball, a family celebration, and more.

“My favorite event during Senior Week was probably Stonebridge because it was a great way to kick off the week,” said Maddie Beekman ‘25, former Editor-In-Chief of Spectrum. “Sacred Heart rents out the bar so it was just graduating seniors with tickets and we were able to enjoy a night outside without having to worry about it being too crowded or busy.”

Along with these planned activities, alumni appreciated living in the first-year residence halls.

“As a transfer student, I had not previously experienced freshman-year housing, so it was especially meaningful to be able to take part in that aspect of campus life for the first time,” said Giana Coccimiglio ‘25.

The time spent on campus during Senior Week is one of the many reasons seniors do not want to miss this experience.

“Coming back as an alumni is a completely different feeling, so my best advice is to take advantage of Senior Week and the opportunity to be on campus as an undergraduate for the last time,” said Beekman.



Tina Marie Photography, Sacred Heart University

A group of graduating seniors celebrate at the Family Soiree during the 2024 Senior Week.

As the 2026 spring semester comes to an end, excitement among this year’s graduating class has begun to build.

“I look forward to being with my friends for the week before we all move back home,” said senior Anna Wildes. “I expect a lot of fun and memories made.”

Seniors not only hope to foster and nurture past relationships, but they hope to make new ones as well.

“My expectations for Senior Week are to meet other students who I haven’t met yet, and to feel satisfied with my time coming to an end at SHU,” said senior Renna Badolato.

Seniors can anticipate that this opportunity will live up to their expectations.

“I entered Senior Week with expectations of celebrating this milestone alongside my peers, participating in well-organized events, and creating meaningful, lasting memories,” said Coccimiglio. “I

am pleased to say that the experience fully met those expectations, as each event was thoughtfully planned and provided a memorable way to conclude my college journey.”

Graduates are encouraged to register for one event or all events.

“It gives you the chance to hang out with the people you see every weekend, but also reconnect with friends from freshman year, Study Abroad, etc. that you maybe haven’t spoken to since,” said Beekman. “It really felt like the perfect culmination of my four years at SHU leading up to graduation.”

Registration for Senior Week 2026 opened on Feb. 19 and ends on March 20.

“Senior Week is more than just a celebration,” said Coccimiglio. “It’s your final chance to honor how far you’ve come and fully embrace the moments that will become some of your most cherished memories.”

**UPCOMING
EVENTS ON
CAMPUS**

**WEDNESDAY 3/11:
STUFF-A-BEAR
WITH SHU LEMON CLUB
6 P.M. LINDA E. MCMAHON**

**THURSDAY 3/12:
CAITLIN’S SHAMROCK
THE RUNWAY
4 P.M. EDGERTON
CENTER**

**FRIDAY 3/13:
MEN’S ICE HOCKEY
SEMIFINALS
7 P.M. MARTIRE
FAMILY ARENA**

Features

Becoming a SHUfluencer

BY BELLA MAZZILLI
Staff Writer

“SHUfluencers is an organization to bring together students who are passionate about digital storytelling, content creation, and social media influencer marketing,” said junior Amanda Federico, president of the newly established SHUfluencers club.

The club is open to any Sacred Heart student. It doesn’t matter if they’re just starting out or already involved with content creation. Students in SHUfluencers will gain hands-on experience creating real content, collaboration opportunities, and portfolio building.

“A big part of bringing these ideas to life was the encouragement and support from Nicolee McIssac, who truly pushed me to take the leap and turn the vision into something real,” said Federico.

Nicolee McIssac, the assistant director of content, marketing and communications, is the club advisor to SHUfluencers. McIssac has been an employee at Sacred Heart for about a year and has made significant changes to the university’s social media strategy.

“I really see this club as a space where students can grow creatively and professionally while also building a community,” said McIssac.

Sacred Heart has grown its relationship with their current students and potential students through social media.

“Having social media is another way that people can learn more about the great things that we’re doing here at SHU and what a strong institution this is,” said McIssac.

“It’s about building a personal brand, creating meaningful content, and understanding how to connect with a community authentically,” said Federico.

Sophomore Marco Graci started content creation on TikTok to promote his DJ business. Over the past year, Graci gained 105 million views and 53,000 followers. He acknowledges the difficult work and dedication put into content creation.

“It can sometimes feel very frustrating, so it’s good to be in a community with other creators,” said Graci. “I would love to help other students begin their journey into content creation.”

The club was established because students were creating content individually, but there wasn’t a space where they could collaborate together.

Junior James Grillo is the Vice President of SHUfluencers and is dedicated to its direction in the future.

“I’m especially passionate about growing membership and connecting students from all different interests so we can hype up everything happening on campus,” said Grillo.

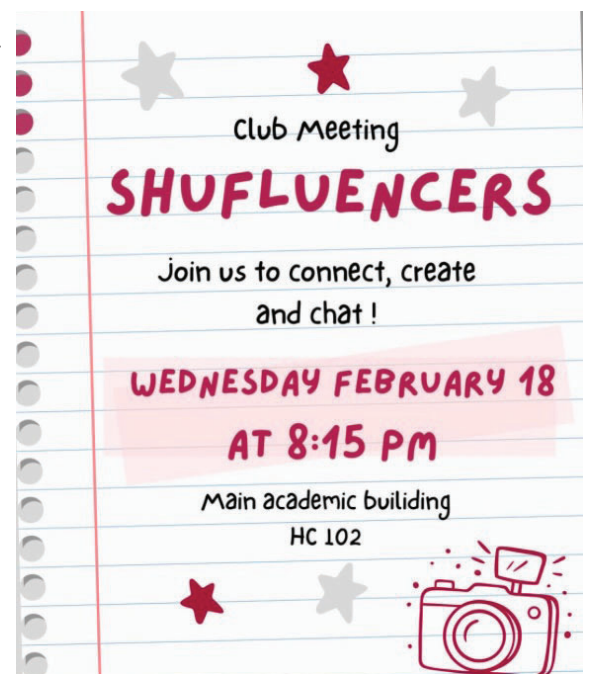
The club has roughly 25 members and are looking to expand to students from all different majors.

“We hope to grow our social presence and recognition, while providing members with great networking opportunities and enjoying our time together as a community,” said Federico.

SHUfluencers plans to become a central creative hub on Sacred Heart’s campus.

“Not every school has spaces for students who are interested in influencer marketing, growing their own brands, or just digital branding in general,” said McIssac.

“I wanted to create a community where students can turn creativity into opportunity and develop skills that translate directly into careers and real-world experiences,” Federico.



Instagram, @shu.fluencers

SHUfluencers announce release of club and gain followers.

Greek Life’s Growing Community

BY BRENNAN TAUBER
Staff Writer

Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) continues to play a major role in shaping the student experience at Sacred Heart University, offering opportunities for leadership, friendship, service and personal growth. Through the efforts of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the Panhellenic Board, Greek life on campus has expanded steadily, providing students with a welcoming and supportive community.

For many freshmen, rushing a fraternity or sorority serves as their first introduction to Greek life. Freshman Chase Inesta said his decision to rush stemmed from wanting to meet new people and become more involved on campus.

“I met a couple of people here before rush events started, and a couple people on my floor were potentially looking to rush,” said Inesta. “We all thought we should give it a shot and give us an outlet to do during the weekends. One thing I was hoping to gain out of the experience was getting to meet more people on campus, especially

since I was new.”

Another first-year student, Nathaniel Nesbitt, echoed similar motivations, explaining that rushing provided an immediate sense of belonging.

“Getting introduced to upperclassmen and building connections with them really helped me feel more engaged with the school,” said Nesbitt.

Rush events offer students a chance to interact with current members in casual and welcoming environments. One standout event for both students was a basketball night hosted by Delta Tau Delta at Bobby Valentine Health and Recreation Center.

“They reserved the whole basketball gym area, and we really got to meet and engage with the brothers as if you were one,” said Inesta. “At first, I was nervous, but after the second or third event, I became much more comfortable meeting new people.”

Kathryn Ionta, director of fraternity and sorority life, explains that Greek life fosters leadership, academic accountability, and community service.

“Fraternity and Sorority Life enhances the overall student experience by fostering a strong sense of community, leadership and service,” said Ionta. “Students build lifelong friendships, develop teamwork and organizational skills, and take on leadership roles that prepare them for future careers.”

According to Ionta, students in Greek life maintain a strong academic standing, with the all-FSL GPA currently at 3.35 being higher than the university’s overall undergraduate average. Additionally, the community raises more than \$200,000 annually for philanthropic initiatives while contributing tens of thousands of hours to service.

The IFC and Panhellenic Boards play a key role in maintaining a positive and inclusive environment. Ionta explained that these councils provide governance, organize recruitment, and coordinate collaborative events, such as greek sing, while ensuring accountability among chapters.

Brennan Hart, the IFC president at SHU, highlighted the importance of leadership and organization in managing the growing fraternity community.

“We oversee all six chapters on campus, run recruitment, and make sure everybody’s doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” said Hart. “Last semester, rush increased by around 15%, and the week before that, it jumped 50%.”

Despite misconceptions, Greek life remains one of the most engaged communities on campus.

“FSL literally brings people to SHU, and it keeps them here,” said Ionta. “It’s not meant to be something you’re outside looking into. If you’re interested, come join us and ask questions.”

For students considering rushing, Hart encouraged openness and involvement. “Go to everybody’s events, meet all the people, and feel out where you fit best,” said Hart. “Even if you don’t join, you still meet a ton of people.”

With new organizations such as Phi Gamma Delta (FIJI) joining campus and increasing student involvement, Fraternity and Sorority Life remains a cornerstone of campus culture.

“I’m most excited to see it continue to grow,” said Hart. “The bigger our presence becomes, the more we can contribute to student life, service, and philanthropy.”



Instagram, @sacredheartuniversity

Students celebrate Bid Day, marking the beginning of their journeys within the Panhellenic Community

Sports

On Your Mark, Get Set, Win!

BY JAMES SPOTO
Staff Writer

On Feb. 21 and 22, the men's and women's track and field teams traveled to New York City for the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) Championship meet. The women's team finished second behind Quinnipiac, while the men's team won its first MAAC Championship in program history.

Freshman Gavin Alvarez described the team's mentality to win and bounce back after finishing seventh at the MAAC Championship last year.

"We wanted it more than anyone else, and we took it," said Alvarez. "I wanted this for the seniors, especially, because they were very big in our success."

Alvarez won the 200m with a time of 21.72 seconds. Junior Colin Brown finished second in 21.73 seconds, adding eight more points for the Pios. Freshman Ian Crowley placed second in the 60m hurdles with a time of 8.24 seconds.

The Pioneers secured the title with a second-place finish in the 4x400m relay, where Alvarez ran alongside Brown and graduate students Rafael Mahario and Lance Hayes. Alvarez also secured the award for the MAAC Championship Rookie of the Meet.

"Gavin has made an early and major impact on the program with his talent, positive attitude, and work ethic," said men's track and field head coach Christian Morrison. "He, and some of our other young guys, were the added ingredient we needed to win this season."

A few days after the championship, Morrison was named MAAC Men's Coach of the Year, his 21st Division I Coach of the Year award. Alvarez highlighted how Morrison was flexible and supportive of the men, guiding them to victory.

"I think with his win, he's shining a new light on the team," said women's junior captain Ariyana Jackson. "Coming in as the underdogs and now champions, this win is a huge statement."

On the women's side, Jackson scored 10 points in the 60m hurdles with a time of 8.75 seconds.

"I was so nervous before my event, my whole body was shaking," said Jackson. "But I was like, no, you want this. If you want to rewrite your story, then you're going to take this moment. You're going to do it."

Jackson got help from her teammates as fellow sophomore sprinter Nyahingiva Musa finished second in the 60m, and graduate student Jenna Engels captured first place in the pole vault.

In the field, sophomore Suzan Adekunle scored 18 points, finishing first in the weight throw on day one and second in the shot put on day two. Adekunle also took home the award for the MAAC Championship Field Most Outstanding Performer.

"I had a rough start to the season, so it definitely meant a lot winning the award," said Adekunle. "Standing on the podium was a surreal feeling, and it felt good knowing that all that hard work paid off."

Jackson encouraged Adekunle before her events, reminding her that she knew what she was capable of and how much she meant to the team.

"We're here to win," said Adekunle. "We hope that this winning tradition continues for years to come and into the outdoor season."



Contributed by Gavin Alvarez, '29

Freshman Gavin Alvarez holds up both trophies after the men's team's big win at the MAAC championship in New York.



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CampusLife



Green is for Everyone

BY WILL MORGAN
Audrey's Corner Editor



A Group of Firemen take a selfie with a group of Spectators at the annual St. Patrick's Day parade in Boston, Massachusetts.

Steven Senne, AP News

The sun is brighter, the grass is greener, spring has sprung, and St. Patrick's Day is nearly here. While the holiday honoring Irish culture occurs on March 17, SHU students celebrate all throughout the month of March.

"Over spring break, I marched in my local parade with my parents and our whole extended family," said

sophomore Blake Mattesitch. "St. Paddy's is really important for me and staying connected to the Irish half of my family, my Mom's side. Sometimes it can feel like you lose connection to where your ancestors came from, especially if you don't think about them throughout the rest of the year."

Heritage and familial ties are an important part of the holiday.

"Every year on the 17th, my older cousins and uncles all meet up and go on a bar crawl," said sophomore Nicholas Bosticco. "It's really important for them, my Uncle Tom even flies in from Buffalo to join them."

Participation isn't limited to the Irish, St. Patrick's Day is enjoyed by

most everyone in the country.

"I'm not Irish myself, but I am a catholic, and I always take part in the celebrations in honor of Saint Patrick," said sophomore Andrew Bis. "He brought the word of Jesus to Ireland, I think he's a pretty cool historical figure."

The holiday's celebrations also have a heavy influence on college culture.

"I'm also not Irish, I'm Guatemalan, but I have so much fun with St. Paddy's every year," said sophomore Alek Rencurrel. "Last year, the boys and I went over to Fairfield University for the annual campus day party."

The holiday comes with a dress code.

"You have to dress in green on St. Paddy's. I don't make the rules," said Mattesitch. "If you don't, it's just lame. It's in the spirit to celebrate the emerald isle, so put your shamrocks on and start shouting $26+6=1$."

The festivities would be incomplete without a proper soundtrack.

"Obviously you need to play 'I'm Shipping Up to Boston' by Dropkick Murphys," said Rencurrel. "But you need to throw in lots of real Irish music. Not just your standard party fare with that one song once an hour. Throw in the Pogues, Thin Lizzy with 'The Boys Are Back In Town', some early Van Morrison, and some Cranberries songs."

"I'm a big Kneecap fan," said sophomore Matthew Butt. "I know no one is gonna play their songs this weekend, but they have great lyrics about the famine and the troubles, all wrapped in Gaelic."

"I'm proudly Irish and proud to represent a country that has resisted oppression and has acted in solidarity with oppressed people around the world. That to me is the spirit of St. Patrick's Day," said senior Liam Conway.

Senior Scaries

BY BENJAMIN OBIENU
Staff Writer

As graduation approaches, seniors at Sacred Heart University are reflecting on how quickly their college years have passed and what comes next after leaving campus in May.

With spring break over, seniors feel the shift toward urgency.

"Post-spring break feels different as a senior. There's more focus and intention," said senior Ricky Rodriguez.

"I feel fine. I have some plans for the immediate future, but I'm not too sure about the long term," said senior communications major Giancarlo Broccoli. "You might have to get back to me on that one."

For many seniors, the last year of college has seemed to fly by the quickest.

"It honestly feels unreal. It feels like I just moved in yesterday, trying to figure everything out, and now I'm preparing to graduate," said Rodriguez. "I feel grateful more than anything."

Even though three years doesn't seem that long, the mental and spiritual growth for some students can be exponential. Rodriguez, graduating in his third year with a double major in music production and marketing, said the experience has been overwhelming in the best way.

"I started at SHU at 19 years old, and now, at 21, I can clearly see how much I've grown academically, personally, and as a leader," said Rodriguez.

For others, the transition out of college brings a mix of excitement and uncertainty.

"It's scary," said senior political science major William Conway. "Everything is changing incredibly fast. However, I'm also excited. I can do so much more once I am out of here."

Balancing academics, projects and personal time is another challenge seniors face. Broccoli, who is working on a film for his senior project, says he does his best to stay grounded.

"Some days it can seem like a grueling process to get my script on a screen, but I know this is only a minor setback in my daily plans," said Broccoli.

Many students also hope to complete bucket-list goals before May.



Tracy Deer-Mirek, Sacred Heart University

Students celebrate after receiving their diploma at graduation.

Rodriguez plans to perform at the Goon 5 concert on April 25 in the Edgerton Theater.

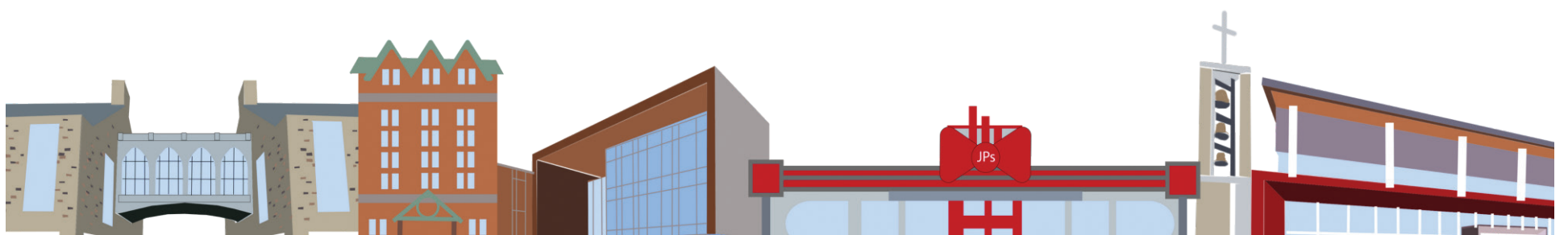
"That show represents everything I've built creatively and as a leader," said Rodriguez.

Conway says he hopes to continue learning and use his education to help others.

"It is incredibly important to know how politics and society work," said Conway. "My hope is that I can continue to learn and fight for those who need help."

Some students have simpler plans, just looking to enjoy the last few months with their fellow pioneers.

"My bucket list consists of going crazy and having a good time," said Broccoli.



Interested in contributing to Campus Life? Contact us at spectrum@sacredheart.edu

Arts & Entertainment

Students React to Lana Del Rey's New Single

BY NORA DELEHANTY
Staff Writer

Lana Del Rey released her new single, "White Feather Hawk Tail Deer Hunter," on Tuesday, Feb. 17. The song will appear on her upcoming album "Stove," which fans expect to be released in the coming weeks. Students at Sacred Heart University are already reacting to the release and discussing Del Rey's different sound.

"She had always talked about wanting to do a southern gothic, kind of country album, which I can definitely see in her new single," said freshman Amelia Saladino, a Spectrum staff writer. "She's trailing off into more of an Ethel Kane, gothic, moodier version of herself, which I'm really excited to see."

According to Forbes, the single debuted on three Billboard charts and entered the top 10 in the Alternative Digital Song Sales ranking.

Junior William Heidelberg said Del Rey's growth as an artist mirrors the experiences of many listeners her age.

"She's super super influential among people our age because we're in the stage where we're starting our life and we don't really know where to go. She demonstrates a good sense of courage and she shows us that it's okay if you want to rebrand yourself and try different things," said Heidelberg.

Students also pointed to the artistic vision of Del Rey's music.

"She's not afraid to put in sort of uncanny sounds or adding some kind of murkiness to the song to really make it feel like you're in a real place with her," said senior David Irizarry.

"Especially in this new song, it sounds like she's whispering in your ear or saying it to you in conversation. I think it really creates this unique vibe. She's really creating an experience when you listen to her," said Irizarry.

Irizarry said her music builds a personal connection with her audience.

"It almost feels like I'm meeting with an old friend, and I feel like that's how it should be with an artist that you listen to," said Irizarry.

According to the Grammy Awards website, Del Rey has received 11 nominations during her career. Heidelberg said her style makes her stand out.

"I think that Del Rey as an artist has such a uniqueness about her that maybe makes her less popular for general audiences," said Heidelberg.



Instagram, @honeymoon
Lana Del Rey in her recent Instagram post promoting her new single "White Feather Hawk Tail Deer Hunter".

"She just recently married so I think it's going to be sort of exploring themes of this oncoming feeling of domestic life and everything that might bring for her. You can feel a little apprehension in the music, but then there's also this flirtation," said Irizarry.

Not all students are longtime listeners. Senior Dylan Dupre said he is less familiar with Del Rey's music.

"I don't really listen to Lana Del Rey. I like many different genres, I like one of her songs, 'Young and Beautiful',

which I know from the 'Great Gatsby' movie. I enjoy it and will listen to it at times, but that's the only song I know by her," said Dupre.

Dupre said he may explore more of her music.

"I know people that rave about Lana Del Rey all the time," said Dupre.

As anticipation builds the album, students continue discussing Del Rey's new music and artistic direction.

"Music is experimentive, music isn't conformity. Music is an art form that's meant for people to step outside of the box and try new things. And I feel like Lana shows that through every piece of work she creates," said Heidelberg.

Claddagh Takes On NYC

BY AMELIA SALADINO
Staff Writer

Sacred Heart University's Claddagh Irish Dance Team traveled to New York City (NYC) on Feb. 21 to participate in a master class from dancers of Trinity Irish Dance Company (TIDC) before attending the company's performance later that evening.

The trip included both a workshop and a professional performance giving dancers the opportunity to learn choreography from touring performers and observe the company's work on stage.

TIDC is known for blending traditional Irish step dance with contemporary movement and theatrical storytelling. The Chicago-based company tours internationally and is recognized for expanding the artistic possibilities of Irish dance.

The Claddagh dance team is currently in its 10th year and performs throughout the academic year at campus events and showcases. The team rehearses regularly during the semester while preparing multiple dances for performances.

"We focus on traditional Irish dance blended with performance Irish dance," said Allison O'Riordan, coach of the dance team. "Most of our pieces incorporate traditional footwork with added arm movements that would not typically be seen in competitive Irish dance."

The program has recently emphasized professional training opportunities and prepares choreography during weekly rehearsals to maintain their repertoire of dances performed throughout the year.

"We have focused more on performances and workshops with industry professionals rather than competitions against club teams," said O'Riordan. "We maintain a structured rehearsal schedule to ensure each dance receives adequate time and attention so that all dancers are confident and the performances are polished."

The team's connection with TIDC began after the group hosted a workshop at Sacred Heart University in 2024. The professional dancers later invited the team to participate in a master class while the company was touring in NYC.

Junior Ava Leddy, who attended the workshop with her teammates, is one of Claddagh's co-captains.

"When we found out they were on tour in NYC, we figured it would be a fantastic opportunity to bring our team there to watch," said Leddy. "They offered doing a master class with us, which was an opportunity we didn't want to miss."

The class included choreography from TIDC's repertoire and combinations led by members of the company.

"Learning from Trinity felt different because they focused a lot on storytelling through movement, not just technique," said Leddy. "In our practices we work on our precision, so it was fun to think more about musicality, expression and how our movement fills the stage."

Senior Elizabeth Kennedy is the other co-captain of the team and felt that their choreography introduced dancers to unfamiliar rhythms and combinations.

"The class with Trinity allowed each of our dancers to challenge themselves with new and creative rhythms," said Kennedy. "Trinity gave us pieces of their repertoire to learn which we would then see in their show later that day."

Following the workshop, the team attended the company's performance in NYC. The show featured multiple group numbers and showcased the company's approach to rhythm, formations and contemporary choreography.

"What stood out the most to me was their energy and connection as a whole group," said Leddy. "There was a story behind every dance and every dancer looked committed to the choreography."

The Claddagh team will continue preparing choreography for performances later this semester at Sacred Heart. Students will have the opportunity to see the team perform at the "Claddagh Irish Dance Team Showcase" on April 17 at 7 p.m.



Contributed by Allison O'Riordan
Claddagh dancers with Chelsea Hoy after a workshop at Gibney Studios in Manhattan, NY.

Sports

Former Pioneer Credits SHU for Olympic Success

BY ASHTON DAVIS
Staff Writer

Sacred Heart women's ice hockey alumna Amie Varano reached the sport's biggest stage this winter, representing Italy at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan.

"They called us into the room and said, 'Congratulations, you're on the team,'" said Varano. "I remember calling my parents and telling them, 'Mom, Dad, I'm going to Milan.'"

For Varano, the moment marked the culmination of years of dedication and international competition. After graduating from Sacred Heart in 2017, the former team captain began her professional career in Europe, playing in multiple countries while continuing to develop her game at the highest level.

Along the way, she also joined the Italian national team, competing around the world leading up to the Olympics.

When Varano finally stepped onto Olympic ice, the moment felt surreal.

"It was the biggest crowd I've ever played in front of, more than 10,000 people in the stands."



Instagram, @avarano12

Amie Varano acknowledges the crowd during the Olympic competition in Milano Cortina.

Varano's Olympic journey is a point of pride not only for her family but also for the Sacred Heart women's hockey program and its current players. Sacred Heart head coach Thomas O'Malley, who has led the program for more than two decades, said hearing the news was one of the most rewarding moments of his coaching career.

"My phone rings, and the first thing I said to Amie was, 'Amie, are you calling me with the news I want to hear?' And she says, 'Yes, coach.' And I said, 'You just made my day,'" said O'Malley.

O'Malley said Varano's success reflects both her character and work ethic during her time as a Pioneer.

"The first quality Amie Varano possesses is she's a good person, always had a smile on her face, always worked hard," said O'Malley.

Varano's Olympic appearance also shines a national spotlight on the Sacred Heart program.

"Sacred Heart's a smaller school, not many people look at it as a threat. But seeing her on the Olympic team makes it seem like, 'Watch out for Sacred Heart,'" said women's ice hockey sophomore Brianna Morden.

Morden and her teammates have embraced Varano's success. The women gathered to watch Varano's Olympic games together, celebrating the accomplishment of a former Pioneer.

"Seeing her in the Olympics just makes it seem like we can all go out there and do it," said Morden. "It makes us want to go out there and work harder."

Varano said knowing the current team was watching her compete meant a great deal.

"It warmed my heart. I've never even met most of these girls, and they were willing to sit down and watch my game. I was so honored," said Varano.

Even after reaching the Olympic stage, Varano still credits Sacred Heart for shaping her journey.

"Coach O'Malley always believed in me," said Varano. "I'm so grateful for my time at SHU. It really shaped me into the person I am today. If I had to do it all over again, I would pick SHU every single time."

Sacred Heart Athletics contributed to this article.

WBC Makes Highly Anticipated Return

BY JEREMY RODRIGUEZ-MOREL
Staff Writer

The World Baseball Classic (WBC) has returned to bring together top Major League Baseball players representing their countries in an international tournament. Organized by Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association, the event features professional players representing their home nations.

"Baseball started this tournament to do just that, to grow it and to have a signature event every three years, kind of like their World Cup or Olympics," said School of Communication, Media, and the Arts (SCMA) Prof. John Barnes. "Fans can develop a rooting interest in their country and then follow those players in Major League Baseball."

The WBC is a tournament style competition made up of 20 national teams divided into four pools with respective venues. The 2026 Classic kicked off on March 4 and stretches to the upcoming championship game on March 17 in Miami, Fla.

Since it began in 2006, the competition has grown significantly in popularity. A major factor to this growth is the nationalism culture within sports fans.

"The Classic is also covered differently by the media than the regular season. While U.S. audiences often watch through the lens of national pride, fans from other countries follow their favorite players from different teams," said Barnes. "Bringing them together on one team for their nation is a great way to unify fans."

Patriotism is also demonstrated throughout the professional athletes. This pride adds a new dimension to watching the Classic.

"Players competing for their country share a passion and style of play that is great to showcase," said Barnes.

"The passion that the players have for the country they represent, this is not a job to them but an achievement," said sophomore Nick Frey.

The energy of the Classic is great for Major League Baseball to learn from.

"I like how every team brings its own approach and energy," said junior

Christopher Horvath. "Adding that it's fun to watch stars from Major League Baseball show pride in their home countries."

"You can just feel how much the players care," said sophomore Harrison Kennedy. "Even if it's just spring training MLB, the WBC makes the games feel intense and important."

"The World Baseball Classic is great for the growth of baseball," said Frey. "It's an exciting event that brings people together, showcases top talent, and reminds fans why they love the game."



Rebecca Blackwell, AP Photo

Dominican Republic's Vladimir Guerrero Jr. jumps into the air as he runs the bases after hitting a ywo-run home run during the third inning of a World Baseball Classic game against the Netherlands, Sunday, March 8, 2026, in Miami.

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Olympic Coverage from a SHU Student

BY JAYDEN HUNTER
Asst. Photography Editor

The Olympics, otherwise known as the international athletic stage. This year, the Winter Olympics were held in Milan, Italy. The games were full of athletic achievement, success stories, and even heartbreak, but behind the scenes, Sacred Heart University alumni and current students were working on the production side with NBC.

For me, being at NBC was a dream come true. Being able to see how much work is put into creating Olympic Games coverage for all those in America. For those who aren't aware, the time zone difference from Italy to Eastern Standard Time is approximately five hours. So, having to work around the clock is something that a lot of NBC employees do for the Olympic Games.

For context, 1600 employees are held at NBC Studios for the Olympic Games. Another 800 were held in Milan, with an extra group going to Cortina, Italy, which is where the skiing, snowboarding and biathlon took place.

As a production intern, my responsibilities were to pull footage to use on NBC's shows called Primetime Gold zone as well as featured stories on the social media accounts. Working 4 PM to sometimes two in the morning, I get to be insanely busy, but I had the experience of a lifetime. Getting behind the scenes coverage of Snoop Dogg, having one on one conversations with Redzone host Scott Hanson, and getting to put together awesome featured stories of select athletes

Truth be told, most people do not know much about some of the winter sports held at the Winter Olympics. To tell the truth, I'm one of those people. But being in the NBC setting, you quickly grow to learn more about winter sports. For example, I was working on a figure skating project for the medal round of the competition. I knew nothing about figure skating at all, but being in that project around 30-40 people. I quickly grew to understand how figure skating works. From mechanics, scoring, and even names of stunts.

The NBC community is very family-oriented. When you're around these people for so long, you grow a connection and a relationship with a lot of your coworkers. Although 1600 people is a lot of people to meet. You tend to find your crowd when you are surrounded by the same people for up to four weeks. After a ton of hours, loss of sleep, and hours of watching competition. NBC was able to produce an amazing Olympic Games in 2026.

With maintaining a full course load, and practically a full-time internship, as well also practicing from afar for my sport, I was able to gain knowledge, experience, and a lifetime of memories with my internship for the winter Olympics of 2026. Although I'm sad it is over, I cannot wait to continue my growth in the sports communications and media field.



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