

THE RECORDER

December 4, 2025

VOLUME 137 ISSUE 11



Max Frazier posterizing Sacred Heart to win the game; **Andrew O'Sullivan/The Recorder**

Frazier's Game-Winning Dunk Sends Sacred Heart Packing

By **Eary Banushi**
Staff Writer

In a game defined by a series of big-time plays down the stretch, the Central Connecticut State men's basketball team pulled off a narrow 108-106 victory over the Sacred Heart Pioneers

on Monday, Nov. 24 at Detrick Gymnasium. After senior guard Jay Rodgers hit a clutch 3-point shot to send the game to overtime, junior forward Max Frazier threw down the game-winning poster dunk, giving the Blue Devils their second win in a row.

"For 30-something games a year,

I'm rooting for Sacred Heart, except for this game," CCSU head coach Patrick Sellers said. "I'm glad we won it. I know they're going to be really good. He's a really good coach [Sacred Heart's Anthony Latina]. They got some good players... but tonight is these guys' night."

Central had three players finish in double figures. Sophomore forward Darin Smith Jr. led the way with a career-high 38 points, five rebounds and four assists. He shot 12-for-21 from the field, went 3-for-7 from 3-point range and finished 11-for-12 at the free-throw line.

"The other team, they play a fast-paced game, so we have to somehow keep up with that," Smith said. "It was just one of those nights. I felt it and played hard."

Frazier followed with his own career-high 24 points on 9-for-11

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The IRC Celebrates Their Culture with Campus

By **Noah Gavin**
Staff Writer

The Italian Resource Center at Central Connecticut State University hosted "La Festa del Panettone" on Dec. 2, in Elihu Burritt Library.

The Panettone Festival, as it translates, was hosted to celebrate the end of the semester and the upcoming holidays.

Guests included Central alumni and many local members of the Connecticut Italian American community who are friends and family of the attendees.

The director of the IRC and Italian studies professor at Central, Dr. Sim-

one Puleo, wanted this event to be on a grander scale in comparison to the weekly Italian conversation events they host.

"Every week we host La Pausa Merenda which is an Italian conversation event," Puleo said. "Since this is one of the last weeks of the semester, we decided to do a bigger event."

Slices of several different varieties of panettone were cut and served at the event, which is commonly enjoyed in Italy during the holidays. This paired with Italian espresso made for a delightful evening treat.

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International Blue Devil Pride: What a Semester Abroad is Like

By **Lorenzo Gagliotta**
Staff Writer

CCSU hosted students from partner universities across the globe and welcomed them to the Central community.

International students play a key role in enriching the entire campus, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Being an exchange student has presented itself with its memorable moments, accomplishing goals that have been set to realizing dreams that didn't seem possible.

International students Patrick Dittus and Yourim Huh have been at Central for the fall semester and have realized their potential with their study abroad experience.

Dittus is an exchange student from the University of Hohenheim in Germany, studying international business.

"I really enjoy different cultures and talking to people from different cultures," Dittus said. "I love the people that I have met here, it's really nice to get to know their culture here and how they look at things, to show them my culture, the German perspective."

Having a language barrier is one of the challenges for international students, but Dittus explains how speaking the language has helped him grow his confidence.

Exposing yourself to traveling and exploring new places is all part of making

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About

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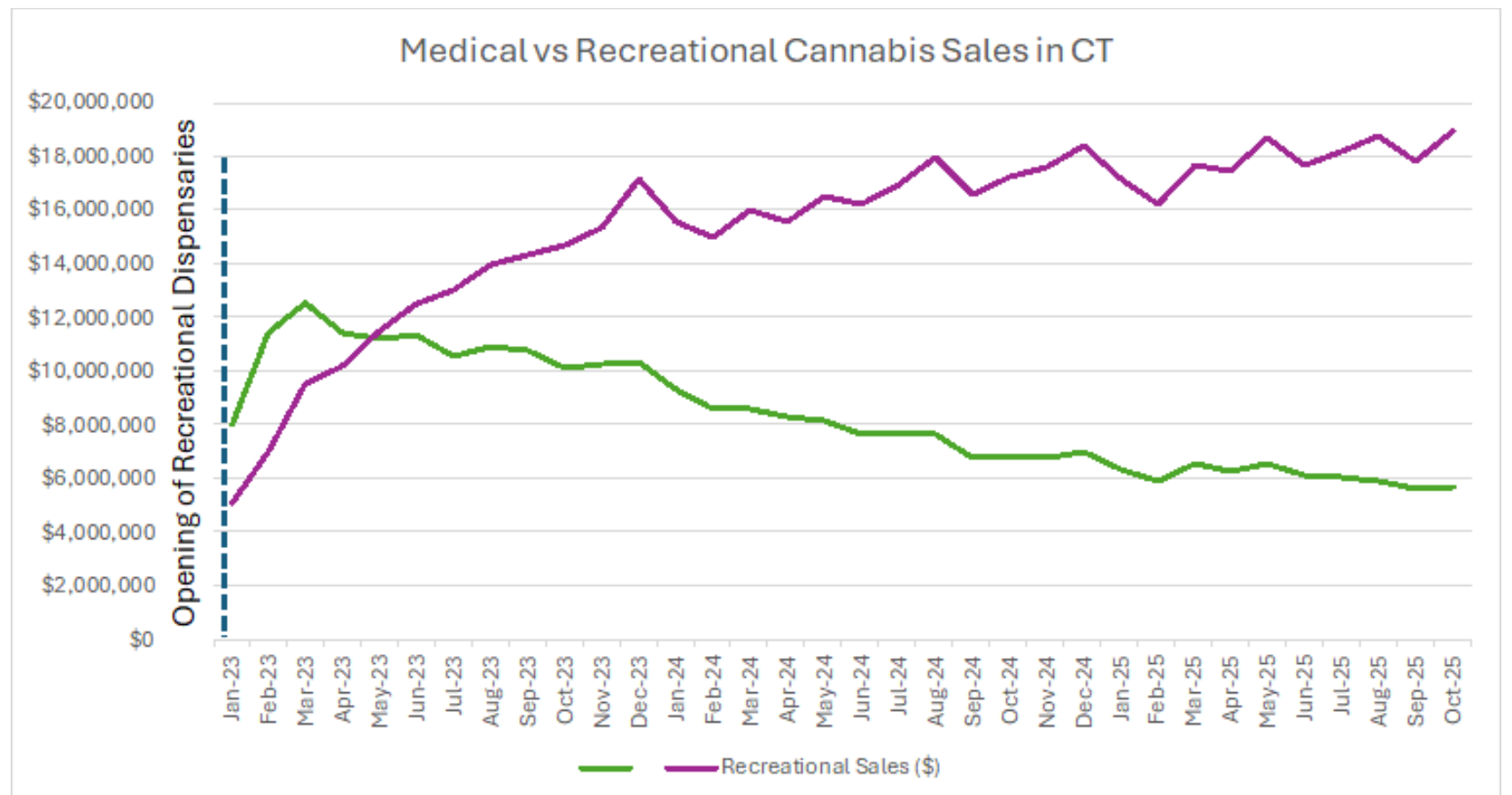
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SCAN FOR OUR LINKS



Recreational Marijuana Sales Break Records, Medical Sales Reach New Low



Data Graphic by: Ronan Hinckley/The Recorder | Data from CT Gov Website

By Ronan Hinckley
Staff Writer

Connecticut cannabis market continues to grow each month following the opening of the state's first recreational dispensary in January 2023. According to data published by the state of Connecticut, recreational cannabis sales reached nearly \$19 million in October 2025, marking the highest-grossing month since legal sales began.

State data also shows that October 2025 marked the lowest month for medical cannabis sales since recreational dispensaries opened. Medical sales totaled \$5.6 million, down from \$9.3 million in January 2025. The numbers highlight a trend of recreational sales surging while medical sales steadily decline.

Kaitlyn Krasselt, a communications official for the Connecticut Department of Consumer Pro-

tection, said the trend reflects what regulators expected when the adult-use market launched.

"We knew there would be some decline in the patient numbers as some people would choose not to renew their medical marijuana patient registration when the adult-use market opened," Krasselt said. "They may choose not to renew for any number of reasons, and we don't ask or know why someone may choose not to renew their patient registration. Maybe they don't need it anymore, or they don't need as much, or they don't need the specialty products that are only available to patients, so going through the process to maintain a registration isn't necessary for them anymore."

Krasselt said patient numbers also fluctuate for natural reasons within the medical marijuana program.

"Unfortunately, many people are in the medical program because of an illness that, in some cases, may be terminal, so there are some natural fluctuations in the patient numbers over time," she said. "It's a small factor, but it can also impact the patient numbers."

State data supports this trend. At the beginning of 2023, Connecticut reported nearly 49,000 registered medical cannabis patients. By October 2025, that number had dropped to about 32,000. Despite losing nearly 17,000 patients, the number of medical certifiers has increased each month, rising from 1,643 to 1,922 with no recorded decreases.

While patients leaving the medical program contributes to the decline in sales, Duncan Markovich said it is not the only cause. Markovich, a longtime advocate for marijuana in Connecticut, is

the owner and founder of Better Ways, a cannabis therapeutic company based in Branford. He said the way the recreational and medical markets operate is also affecting patient access.

"My belief is that Connecticut has done a terrible job managing their medical program since the opening of recreational dispensaries," Markovich said. "In Connecticut, if you're running a dispensary, you have to buy your product from one of the growers based in Connecticut and approved by the DCP, such as Cura-leaf. These companies are major multimillion-dollar corporations that have no respect for the plant of cannabis or the growers who actually know about the cannabis products. They are incentivized to push product into the recreational business because that's where the real profit is. I have talked to so many medical users who sim-

Have a story that needs to be told?
Tips or ledes that should be investigated?
Email us at elijahh@my.ccsu.edu
or fill out the contact form on our website
centralrecorder.org

ply cannot find the products they need because of how the recreational products are incentivized over the medical products.”

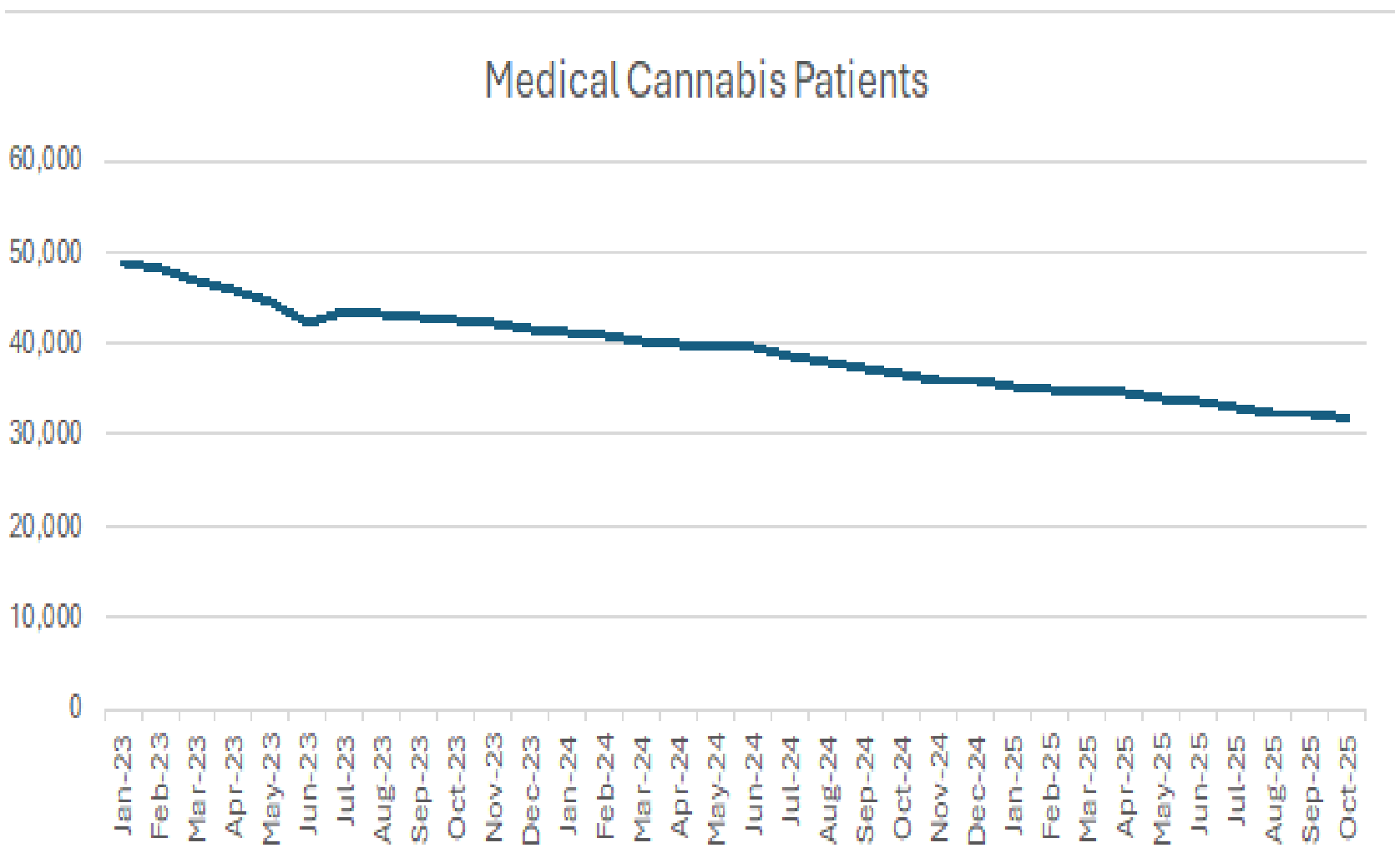
Krasselt, however, disputed his claims. She said the Department of Consumer Protection and the state of Connecticut prioritize both medical and recreational cannabis and said there is no evidence that the state favors recreational sales.

The state’s cannabis sales dashboard shows recreational revenue now regularly exceeds medical revenue by several million dollars each month, even though medical patients can purchase higher-potency products and are exempt from cannabis taxes.

Despite concerns about product availability, some medical patients say the program remains vital. Michelle Jerry, a medical cannabis patient in Stratford, said she relies on medical products to help manage her anxiety.

“I’ve been using medical cannabis for around two and a half years now, and it’s really helped me stay grounded when my anxiety gets overwhelming,” Jerry said. “I wasn’t really looking to use marijuana, but when my doctor prescribed it to me, I found that it’s been very beneficial.”

She said she understands why some users may switch to the recreational market.



Data Graphic by: **Ronan Hinckley/The Recorder** | Data from CT Gov Website

“If your primary focus is just to get marijuana, I totally get why someone would leave the medical program,” Jerry said. “You wouldn’t have to get routine check-ins with your doctor, and sometimes at the dispensary, it is harder to get higher-potency medical products due to limited supply.”

For recreational users, convenience is often a deciding factor. Oliver Lunsford, a Guilford resident who moved from Philadelphia, said Connecticut’s system feels both accessible and safe. “I just moved to Connecticut this year, and I think what they do with

their dispensaries is awesome,” Lunsford said. “In Philadelphia, you still can’t buy cannabis for recreational use legally. This means I’d often have to go to corner stores to buy it illegally, which means there’s risk attached. When I moved to Connecticut, it was great that I could just show my ID at a recreational dispensary and

get a product I knew was safe.” For now, state data shows a recreational cannabis market that continues to grow with no signs of slowing. Medical sales, meanwhile, continue a downward trend as patients shift away from the program or, in some cases, pass away.

This Weeks Campus Events

Pep Squad’s Fall Showcase Amped Up, Dec. 4, 7 p.m.

Student Center Alumni Hall

Devil’s Den @ 10: Lights and Letters, Dec. 4, 10 p.m.

Semesters Cafe, Student Center

Volleyball Club Tournament, Dec. 7, 8:15 a.m.

Boston University

Commuters Breakfast, Dec. 10, 9 a.m.
Student Center Lobby

IRC Continued From Page 1

“Panettone is an Italian sweet bread. It has a number of different variants, and it usually has dried fruits or nuts in the center,” Puleo said. “It’s evolved over the years, and it can sometimes contain pistachio or hazelnut cream.”

A big inspiration was the proximity to the holidays, allowing all who attended to sample a piece of the rich Italian heritage they have to offer.

Puleo wants the IRC to encourage students and members all around the campus community to further their understand of Italian culture.

“The Italian Resource Center is to promote Italian and Italian American studies at CCSU,

as far as language and cultural learning,” Puleo said. “[The IRC] has also begun to operate as a community center for Italian Americans on campus as well as in the greater Hartford area.”

Puleo involved the Italian American community in every aspect of this event by shopping for the panettone and refreshments from local Connecticut Italian businesses, Angelo’s Market in New Britain and Sfizio Italian Kitchen in Wethersfield.

Dante Sambugaro, a major in international relations studies who was originally born in Italy, is very familiar with the holiday staple.

“We eat it every Christmas, it’s a tradition,” Sambugaro said.

Sambugaro frequently attends the events the IRC hosts and thinks it is essential to have events like this one on campus.

“Community is a very important part of who people are, we are social animals by nature,” Sambugaro said. “Having places like [the IRC] to go to have a feeling of belonging is one of the most important things as a person and a student. That belonging keeps you grounded in life and just gives you enjoyment in your relationships,” Sambugaro continued.

Sambugaro really enjoys being social with people that are a part of his culture on campus.

“[The IRC] is a way to speak Italian, connect with other people who are Italian, and just meet people who are part of my community,” Sambugaro said.

Many non-international students showed up as well to enjoy the food and be educated about another culture’s traditions, like nursing major Janessa Rames.

“I think this helps students get a better understanding of where other people come from and learn more about cultures and practices different from your own,” Rames said.

and warm feeling on the snowy December day. Jake Somosky, a computer science major, has attended a few intercultural events in the past at Central and enjoys seeing attendees come together and socialize.

Many students in attendance shared the sentiment that the gathering was very welcoming

“This is wholesome,” Somosky said. “That’s what’s important, and it makes me happy.”



By Nicholas Dest
Staff Writer

Full-time CCSU students pay for 18 credits per semester, but the average student only takes 14.5. This discrepancy means roughly \$1,250 worth of tuition goes unused each term, and over time, it adds up to being about a semester behind an 18-credit pace. For commuter students — the majority of CCSU’s population — the impact is even worse. Gas costs, longer commutes, and the opportunity cost of hours spent on the road make each credit marginally more expensive.

erred around 14.5 for years — but because part-time students now make up a larger share of the student body. From 2024 to 2025, part-time undergraduate enrollment increased 36%, pulling down the overall average and slowing credit accumulation. Over the same period, the average number of credits taken by part-time undergraduates dropped 18%. Whether an undergraduate is part-time or full-time, it’s clear that both groups are taking fewer classes than they should be.

ing another class can add hours to their daily schedule, especially if there’s a long gap between courses.

However, the most practical solution already exists within CCSU’s offerings. Online courses give students the flexibility to complete degree requirements without interfering with already packed schedules. Taking an online class instead of skipping one can be the difference between graduating in four years or paying for a fifth.

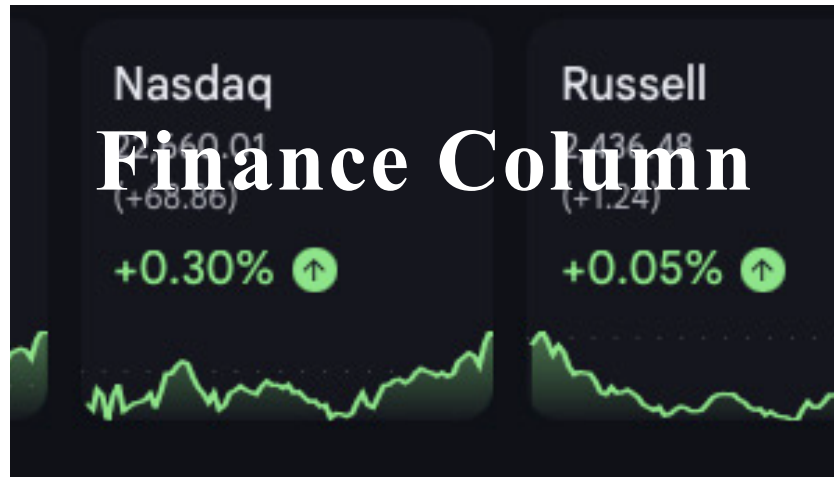
Students need to take advantage of these options, and CCSU needs to make them far more visible. If the downward trend in credit loads continues, degrees will take longer and cost more than they used to for the average student. At a time when college already costs tens of thousands of dollars, students shouldn’t be slowed down by a system that makes it difficult to take the credits they’re already paying for.

But this problem isn’t exclusive to full-time students or commuters. CCSU’s own data shows the average credits taken per undergraduate have slipped to a decade-low level, meaning students across the board are taking fewer classes than they used to, further delaying their expected graduations.

This slow down in degree progression translates into lost wages, extra commuting costs, and delayed entry into full-time employment, and it is often caused by elements outside students’ control.

For example, most upper-level major requirements at CCSU are only offered during one time slot each semester. If that class conflicts with work hours or another required course, students have no way to add an extra class. Commuters feel this the most, as add-

This decade-low average isn’t happening because full-time students suddenly started taking fewer credits — they’ve hov-



How Students Can Budget For Holiday

Season - Maybe a finance column?

By Nicolina Coronis
Staff Writer

The holiday season is supposed to be joyful, but for college students living on a tight budget, December often feels more stressful than festive. Between buying gifts, traveling home, decorating your space, and trying to keep up with the season’s excitement, the costs can pile up quickly. So how do you enjoy the holidays without emptying your bank account? With a little planning and some realistic expectations, it’s completely possible.

Travel can be a huge expense for students. If you drive, consider carpooling with students going in the same direction, which can help cut the cost of gas. For buses or trains, make sure to find any possible student discounts that are usually available. Looking for early departure times can also make the rides cheaper.

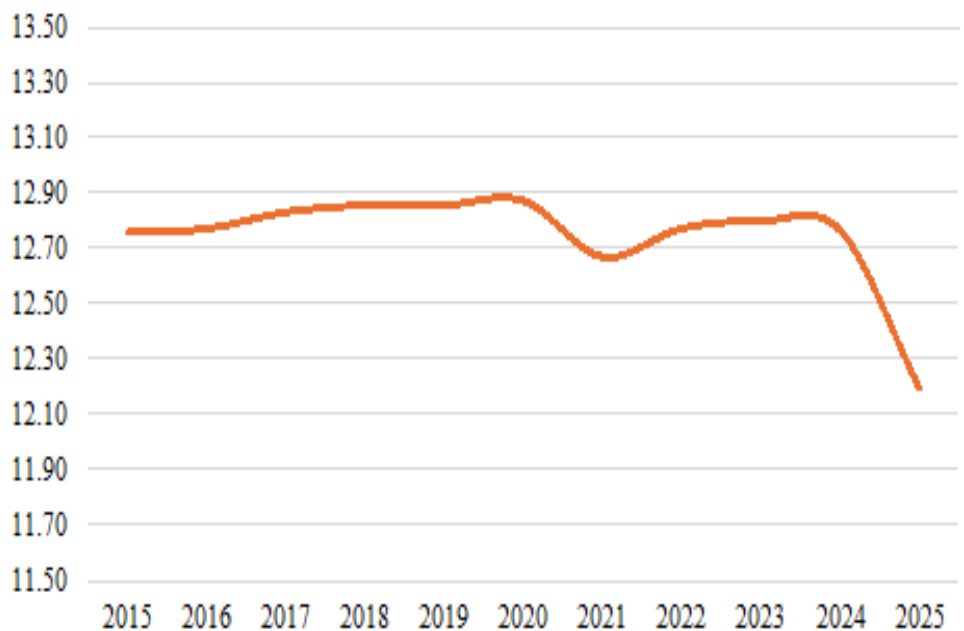
Creating a realistic spending limit is the first step to budgeting. Do not let outside expectations get to you. Gifts do not have to be huge and elaborate, so do not get caught up in an unrealistic mindset. Break down your budget into categories: food, travel, gifts and any fun winter activities you may want to do. Even a rough number can give you reasonable expectations for winter spending.

Make a list. Impulsive shopping is often the downfall of most students. Make a list of what you need to get and who is getting what. Avoid just walking through stores to browse; this is where impulsive decisions happen. Take your list with you and collect only the items on that list, then leave. Have backup ideas in case they do not have what you’re looking for, to avoid finding something that is significantly more money. If you see something you may want, wait 24 hours before deciding if you still want that item. You may realize that now that you are out of the store, you could live without it.

Remember, gifts are there to show someone you care. Gifts can be personalized notes, baked treats, photo collages or practical items people will use. A meaningful gift almost always matters more than a pricey one, and most friends or family members appreciate the thought more than the cost.

December does not have to be stressful. Remember, it is all about spending time with family and friends while you finish the semester strong. Focus on yourself first and what you are capable of. The holiday season can be exciting, so don’t forget to enjoy all the simple things.

Undergraduate Average Credits Per Semester



CCSU’s undergraduate credit load has fallen to a decade low as of 2025. (Source: Central’s Semi-Annual Statistical Report)

Student Highlights of the Week

By Kyle Zarnoch
Staff Writer

Q: What are you looking forward to most over break?



Chloe Lacaden - Freshman

Hannah Vazquez - Freshman

“Over the break I’m planning on going ice skating with friends, watching movies with them as well, possibly a sleepover as well and then like spending time with my family as well.”

“The one thing I’m looking very much forward to over break would definitely be going to Florida to go visit my family. I do it almost every year, and it’s like the one thing I’m really excited for.”



Caden Dufort - Junior

“Definitely going back home to Maine and seeing my dog, I don’t get to see her much often. And also seeing my family and friends, most that I didn’t get to see at Thanksgiving.”



John Phillipopkos - Senior

“I can’t wait to go out with my friends and party. I miss the energy of being home in the great state of New Jersey.”

International Continued From Page 1

the most while studying abroad.

“I love to travel and I was able to see a lot of this beautiful country and feel like it’s been a part of my personal growth and I’ve gone to spaces outside of my comfort zone,” he said.

Huh is an exchange student from the Jeonbuk National University in South Korea, studying English.

“When I moved to the U.S. alone, the biggest thing I learned was how to enjoy life by myself,” she said.

Embracing the culture shock and doing small things like trying new food spots or going shopping in a new place is all part of the exchange experience.

“They were very small things, but they made me feel more confident and independent,” Huh said.

“I also traveled with friends later to places like New York, Niagara Falls, Boston and Miami. Traveling during the semester showed me how big the world is and how much you can learn by stepping out of your comfort zone.”

Huh gave advice on how to make the most out of the study abroad experience.

“Don’t be afraid to try things alone. Just go out there, explore, talk to people and let the experiences come to you,” She said.



Yourim Huh exploring the illustrious NYC; **Yourim Huh**

SPORTS

Poster Continued From Page 1

shooting, along with five rebounds and four blocks. Senior guard Melo Sanchez added 17 points, two rebounds and three assists.

The Blue Devils shot 38-for-62 (.613) overall, 7-of-16 (.438) from 3-point range and 25-for-33 (.758) at the line. The Pioneers went 34-for-67 from the field, 13-for-30 from deep and an almost perfect 25-for-26 at the free-throw line.

Central and Sacred Heart entered Monday night’s nonconference matchup coming off wins and looking to keep their momentum going. The Blue Devils were fresh off a convincing 67-54 road victory over Rutgers on Nov. 21 for their second win over a power-conference team this month after beating Boston College on Nov. 11. That same night, SHU picked up a 79-66 home win over Holy Cross.

The first half was a back-and-forth affair, featuring multiple lead changes, and neither team was able to create real separation. Both sides stayed within four points until the final minutes, when Central finally began to pull ahead. A fast-break dunk off a steal by sophomore forward Daniel James pushed the Blue Devils’ lead to six with 23 seconds left, but Sacred Heart answered with a buzzer-beating 3-pointer to cut the margin to 54-51 at halftime.

Central may have entered the

break with a larger lead if not for a string of fouls that sent the Pioneers to the line throughout the half. SHU capitalized, shooting 11-for-12 at the stripe compared to Central’s 4-for-6. Even so, the Blue Devils controlled the paint, outscoring SHU 24-14 inside, while Smith poured in 21 first-half points on 8-for-11 shooting.

Central opened the second half on a 12-4 run, pushing its lead to 66-55 with 16:19 left, the largest gap of the night. But a pair of costly technical fouls kept the Blue Devils from creating an even bigger cushion. Sacred Heart took advantage, responding with an 8-0 run to cut the lead to three with 14:38 remaining.

Central held the advantage until a 10-2 burst by the Pioneers turned the game on its head, giving SHU an 84-83 lead with just over four minutes left. By the 2:34 mark, Sacred Heart had stretched its advantage to 89-84, nearly putting the game out of reach for a CCSU team that hadn’t scored a field goal in roughly nine minutes.

With 28 seconds left, a hook shot from Frazier finally ended Central’s drought and cut the deficit to one. After SHU made two free throws to go up 93-90, Rodgers buried a clutch 3-pointer with nine seconds left to tie the game and send the building into an uproar.

In overtime, Sacred Heart briefly regained control, going up 98-95, but Central answered quickly. A dunk by sophomore guard James Jones and a Pioneer turnover sparked a 4-0 run that put CCSU back in front, 101-98, with 3:04 left. SHU responded with back-to-back 3s to tie the game at 106-106 with 24 seconds remaining.

With two seconds left, Rodgers found Frazier cutting to the rim, and Frazier threw down a poster dunk to seal the 108-106 win, igniting chaos inside Detrick Gymnasium.

More than 2,000 fans filled the arena on Monday, a strong turnout boosted by Central’s recent momentum. Frazier said the energy helped carry them over the top.

“It felt really good to have a crowd like that,” Frazier said. “We want to stack wins and stack good days. We just won a big game against Rutgers, so we didn’t want to come in here and be flat. We wanted to keep it going.”

With the win over Sacred Heart, Central now has four games remaining before conference play begins. The Blue Devils hit the road for their next two games, starting with Northeastern and Binghamton on Sunday, Dec. 7 and Saturday, Dec. 13, respectively. They return home to face Fairfield on Thursday, Dec. 18, in their final nonconference game.

The Recorder's 2026 World Cup Preview



The three mascots of the 2026 World Cup Maple representing Canada, Zayu representing Mexico and Clutch representing the United States; [FIFA's Official Website](#)

By **Andrew O'Sullivan & Lorenzo Gagliotta**
Staff Writer

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be one of the most anticipated editions of the tournament in its history, especially here in the United States. The U.S. will host the World Cup for the first time since 1994, along with neighboring Canada and Mexico hosting games in their largest cities.

The 2026 tournament will be the most expansive yet, with 48 total nations competing. The U.S., Canada and Mexico, as host nations, are automatically qualified, meaning 45 slots were up for grabs from countries across the world.

So, before the group-stage pots are drawn on Dec. 5, let's look back at the qualifiers to see what we missed from those who qualified and those who need a little bit more.

Unsurprisingly, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has the most slots available at 16, and most of the heavy hitters such as Germany, France, Spain and England easily made it in after winning their respective groups. A few notable nations who will be competing in the playoffs in March 2026 include Italy, Denmark and the Republic of Ireland, with Irishman Troy Parrott standing out as one of Europe's top players during their qualifiers, scoring five goals for Ireland in their qualifying group.

Norway and Scotland were among the teams who came out as a surprise packages, with Manchester City forward Erling Haaland having the highest goal count of 16 — double the most of any other player — and Scotland secured qualification through a Scott McTominay overhead kick and a Kenny McLean

half-field goal over Denmark.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) would have nine slots up for grabs across the continent, with each group being made up of six teams and four playoff spots available. Results in Africa were unexpected, such as Nigeria losing on penalties to DR Congo and Cape Verde escaping out of their group to qualify for their first World Cup. Top goal scorers included Algeria's Mohamed El Amine Amoura and Egypt's Mohamed Salah.

The Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) has three spots taken by the host nations. The three spots remaining in CONCACAF were taken by Panama, Haiti and Curacao, the latter becoming the smallest country to ever qualify for the World Cup, with manager Dick Advocaat also being the oldest manager to make the tournament at 78. Panama returns for the first time since 2018 and Haiti since 1974.

Further south, the Confederacion Sudamericana de Futbol (CONMEBOL) features a different qualification system, where the top six teams automatically qualified for the World Cup. Unsurprisingly, the group was topped by defending champions Argentina and Ecuador, with Carlo Ancelotti's Brazil surprisingly down in fifth.

New Zealand is the only Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) representative in the tournament, taking the sole direct qualification spot. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) features eight qualifiers, with highlights including Qatar's first appearance not as a host, as well as Jordan and Uzbekistan's first appearances at all.

Regarding which teams will be the most competitive in the tour-

namment, let's find out who looks to thrive on North American soil.

Spain

They seem to be the strongest team in Europe with the right balance and are the favorite to win the whole tournament, according to Opta.

They are currently undefeated in their last 31 competitive games. With La Roja's young core of Lamine Yamal, Fermin Lopez and Nico Williams, coach Luis de la Fuente looks to count on their dominant presence if they plan to triumph in another major tournament.

Veteran Rodri excelled in the Euros, earning himself Player of the Tournament, and fellow midfielder Fabian Ruiz came off an impressive campaign. Spain and de la Fuente look to replicate the work that former manager Vicente del Bosque did in winning back-to-back major international competitions.

Although challenges could come from Germany and a dark horse in Norway, expect the Spanish to be the highest-caliber European team come next summer.

United States

To be blunt about the U.S. Men's National Team, they should be lucky that the World Cup is coming to their backyard because the team has been very unenthusiastic on the pitch for a while.

Following Gregg Berhalter's firing in September 2024, the United States Men's National Team (USMNT) hired former Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino, and it seemed as though he could be turning the team around until an embarrassing 1-0 loss to Panama knocked the stars and

stripes out of the CONCACAF Nations League in early 2025.

Couple the lacking on-pitch with some fireworks off it, they are in a very weird spot that they desperately need to fix before hosting the big dance in 2026. Christian Pulisic's amazing form in Serie A for AC Milan hasn't translated amazingly from club to country, as is the case with many of his teammates, but changes must be made in order to be even as competitive as they were in Qatar.

Cape Verde

A good amount of the World Cup's viewers in 2026 will have no idea where to place Cape Verde on a map.

The small archipelago off the coast of Africa, however, made their mark following a defensive masterclass in CAF Group D to win its way into the tournament by four points over Cameroon.

The team, managed by Pedro Leitao Brito (or Bubista, as many call him), made it to qualifying contention for the first time since 2002 and were able to make it in off the back of great performances from veteran captain Ryan Mendes and Dutch-born Dailon Livramento.

They may not go very far, but expect many Cape Verdean flags to be flown if the team plays a match at Gillette Stadium.

Japan

From the AFC, they look to go further than their round of 16 finish in previous World Cup runs, and hopes remain high under manager Hajime Moriyasu.

A team built to excel as a collective, the Samurai Blue seems to have the depth to push completely next summer with the likes of

Liverpool's Wataru Endo, Real Sociedad's Takefusa Kubo and Eintracht Frankfurt's Ritsu Doan.

Japan impressed in an international friendly in early October, winning 3-2 against five-time World Cup champions, Brazil, which further instilled the belief that they could reach new heights in their World Cup summit.

Argentina

You can't get much better than world champions, and that's exactly where they find themselves after a masterful victory in the 2022 World Cup final at the hands of Lionel Messi.

The road to winning wasn't easy. A loss to Saudi Arabia early in the tournament seemed to spell the end for the Argentines until they crawled back with crucial wins against the likes of the Netherlands and an enthralling final against France to take their third World Cup title.

Fortunately, their qualification run has been much smoother in comparison, as they steamrolled CONMEBOL to take an easy qualification spot. La Albiceleste scored the most goals, allowed the second fewest and beat second-place Ecuador by nine points overall.

All signs point to the Argentines fielding yet another competitive side in the 2026 tournament, with the main question being if the team can repeat their success in Qatar — and if homegrown legend Lionel Messi will call it quits on his international career following the tournament.

The highly anticipated draw for the 2026 World Cup pots will take place at noon Eastern on Friday, Dec. 5.

CCSU Captures Second Consecutive NEC Title, Clinches Automatic Bid into FCS Playoffs

By Andrew O'Sullivan
Staff Writer

After proving everyone wrong last year and winning the Northeast Conference as underdogs, the Blue Devils proved everyone right this season, winning the NEC as the favorite with their 35-28 victory at home over Mercyhurst on Nov. 22. They also punched their ticket to the NCAA FCS Playoffs with the win.

CCSU's Brady Olson threw for 221 yards, and added three touchdowns. Running back Elijah Howard ran for 163 yards and two touchdowns. He also added a receiving touchdown. Linebacker Jack Stoll and defensive back Eric Jackson led the team in tackles with 11 each.

Saturday's game was a must-win for Central if they were going to make the postseason, as division rivals Duquesne still had a chance of taking the NEC automatic bid.

Entering game day, Central would clinch the conference bid by beating Mercyhurst at home regardless of what would happen between Duquesne and Robert Morris University. If Central were to lose to Mercyhurst, they would need a Duquesne loss to prevent them from taking the bid.

CCSU deferred the ball to the second half to start the game. The Lakers didn't gain much on the drive and punted after only two minutes, where defensive back Brayden Hall ripped a 49-yard punt return that put CCSU in great scoring position, which they immediately capitalized on with a Howard 22-yard rushing touchdown, putting the Blue Devils on the board early.

Mercyhurst got the ball back, but their second drive mirrored their first, but Hall fumbled on his next punt return and the Lakers recovered the ball. They then rushed their way to the end zone to tie the game at seven.

Central went three-and-out to give the ball back to the Lakers, who overcame a fourth down to convert and later scored another rushing touchdown to take their first lead of the game.

Howard would again take the game into his own hands and pull a 39-yard rush to eventually put the Blue Devils into touch-down position, where he once again reached the end zone. During the drive, he eclipsed 1,000 rushing yards on the season. He became the 12th back in Central history to reach this feat and praised head coach Adam Lechtenberg for believing in him.

"I just knew I trusted Coach Letch. I knew he was a man of his word," he said. "He gave me the key to the program. [On the] first day he trusted me, and that's all I ask for as an athlete."

After a high-flying first quarter, a Mercyhurst turnover on downs gave the ball back to CCSU, who responded by punting. After getting the ball back, the Lakers' rushing attack would turn up the heat as senior running back Brian Trobel ran for a 63-yard touchdown and with the extra point, it gave Mercyhurst a 21-14 lead.

The Blue Devils put together a methodical drive highlighted by Howard and Olson to eventually close with a touchdown pass from Olson to freshman receiver Michael Trovarelli to tie the game.

Mercyhurst punted the ball back to Central, and their drive looked promising, but Olson threw an interception. He stayed with the play and tackled the defensive back before he could reach the end zone. Because of Olson's hustle, the Lakers had to settle for a

field goal, and CCSU was able to block it as the first half expired.

On the first drive of the second half, Olson and Trovarelli connected twice on the drive for big gains which resulted in a receiving touchdown for running back Donovan Marcus to take a 28-21 lead. With 2:03 remaining in the third quarter, Mercyhurst was able to tie the game with an impressive grab by receiver Taylor Wright-Rawls.

In the fourth quarter, the Lakers fumbled just a minute in and Howard caught Olson's 50th career touchdown to give the Blue Devils a lead.

It looked like Central would put the game away while already up 35-28, but a field goal attempt with just under two minutes remaining sailed wide right off the cleat of Jack Hennessey, and suddenly the game was wide open.

Mercyhurst drove down the field with almost no stoppage until they got to Central's 23-yard line, where CCSU's defense showed up in style, deflecting a crucial pass on second down until Lakers quarterback Adam Urena missed his tight end for the fourth-down conversion, sealing the victory.

On Nov. 23, the NCAA announced the bracket for the 2025 FCS Playoff field, and Central was chosen to play the Rhode Island Rams. The Rams were the same team that played Central in last year's playoffs, and the

Blue Devils look to upset their ranked opponent this time around.

Lechtenberg now has two FCS Playoff appearances in three years of coaching at Central, and he had a lot of positives to say about the team following the game.

"Our young, inexperienced team kept finding ways to win close games, and I'm really proud of them. This is a relatively new team; it was a new experience for our guys."

Lechtenberg "absolutely" agreed that a close game against a team like Mercyhurst was expected coming in but was very pleased with the result. He loved the performances he got from Howard and Olson.

"They're the two best offensive players in the league. We're very fortunate," Lechtenberg said. "They do great things every week. They continue to make plays. Just really proud of them."

Preceding the first playoff game against URI, Lechtenberg said their main goal is "to just try and figure out how to win the game" given the CAA champions' impressive season.

Howard spoke highly of his time on the team and the people who helped him succeed, both in the game and in his career.

"Man, it feels great. Coach said we had the ability and team to do it. We just had to trust the process. It's just a beautiful thing."

He spoke on their upcoming game against URI and the challenges the team could face but remained confident.

"Coach Letch said it's gonna be a close game, to the fourth quarter. We just gotta keep staying the course, keep trusting the process," he said. "At the end of the day we're trying to be the first NEC team to win a playoff game."

Like his main back Howard, Brady Olson also played in his final regular-season home game on Saturday at Arute Field.

He described his time starting at Central highly and said he was blessed and grateful for the opportunity, and that reaching 50 total career touchdowns throughout his time as a college football quarterback was a definite goal.

Olson spoke highly of Howard as well.

"He's a hell of a player, one-in-a-lifetime kind of player," he said. "He just elevates everyone around him."

Regarding the final regular season game and future playoff game, Olson would mention that although Mercyhurst is a "talented football team," URI would be a much bigger opponent, and the team will need to work hard to get a win.

Central will play Rhode Island on Nov. 29 at Meade Stadium in Kingston, R.I.



The Blue Devils posing as NEC champions; Steve McLaughlin



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From the Office to the Court: Caruso's Love Leads Her Back To a Leadership Role

By Mekhai Ouellette
Staff Writer



Pictured the furthest to the left, Kristin Caruso joins the team in hopes of creating a culture of winning;
Steve McLaughlin

When Central Connecticut State University announced Kristin Caruso as the next head coach of the women's basketball team on April 11, 2025, it marked the new chapter for the program. Caruso, who helped lead the Blue Devils to a 9-6 record as acting head coach during the 2024-25 season, officially took the reins. Under her guidance, CCSU finished third in the Northeast Conference and hosted a tournament game for the first time in 10 years.

Caruso brings a wealth of experience to the program. She has previously served as head coach at Marist College and Longwood University and was an associate head coach at the University of Hartford, where she helped the Hawks win back-to-back America East Tournament champion-

ships and their first NCAA Tournament game. She also played at UConn under coach Geno Auriemma, averaging 11.3 points per game during her collegiate career.

Reflecting on her past coaching stops, Caruso said her philosophy has evolved with experience. "I've learned that you must change your coaching style based on the kids you're coaching," she said. "It's a lot different now than it was when I first started 15 years ago. My philosophy has changed a lot — just growing up, learning more about the game and understanding the pressures student-athletes face. It's definitely changed for the better."

Her coaching style is heavily influenced by her time at UConn. "I think my intensity and passion

for the game and my love for the game come from my time at UConn." Caruso said. "I like to have relationships with my players, and I care about them both on and off the court. That's all the kind of stuff I took from when I played at UConn and coached there, and I bring it to my coaching today."

Stepping in as acting head coach midseason was a whirlwind, she recalled. "It was crazy," Caruso said. "I was working in HR, and then suddenly they told me I had practice Wednesday night and a game Thursday. I didn't know anyone's name or the plays we ran — but I did know how to coach basketball. It was like riding a bike. The second I got back on, I thought, 'Wow, I've missed this.'"

As she prepares for a rebuilding

year, Caruso is clear about the kind of team she wants to lead. "I want our team to play very hard and compete," she said. "Diving on the floor for loose balls — that's nonnegotiable. The X's and O's will be based on the talent of my players. Right now, it's a little tough because we are totally rebuilding. We lost 95% of our points from last year, so it's basically a new team. We're figuring things out and working hard, but one thing I always want is to go out and play hard and compete."

Mentorship has also played a key role in shaping Caruso's journey. "I had a middle school coach who basically helped mold my love for the game," she said. "He was disciplined, passionate, and always believed I could play college basketball. From sev-

enth grade on, he even wrote to college coaches on my behalf. Later, Coach Auriemma started recruiting me in ninth grade, so I got to know him during high school. I've been self-motivated, but between those two coaches, I learned a lot and gained a lot of knowledge that I still use today."

Her connection with the CCSU community is equally important. "The students have been great," Caruso said. "We've only had two home games, but the crowds have grown. I know our first home game was amazing — I looked across and saw a lot of students, and I think the kids felt that it was awesome. I did too. To keep their support would be incredible, and I really do appreciate it."

Looking ahead, Caruso is focused on growth and long-term goals. "I really want our team to keep growing and getting better," she said. "We're struggling right now with putting the basketball in the hole, but we want to be very competitive in the NEC. Our goal will always be, as long as I'm head coach, to get to the NCAA tournament. How long will that take? I don't know — it could happen this year, it could happen in two years — but we're going to keep striving for it and working every day to get better."

With Caruso at the helm, CCSU women's basketball enters a new era, one that will blend experience, passion, and a clear vision for success on and off the court.



CCSU's ATHLETIC SCHEDULE



Men's Basketball

December 7 – @ Northeastern at 1 PM

Women's Basketball

December 5 – @ Dartmouth at 6 PM

December 7 – vs. Vermont at 1 PM

Women's Swimming & Diving

December 5-7 – Gompei Invitational at 9 AM

December 5-6 – ECAC Winter Classic (All Day)