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Creightonian

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Nebraska reduces pay rate for youth

PARKER LUND
News Reporter

On Thursday, Feb. 5, the minimum wage for workers aged 14 to 15 was lowered from \$15 an hour to \$13.50 following the passage of Legislative Bill 258 by the Nebraska Legislature, according to Nebraska Public Media. Workers ages 16 to 19 can continue to earn a reduced minimum wage during a 90-day training period.

The change comes after a statewide minimum wage increase in 2022, when voters approved raising the wage to \$15 an hour as of Jan. 1, 2023.

NPR quoted Sen. Jane Raybould, the bill's sponsor, saying the lower wage will help businesses hire young people.

"Early work experiences teach responsibility, time management and the basics of showing up and doing the job. If we want young people to develop strong work ethic and practical skills, we have to make sure they have safe, appropriate opportunities to take those first steps into the workforce," she said.

About 24% of Creighton University's student body is from Nebraska. While the bill doesn't directly impact most students, RJ Stefka, a junior in the College of Arts and Sciences and a graduate of North Platte High School, expressed disapproval of the wage reduction.

"I think that if you are performing at the same level as the people around you, you deserve to be paid the same amount of money," Stefka said.

"I think that if you are performing at the same level as the people around you, you deserve to be paid the same amount of money."

**-RJ Stefka
College of Arts and Science
Class of 2027**

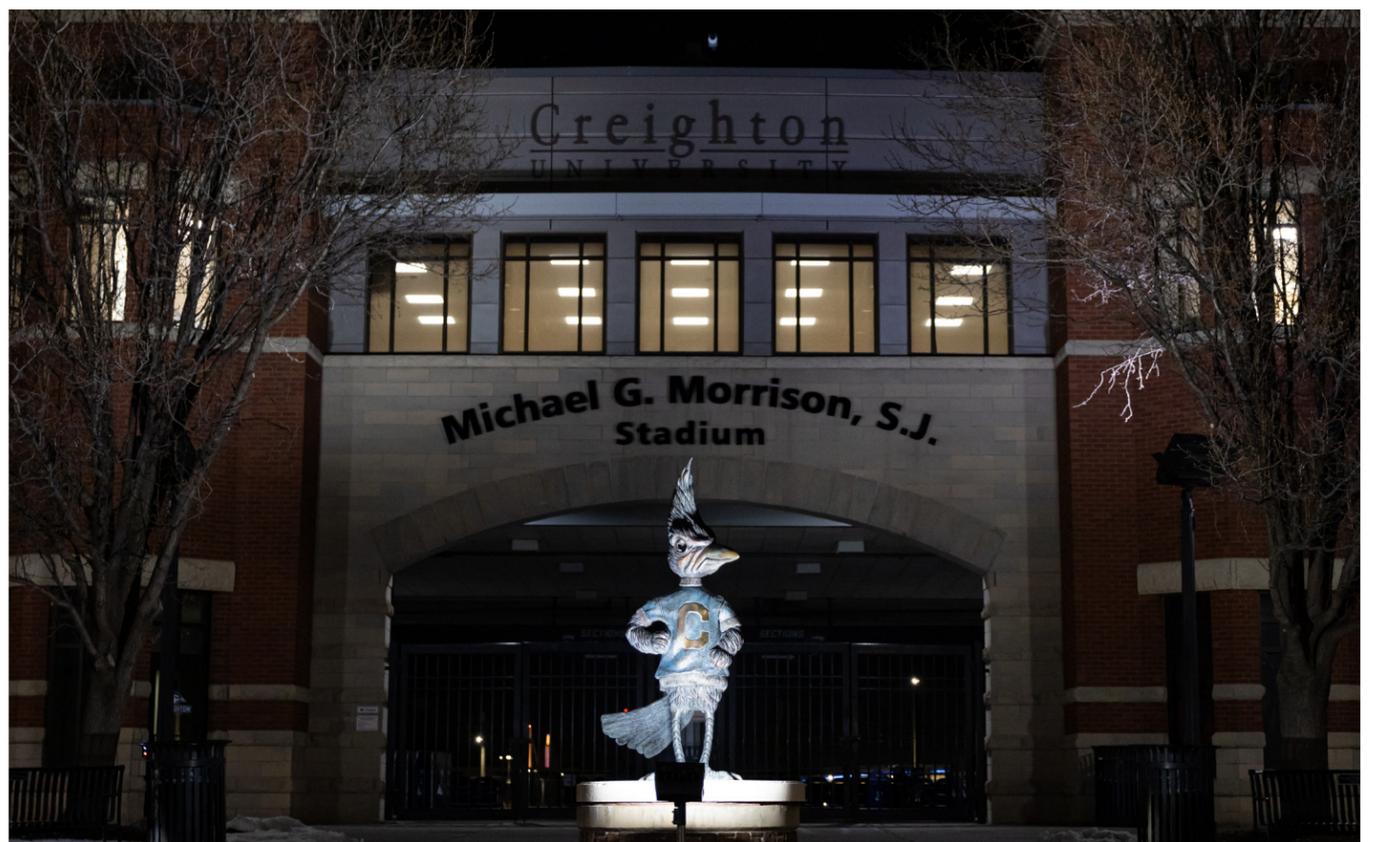
Stefka has worked extensively as a teenager, moving from a pharmacy clerk in high school to a pharmacy technician at age 18.

However, the wage adjustment is aimed at situations like those described by Sen. Stan Clouse, a bill supporter, who cited experiences with small businesses. He said owners did not want to pay high school workers minimum wage just to "come in and be told three times to empty out the trash."

LB258 is expected to take effect in July.

CU earns national honors

U.S. News & World Report places Creighton in top 50



JONAH LAGRANGE/THE CREIGHTONIAN

First-year students tap the beak of the Billy the Bluejay statue during fall move-in, a campus tradition symbolizing good luck and the start of their academic journey at Creighton University, which recently earned national recognition for undergraduate teaching and student experience.

LILIAN GARDNER
News Editor

Creighton University earned national recognition in the 2026 U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges rankings, placing No. 117 among national universities and receiving top placements for undergraduate teaching, research and first-year experiences.

The University ranked No. 39 for Best Undergraduate Teaching, No. 33 for First-Year Experiences and No. 44 for Undergraduate Research and Creative Projects. Creighton was also recognized as No. 56 among Most Innovative Schools, reflecting its continued national standing and emphasis on academic development, faculty mentorship and experiential learning.

University president the Rev. Daniel Hendrickson said the rankings reflect the academic and personal growth students experience at Creighton.

"These rankings affirm what our university community experiences every day. At Creighton, academic excellence and personal formation happen together. Students come here to grow intellectually, professionally, and personally, and that transformation unfolds in classrooms, labs, and conversations across campus," Hendrickson said in a statement.

Creighton Provost Mardell A. Wilson said the rankings also highlight the university's

Jesuit educational mission and student-centered approach.

"These acknowledgments are a testament to Creighton's distinctive Jesuit approach to education," Wilson said in a university statement.

She added that the university's approach is rooted in care for the whole student and provides meaningful guidance beyond the classroom.

"Rooted in cura personalis — care for the whole person — Creighton provides students with academic support, mentorship and meaningful experiences that shape students far beyond graduation," Wilson said.

Wilson said the rankings also reflect the university's emphasis on faculty excellence and student-focused teaching.

"Our U.S. News ranking at #39 affirms the university's investment in supporting our faculty as outstanding educators. The Center for Faculty Excellence provides guidance, resources and professional development to strengthen teaching, scholarship and service. Smaller class sizes also allow students to build meaningful relationships with their professors. It's special," she said.

She emphasized that these recognitions underscore Creighton's high-impact educational experiences across the undergraduate journey.

"These rankings reflect Creighton's strong academic priorities and deep loyalty to stu-

dent success by highlighting high-impact experiences at every stage of the undergraduate journey. Recognition for Undergraduate Teaching, First-Year Experiences and Undergraduate Research underscores our emphasis on engaged instruction, mentoring and experiential learning that prepare students for long-term success," Wilson said.

The provost noted that such rankings confirm what the university sees in day-to-day student engagement.

"The U.S. News and World Report Rankings serve as an external affirmation of what we at Creighton see every day: faculty who are deeply committed to their students' success and students who rise to the challenge of learning with purpose. Education here is not just about knowledge gained, but about forming leaders prepared to make a meaningful impact in the world," Wilson said.

University officials said Creighton's educational model focuses on mentorship and hands-on learning opportunities that prepare students for careers and leadership. According to university data, more than 50% of Arts and Sciences students participate in undergraduate research, and 83% of undergraduate students complete internships, research or other experiential learning opportunities.

Several undergraduate programs also received national recognition. Creighton's

TURN TO "Campus" PAGE 3

Turning Point moves into schools

Gov. Pillen announces “Club America” chapters statewide

PARKER LUND
News Reporter

Nebraska is partnering with conservative organization Turning Point USA to sponsor a chapter of Club America in every high school in the state. This was announced by Governor Jim Pillen on Feb. 10 at the governor’s mansion.

Pillen was joined with students from colleges across the state, including Emma Smith, a senior at Creighton University and the president of Turning Point’s chapter on campus.

“If you’re arguing that these organizations should be in school on the matter of marketplace of ideas, then you have closed off half the marketplace.”

-Anonymous
College of Business
Class of 2027

Smith has been the president for a year now. She’s been working on restarting the club, and as of Feb. 24, she said that the chapter at Creighton has only had one meeting, but it has helped her find her voice and a sense

of community.

“I think it’s really nice to have other students to connect with, especially on campus. Young Republicans isn’t a thing anymore ... There’s not really a club for anybody with my similar viewpoints,” Smith elaborated. She expressed hopes that the new partnership will do the same for students in high schools across the state.

Smith denied that this was political action being taken by the governor. She conceded that even though Governor Pillen is Republican, she doesn’t view this as “indoctrination,” as she described.

“I don’t really think [that] at all. I mean, it’s your free will, you’re free to join this as an extra club, just like Young Republicans or Young Democrats ... it’s not something that is forced upon you.”

The same view, that this motion was not politically motivated, was echoed by the governor and Nebraska Attorney General Mike Hilgers at the announcement.

“This is the antidote to poison in our culture. It is young people, people of all ages who are approaching issues – not with violence and not with hate and not with yelling or disruption – they’re approaching it based out of love and joy and courage in talking about the things they believe in, using free speech in this constitutional structure that we’ve been gifted by generations before us,” Hilgers was quoted, according to a press release from the office of the governor.

But not everyone at Creighton agrees that the partnership between Turning Point USA and the Nebraska Governor is completely apolitical.

“...it’s your free will, you’re free to join this as an extra club, just like Young Republicans or Young Democrats... it’s not something that is forced upon you.”

-Emma Smith
College of Arts and Science
Class of 2026

A junior economics student at Creighton who wished to remain anonymous was asked about their political experience at the Omaha high school they attended.

“I went to a private school. We were allowed to do a lot more in terms of social work and political work [since we] were a Catholic school, specifically a Jesuit one, we operate on the same principles [as] Creighton does. We were political non-partisan though,” they explained. “[My school] did a good job at describing value systems and asking you to decide which you align with.”

But even if that’s the explicit goal of the

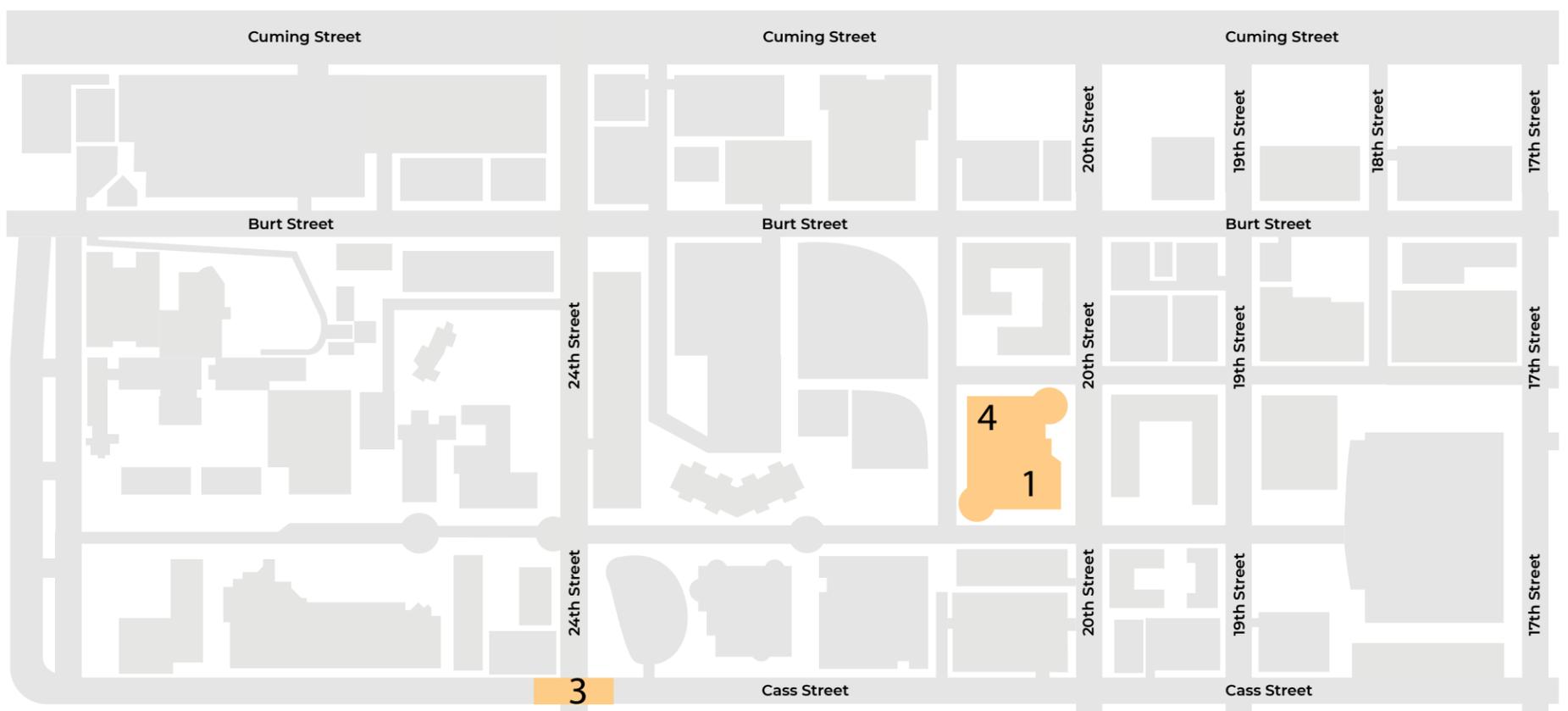
partnership between Turning Point USA and Nebraska, for this student, that’s not enough. In their opinion, a partnership between Turning Point, a “famously conservative” organization, and Nebraska would qualify as endorsement. They disagreed with the notion that it was simply for the promotion of free speech.

“If you’re arguing that these organizations should be in school on the matter of marketplace of ideas, then you have closed off half the marketplace,” they said, again alluding to Turning Point’s conservative values.

They argued that the state should push for an alternative “left-leaning” sponsored club to absolve the state of political indoctrination, or simply not partner with a political organization at all.

What exactly the state’s role in this partnership is, is unclear, because Pillen refused to take any questions at the announcement, according to KMTV.

Nick Cocca, the Club America enterprise director, said that state funding is not part of the partnership between the organization and Nebraska, according to Nebraska Public Media. However, schools who deny students from starting a chapter will face consequences, even if those consequences have not been outlined.



Weekly Campus Safety Report

This is a selection of incidents chosen by the Editor in Chief and is not a comprehensive weekly report. The full report is compiled in the Daily Crime Log which anyone can access in the Public Safety office located at 2222 Burt St.

1 February 10 - 9:23 p.m.
Public Safety and the OPD contacted a non-affiliate who appeared to be having a mental health crisis and/or under the influence of drugs.

2 February 18 - 9:27 p.m.
Pub Safe assisted a student who reported being potentially followed by an unidentified individual over the course of several days, both on and off campus. At the time Pub Safe was informed, an OPD report had already been filed. (Not Pictured)

3 February 19 - 9:39 a.m.
A non-affiliated couple was reported arguing in the area of 24th and Cass St. The male party punched the female party in the face. OPD responded and the male party was arrested.

4 February 21 - 4:30 p.m.
Public Safety responded to the Harper Center in response to a non-affiliated male who was following female students and entered the women’s restrooms. Individual was issued a Notice of Trespass.

Creightonian

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CU alumnus to lead archdiocese

Pope appoints James R. Golka Denver's new archbishop

Grand Island native and Colorado Springs bishop steps into new role.

ELIZABETH JONES
News Reporter

Next month, a new archbishop of Denver will be installed — he's a Creighton University graduate and a Nebraska native.

The Holy See announced earlier this month that Pope Leo XIV accepted the retirement request of the Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Denver's current archbishop, and his successor will be the Rev. James R. Golka, who is currently the bishop of the Diocese of Colorado Springs.

He has served as the bishop of Colorado

Spring since he was appointed by the late Pope Francis in 2021.

Born and raised in Grand Island, Golka attended Creighton after graduating from Grand Island Central Catholic High School. In 1989 he earned degrees in philosophy and theology from the university, according to an article on the Archdiocese of Denver's website.

Following graduation, Golka brought Creighton's Jesuit values into the early part of his ministry. He worked as a Jesuit lay volunteer for the Native American Missions in South Dakota from 1989 to 1990, according to the Diocese of Colorado Springs' website.

He then went on to enter the St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota, eventually earning both a Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Sacramental Theology. In 1994 he returned to Nebraska and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Grand Island.

According to the Archdiocese of Denver's article, Golka, who is fluent in Spanish, has

spent his time in Colorado Springs working to increase the involvement and representation of Hispanic Catholics in the diocese. Last year, he created the first shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the diocese's patroness.

Additionally, he is a member of the Board of Directors of Cross Catholic Outreach, serves as episcopal moderator of the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference and has worked with Catholic stewardship organizations.

"Bishop Golka has worked with national consultants to better help parishes develop stewardship as a way of life," the Diocese of Colorado Springs' website says. "He has offered numerous retreats across the country, preaching the blessings of ordering our lives in recognition that all we are and all we have is a gift from God."

Some Creighton students from Colorado, who are familiar with Golka, have seen his dedication to stewardship through his care

for others.

"He speaks fervently about the dignity of women, and works to uphold the sanctity of all, especially the poor," Jake Limb, a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences from Colorado Springs, said about Golka.

During a solemn mass on March 25, Golka will be installed as the sixth archbishop of the Archdiocese of Denver.

"As we look to the future, I ask you to join me in prayerful support for my brother bishop whom the Lord has called to shepherd this archdiocese: Archbishop-designate James R. Golka," a thank you letter from Aquila said. "May he be strengthened by your prayers, encouraged by your collaboration and sustained by the grace of the office he will receive. Welcome him with open hearts, confident that Christ himself remains the ultimate Shepherd of the Church."

As a Creighton alumnus, Golka is part of the growing list of the university's graduates in Catholic leadership.

Campus shines in national rankings

Continued from Page 1

College of Nursing ranked No. 40 nationally, placing it among the country's top undergraduate nursing programs. In the Heider College of Business, undergraduate specialties in analytics, accounting and finance ranked No. 14, No. 17 and No. 18, respectively.

Hendrickson said the university continues to invest in academic programs and campus development to strengthen student opportunities.

"We are building on our Jesuit, Catholic foundation with great intention and a focus on the future. Our campus is undergoing one of its most dynamic updates in decades, and with new spaces and programs connecting disciplines, sparking collaboration, and expanding opportunities for hands-on learning and research, we are deepening and person-

alizing the undergraduate experience," Hendrickson said.

Faculty mentorship remains central to Creighton's academic environment, with professors working closely with students both in and outside the classroom.

"Faculty are the driving force behind Creighton's strength in teaching. Our professors are respected scholars and devoted mentors who invest deeply in our students' success. They know their students by name and what motivates them. They collaborate on innovative research, open doors to internships and experiential learning, and challenge them to use their talents in service of the greater good," Hendrickson said.

Students say those relationships contribute significantly to their academic experience. Jimmy Jimerson, a sophomore in the College of Arts and Sciences, said smaller class sizes

allow professors to provide individualized support.

"I guess it's nice that the school is small enough the teachers actually know your name and can give you 1 v. 1 help, and it feels like the professors care about students on an individual level," Jimerson said.

Hendrickson said this individualized approach reflects Creighton's broader mission to support students academically and personally.

"I believe that as students experience what it means to engage meaningfully with a Jesuit education, they find a place where they belong. That individualized attention is central to who we are, and in a world defined by rapid change, that formation matters more than ever. Our graduates leave not only with professional competency, but as critical-thinkers, innovators, and leaders," Hendrickson said.

While national rankings provide external recognition, Hendrickson emphasized that the university's primary focus remains on student growth and development.

"We exist for our students. Recognition like this is encouraging, and it reflects a growing national awareness of what makes Creighton distinctive. However, what matters most is that every person here is supported and encouraged to step out of their comfort zone so that when they graduate, they are prepared to serve others and live meaningful lives," Hendrickson said.

University officials said the rankings reflect Creighton's continued commitment to academic excellence, mentorship and preparing students to make meaningful contributions in their professions and communities.

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CU welcomes Lunar New Year



DAWN NGUYEN/THE CREIGHTONIAN

The Creighton Intercultural Center honored tradition through their Lunar New Year celebration, hosting cultural dancers, martial arts exhibitions, food, and ringing in the Year of the Fire Horse.

ELIZABETH JONES Scene Reporter

Creighton University kicked off the Lunar New Year with a fun-and-food-filled celebration hosted by the Creighton Intercultural Center (CIC) to honor the Year of the Horse and uplift Asian cultures with traditional dances, a meal and education.

“Lunar New Year is one of the most important festivals in a lot of Asian countries, celebrated with family, reunions, feasts, fireworks. ... I love being able to amplify the stories of all of the students and their cultures and their identities,” Mario Alejandro, the CIC’s director, said at Saturday’s event in the Skutt Student Center Ballroom.

The lively celebration was attended by both members of the Creighton community and the broader Omaha community, and attendees shared the sentiment that amplifying all the students’ cultures is important.

“I was really curious just to learn more about the Asian culture as coming from [that] background ... and I really do just appreciate the way that Creighton does represent all different cultures,” Kara Crepeau, a sophomore in the Heider College of Business, said. “I think it’s very important just because Creighton has students that come from all across the United States and even globally, so having each culture be represented is cool. Also, we’re able to see different cultures. If

someone isn’t from the Asian culture, they’re able to learn more about it.”

The evening featured several cultural performances from various organizations in Nebraska.

The first was a lion dance, where costumed performers danced through the audience, posing for pictures and dancing with lion-esque movements. One of the “lions” even leapt onto and then off of a platform made from red benches. The lion dance is said to ward off evil, promote prosperity and luck, symbolize power and vitality and celebrate community and identity, according to CIC signage at the event.

The lion dance was followed by a performance from a Lincoln-based Vietnamese dance troupe, the Pink Ladies.

“The song that they’re going to perform is talking about best wishes for everyone during Lunar New Year, how beautiful spring in Vietnam is and all the many flowers and happiness [in the celebration]. This song serves as an invitation for you to ... experience the beauty of Vietnam,” Alejandro said when he introduced the troupe.

The dancers wore beautiful pink, white and blue dresses and danced with pink fans shaped like flower petals.

Next, the Omaha Kung Fu Academy demonstrated some of their techniques and discussed applications of those techniques. Then a Karen dance group showcased a bamboo dance. Holding the flag of the Karen Na-

tional Union, dancers moved in and out of a bamboo grid. The bamboo was rhythmically moved by performers sitting on the ground.

The last three performances were Filipino dances put on by the Filipino Heritage Foundation. Their performances included a tinkling dance, the national dance of the Philippines, and sayaw sa payong, also known as the umbrella dance. During these dances the performers moved elegantly, captivating the audience.

“The symbol of the horse represents speed, strength, independence [and] symbols of passion and ambition. The CIC and Creighton University is wishing everyone a joyful and prosperous Year of the Horse.”

**-Mario Alejandro
Director of the Creighton
Intercultural Center**

Each performance of the evening was met with loud applause and big smiles from the crowd.

“It was really cool to see all of the performers today,” Crepeau said.

While watching the performers, the event’s attendees had the opportunity to a buffet of cuisine from multiple Asian cultures. The dishes were important to the Lunar New Year celebration, including things such as longevity noodles to represent a long, healthy life; mandarin oranges to represent luck, success and prosperity; and veggie and chicken spring rolls to represent wealth.

“The food was really good,” Crepeau said. “It definitely showcases the diverse way that the different Asian cultures [eat and celebrate], and it was cool to try them out.”

Attendees had the opportunity to continue eating, participate in trivia, mingle with each other and learn more from the kung fu academy, who displayed some of their weapons at a table, after the performances concluded. There were also signs explaining the Lunar New Year traditions of China, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea and Singapore to help people learn more about how this holiday is celebrated.

Based on the lunar calendar, the Lunar New Year falls on a different day each year and follows a 12-year cycle of zodiac signs. This year is the Year of the Fire Horse.

“The symbol of the horse represents speed, strength, independence [and] symbols of passion and ambition,” Alejandro said. “The CIC and Creighton University is wishing everyone a joyful and prosperous Year of the Horse.”

Spanish club hosts Creighton Carnaval

BEHLA SCHMIDT
Assistant Scene Editor

Last Monday, Feb. 16, Creighton's Club del Español granted the opportunity for its members and students to learn more about Hispanic culture, specifically in Latin American countries, through the commemoration of the celebración del Carnaval. To cultivate a lively atmosphere, the event featured authentic treats and snacks from local Hispanic businesses such as the International Bakery and Supermercado Nuestra Familia, as well as festive music and bright decorations. Matters began with a short presentation regarding the origins of Carnaval and how it is recognized in various Hispanic countries, highlighting the ways in which indigenous and African culture have contributed to the ongoing diversity.

This was followed by an educational trivia game which allowed students to test their knowledge and embrace some friendly competition. Through these activities, participants were encouraged to engage in meaningful conversations, while also partaking in the offered festivities.

Celebración de Carnaval, otherwise known as Carnival, begins on Quinquagesima Sunday (the Sunday before Ash Wednesday) and concludes two days later, signifying the commencement of the Lenten season. Its origins can be traced back to ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilizations, which held feasts and parades to welcome the arrival of spring and honor their gods. Over time, other African and Indigenous cultures incorporated their own traditional and musical aspects, such as burning sugar cane, stick-fighting and the use of pan steel drums, to further enrich activities and honor their heritage.

As Christianity and Catholicism spread across the globe due to colonization, church authorities adapted many of these revelries to precede Lent, the forty-day period leading up to Easter, which is typically characterized by periods of fasting and various penitential practices. Such jubilant attitudes and behaviors are directly displayed on the final day of the Carnival season: Mardi Gras. Also referred to as "Fat Tuesday," these twenty-four hours are filled with grand parades, indulging in rich foods and cheery social gatherings as a means of celebration.

In Latin America, each country has developed their own traditions, incorporating regional identity and pride into their recreations to display community spirit, creativity and acknowledge national history.

Such social awareness is ultimately what Club del Español sought to promote by hosting this event.

"The Creighton Spanish club is not only a language club," explained junior Jarrod Choate, who is the current president of the club.

"We're also a cultural club, so we want to learn about Hispanic culture and how it's celebrated throughout the world ... It's also really good to bring cultural events from all different parts of the world to the Creighton campus, so that we can learn a little bit more about things or experiences that are different from our own," Choate said.

Similar sentiments were echoed by junior RJ Stefka, who recently studied abroad in the Dominican Republic, claiming that the opportunity for social and cultural engagement was one of the reasons why he decided to attend the Carnival event.

"If you see other people's cultures ... it changes your mindset to the point where you can see things from a broader perspective," he said. "I think that if you have that perspective, then you can see life a little bit more clearly, and honestly it makes me happier ..."

Though direct involvement is a great way to gain new experiences and connect with individuals of different backgrounds, it's important to remember that culture and language go hand-in-hand. Recent estimates show that under 20% of the world population speaks English as their native or second language, which rounds out to around 1.5 billion people or four out of five people. These facts are why it's essential to consider multiple sociocultural factors when interacting with strangers or traveling to new places.

Annie Sanden, the tutoring coordinator of the Spanish Club and a junior, explains that Club del Español has attempted to apply this mindset through Carnaval, other related events, and their weekly drop-in tutoring.

"Culture is very much tied with language, so that's why the Spanish club also wants to focus on cultural events as well, because language influences culture and culture influences language."

Overall, she encourages anyone who is interested to join, since "... learning a new language is about learning new things and meeting new people. So that should be, first and foremost, what you do."



JONAH LAGRANGE / THE CREIGHTONIAN

Creighton students were invited to learn about the importance of culture at "Celebración de Carnaval" through games, community, and snacks provided by Creighton's Club del Español.

February 27
Friday

Fresh Fruit Friday

1:00-2:00 PM
KFC Spine

CUASA Soul Food Dinner

6:00-7:00 PM
Skutt Ballroom

February 28
Saturday

Traditions: Breakfast Culinary Tour

10:00 AM-12:00 PM
CSU Program Board

March 1
Sunday

Phonathon Daily Calling

1:00-4:00 PM
Old Gym

Spring Swing

5:00-6:00 PM
Skutt 105

March 2
Monday

Creighton in Common: Wellness Painting

6:00-8:00 PM
Skutt 105

Creighton Film Club Movie Discussion

7:30-8:30 PM
Harper 3006E

March 3
Tuesday

Phonathon Daily Calling

6:00-9:00 PM
Old Gym

March 4
Wednesday

Midterms Study Break

12:00-3:00 PM
Reinert Memorial Alumni Library

Wednesdays After Class (WAC)

1:30-3:30 PM
Skutt Student Center

Drop-in Spanish Tutoring

5:00-6:00 PM
Hitchcock 108

Entrepreneurship Club General Meeting

5:30-6:30 PM
Harper 2079

March 5
Thursday

Survivor's Circle Support Group

2:00-3:00 PM
VIP Center Rise Room

Late Night: Movie Night

7:00-9:00 PM
Skutt Stairs

It takes a villager

CECE SLADOVNIK
Assistant Opinion Editor

“Everyone wants a village, but no one wants to be a villager.” I first heard this saying on comedian Caleb Hearon’s podcast a few months ago. It describes the phenomenon of people advocating for an ideal organized situation but not taking the small steps to actually bring it to fruition. He was saying it as a punch line, but even after finishing the episode, I couldn’t get this idea out of my head.

It is very important to be informed about current events and have convictions about how the world should be. However, we often carry these ideas heavily in a political context but neglect to hold them in our daily lives. Many times, we overlook the act of actually living out the values we expect from society as a whole. Creighton students are adamant about reaching out to those on the margins, the most vulnerable of our society, but won’t talk to the person sitting alone in class. They boast ideas of equity and fairness but won’t pull their weight in a group project. We love the idea of diversity, until it comes to someone speaking an opinion that is not our own. People yearn for a more compassionate world but won’t get up to help their mom with the dishes.

When did we forget our fourth-grade teacher quoting Mother Theresa’s “Do small things with great love?” When will we start realizing that we’re not going to see the change we want in the world without implementing these changes in our daily behavior?

It may sound like a hot take, but I think the reason people are unable to be villagers is because doing these small acts is supremely more difficult than championing for something big. It is easy to go online and post an infographic about the need for people in power to take accountability. What’s difficult is owning up to your friends and apologizing for something you shouldn’t have said. It’s easy to preach about boundaries but difficult to say no to the toxic friend who keeps asking for favors. Small actions are often more vulnerable, awkward and less immediately relieving. However, they are overwhelmingly more impactful and available to us every day.

Villages aren’t built on words and ideas; they’re built on the small decisions we make every day. You want to start a movement for the greater good of society? Start by giving the person next to you in the Starbucks line a compliment. Have an honest and respectful conversation with someone you disagree with and see what you can learn from them. Begin with the micro because the macro won’t be influenced without it. Start being a villager and see how strong the village can become.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PUBLIC SAFETY

One Creighton student drove off the road last Thursday, Feb. 19 during the winter storm.

Permission to unplug

ELIZABETH GRAVELINE
Opinion Editor

At a concert, the glow of screens rises before the music does. At a party, conversations pause mid-sentence as someone checks a notification. We’ve all felt it — the strange loneliness of being together. There is a claim that social media is upending our social fabric. But moral panic about technology is nothing new.

How is the issue we face today different from the problems of past generations? Even Plato considered the invention of writing to be a threat to learning and that would create forgetfulness in the soul. Long before AI chatbots, doomscrolling and even the first manufactured car, Henry David Thoreau grew tired of society and withdrew to his cabin on Walden Pond.

History suggests that blaming technology itself is too simple. A couple weeks ago, our assistant opinion editor, Cece, wrote that abandoning technology is not the answer to our problems. After all, cellphones have made us so much more productive. A smartphone’s ability to replace a camera, GPS, encyclopedias and calculator has saved energy, time and money. New inventions are more efficient — that’s why we grow to rely on them. Do you think it’s a problem that we are dependent on electric light?

Instead, it’s the trap of social media that most students detest and its tendency to discourage face-to-face contact. So how can we embrace technology but resist its addictive and dividing nature?

There’s a new trend which has some members of Gen Z seeking out forced sep-

aration from their phones. The new-age Walden Pond comes in the form of locked-up cell phones.

Phone-free opportunities are on the rise: from concerts to dance clubs, to sporting events. At phone-free events, guests lock their phones in secure pouches made by companies such as Yondr, where they cannot be used or heard until unlocked by event staff.

Some young people even participate in tech-fasts, like one at St. John’s College last year, a small liberal arts school in New Mexico. A group of students locked up their phones for a week in an effort to avoid distractions created by notifications, online games and the pull of social media. Every summer a group of Yale students take a popular writers’ retreat in France that involves four weeks with minimal access to the internet. During the tech-fast, the students at St. John’s College reported feeling more productive and connected. The writers were surprised by their creativity and ability to focus and play.

These situational changes in social norms seem to be not just welcomed, but highly sought after by Gen Z. It begs the question: if your phone is such a harm to you, why not just use it less?

Young people are addicted to their phones and they know it, but voluntary disuse is not

enough. When our social lives are on-line, it becomes much more difficult to get off-line. They don’t just want to put their phones down; they want everyone else to put their

phones down too. One of the benefits given by a phone-free event is its ability to get a whole group of people to put their phones down, together. Phone-free spaces make face-to-face connection the norm again. Community — not willpower — is the key to unplugging.

It is hard to imagine a successful phone-fast on Creighton’s campus. We are a tech-reliant campus. How would you find out about a snow day or a power outage without Creighton’s endless phone calls? How can you access your email without two-factor authentication?

However, Creighton can support students by hosting phone free spaces and opportunities to connect off-line — and students can do the same for one another. Try getting a group of friends together for a mini-tech-fast or a night out without the screens. Students long for permission to unplug. Creating a community around technology independence will be the only way to fight the addiction.



Readiness is a decision

MOLLY STARKLE
Opinion Writer

Readiness is not a feeling. It is a decision.

Throughout my life, I have had various dreams and goals. More often than not, they have been future-focused. It is easy to dream up things for the future — things that I’m not ready for now. They are conversation pieces that can be put on the back burner and dealt with later. I always had this future-focused mindset. That is, until last year.

I studied abroad in Florence, Italy, last Spring. I went alone. I was the only Creighton student, and there was not another person in the city that I knew. This was something I talked about doing all my life. Packing up, moving somewhere new, doing

it completely for myself. When I moved out of my dorm for winter break, the nature of what I was doing started to hit me. Why did I voluntarily choose to move halfway around the world with not a single familiar face? Everything was going to be new. The culture, the language, the people.

A week before my flight, I began to spiral. I was panicked and anxious, unsure of whether this was actually something I really wanted to do. No piece of me felt ready. I wasn’t ready, but I went anyway. About two weeks into my program, it clicked. There was nothing that could prepare me for what was to come, except for actually experiencing it. I was never going to be ready. I had to decide to take the risk and do it anyway.

Now, I know it’s cliché, but studying abroad is one of the best decisions I have made and led to some of the most amazing experiences life has brought me. I went para-

gliding in Switzerland, rode a tuk tuk around Portugal, hiked the Cliffs of Moher, and witnessed the Duomo bells signaling a new pope in Florence. I made new friends from all over the world, some of whom I’ve kept in close touch with since, and the once-unfamiliar city of Florence became a second home. I would not have lived any of those experiences if I waited for a feeling of readiness.

As I move forward, I have made a conscious effort to embrace this mindset. Readiness is not going to show up on our doorstep. There will never really be a right time for anything. The time is right when we make it right.

As we move forward with our lives, I invite you to consider the things you always talk about doing. If waiting on a feeling of readiness is what is keeping you back, it’s never going to come. Take those leaps regardless. Make the decision that you are ready now.

(S)no way you're driving

JONAH LAGRANGE
Photo Editor

Driving in Omaha in perfect conditions, it’s a miracle if we make it to our destination between dodging construction, potholes and other distracted drivers flying down the road. These pre-existing dangers of driving beg the question: Why add snow and ice to that potent mix in hot pursuit of a Raising Cane’s Box Combo?

Now, as a college student, I would do a lot for a delicious box combo and some entertainment, but one does not need to graduate from Creighton with a Bachelor’s degree in physics to know that the friction coefficient

of car tires on ice is far lower than that of car tires on dry concrete. In plain language, low friction = loss of control, and packed snow and ice on a road spell out a series of unfortunate events for any unsuspecting (or suspecting) students who think they can out-drive Mother Nature to the local Raising Cane’s.

Given this, it is apparently important to reinforce that students must resist the urge to venture out for non-essential reasons amidst winter storm conditions, so they won’t be hurt or killed. Many will hear this advice and think it does not apply to them through some overconfident rationalization.

The Midwestern Laundry List of Convincing Excuses to Travel that your mind (or your peers) may present you with is never-ending. One of my personal favorites: “My

car is All-Wheel Drive!” Perfect! Now all four of your tires can lose traction while you slide off the road, because physics still wins that battle for control every time. Another personal favorite: “But my tires are all-weather!” Lovely! How do they work while sliding towards another car, inundated with wet snow and ice?

Creighton students, by not succumbing to these common delusions of safety rooted in perceived invincibility, unnecessary personal injury and collisions are preventable. Next time the roads are covered in fluffy white snow, don’t let it be lost on you that your life is worth more than that of a scrumptious Cox combo and a lemonade. Stay home and stay safe, Creighton.

CU bests Butler despite injuries

LAUREN GAEDING
Sports Reporter

Creighton Women's Basketball (13-14) took down the Butler Bulldogs (9-18) on Wednesday, Feb. 18 for a well-earned 67-58 victory heading into the end of the season.

Before Wednesday's game, the Jays had faced losses against No. 1-ranked Connecticut and Villanova. Heading on the road, head coach Jim Flannery said that the team was feeling "wobbly." Things were especially amplified with "their second-leading scorer" freshman Neleigh Gessert's new injury, landing her on the bench for the game.

"The way you look at injuries is it gives somebody an opportunity who maybe hasn't quite had as much of an opportunity," Flannery noted.

The small-numbered rotation of girls indeed stepped up on the court and ensured a consistent lead throughout the game. The Jays started out the game strong and headed into halftime with a 44-28 lead. The Bulldogs pushed back however, earning 15 points in the third quarter to the Jays' mere 7, tightening the gap and urging for tighter defense.

"After halftime, we didn't have the best start coming out of the third quarter, but I think we just came together as a group and were just like 'let's stay calm, composed,'" Grace Boffeli said in an interview with ESPN.

Forward Boffeli's astonishing performance led the team through with ease. She earned herself 15 points and 9 rebounds throughout the matchup.

This rightful leadership earned an all-around team victory for the girls. Only having 7 players available to take the floor, each contributed greatly. Freshman Ava Zediker finished with 13 points, sophomore Allison Heathcock with 11, freshman Norah Gessert with 9, senior Kennedy Townsend with 8 and 2 for sophomore Elizabeth Gentry.

"Grace, you see how much toughness she has and how effective she is ... Kennedy Townsend is a really good leader too. Those guys deserve a lot of credit," remarked Flannery in the same interview. "Our freshmen get a lot of credit for having the potential and making the plays that they do. You don't navigate Division I basketball as a freshman and have the success they have without good leadership."

Nearing the end of the season, the girls are adamant to make the most of it, which was highly exemplified in their performance.

"I'm so proud of my team. We have two games left, I think we are just going to embrace every opportunity and play as hard as we can because time is flying and it's almost March," Boffeli told reporters.

The Jays will head into their last home game of the season on Thursday, Feb. 26 with tipoff at 8 p.m. Following this, they will travel to Cincinnati to play Xavier at 12 p.m. on Sunday, March 1 in their last regular season game before the highly anticipated BIG EAST Conference Tournament in Uncasville, Conn.

Red Storm dominate Jays

ABBIE GALLANT
Sports Reporter

Any flame that burned bright from Creighton men's basketball's 91-84 victory over No. 5 UConn was doused quickly by a Red Storm three days later, as No. 17 St. John's dominated the Bluejays 81-52 to end a week-long road trip.

Shooting struggles and an overpowered defense returned in full force for Creighton at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 21, as an airtight St. John's defense smothered the Bluejay offense and, on the other end, the Red Storm shot 46% from the field to defeat the visitors.

St. John's command over the basketball court began early, commencing with a less-than-two-minute 8-0 run in the opening minutes.

"Their defensive versatility makes them very challenging for us with the particular roster we have at this time. Having said that, the start of the game, obviously, the last thing you want to do on the road is go down eight [to] nothing like that," McDermott said

Meanwhile, the Bluejays did not score until 17:36 showed on the clock. Picking up the first points on the Creighton side was senior guard Josh Dix, whose jumper slowed the bleeding for a moment.

The Bluejays' problems from the field weren't contained to the minutes before Dix's jump shot. In fact, Creighton went scoreless again for just under two minutes before the senior guard scored a layup in the paint again to give Creighton just its second bucket in the game.

From there, a deficit ranging between eight and 10 defined most of the remaining minutes before halftime, with the exception of the eight-and-a-half and seven-and-a-half minute marks, when Creighton managed to get to six.

These bursts were gone before they could be sustained, however, and the Red Storm delivered a killer blow at the end of the first

20 minutes, piling up an 8-0 run to end the half.

At the break, the Bluejays trailed 42-27, leaving themselves with 20 minutes to play catch-up after never finding their footing in the first half. Junior guard Fedor Zugic led the Bluejay roster with nine points. Collectively, Creighton shot just 37.04% from the field and 30% from the 3-point line.

Meanwhile, St. John's shot 51.72% from the field to make up for 16.67% from the 3-point line for a first-half offensive performance dominant in the paint and spearheaded by Zuby Ejifor. The Red Storm center led his team at the break with 13 points and two blocked shots.

When play began again in the second half, the Bluejays began on a high note, scoring the first five points thanks to a layup from Dix and a triple from senior guard Nik Graves to lessen the gap to 10, 42-32.

St. John's countered with a 2-pointer of their own before Creighton narrowed the deficit to 10 once again a minute later, at 44-34, but from that point on, the Bluejay offense went completely silent.

"Had we cut it to four or five, maybe they get a little tight, and it's a different outcome, but once they took it from 10 to 18 or 19, we had no answer," McDermott said.

The Bluejays were completely lifeless for eight minutes in the second half, with the exception of free throws. It wasn't until 7:43 remained on the clock that Dix's layup broke the sustained drought, but by that time, Creighton found itself down 69-40 with zero answers and not nearly enough time for damage control, losing 81-52.

Fronting the Red Storm offense was Ron Darling, whose 17 points, four rebounds and five assists in 28 minutes on the floor helped give St. John's the advantage.

"I think Darling's changed their team in a lot of ways the last six weeks," McDermott said. "In preparing for these games and watching film, in a lot of close games, he's making huge plays on both ends of the

floor."

Ejifor also punished the Bluejays. Though Creighton did limit the center to just six field goal attempts, Ejifor ended the game with 15 points and a 7-of-8 stat line from the charity stripe.

Even without the ball, though, McDermott felt that Ejifor's presence gave players like Oziyah Sellers (10 points), Bryce Hopkins (10 rebounds) and Dillon Mitchell (10 rebounds) more space on the floor, given the amount of effort it takes to keep the big man contained.

"We limited at least the amount of shots he [Ejifor] took today, but he's so hard to keep off the offensive glass, and he demands so much attention that he creates things for other people because of that," McDermott said.

St. John's ended the game with a 44-30 advantage on the glass and 40-20 edge in points in the paint. While four Red Storm players reached double figures, Creighton's leading scorer at halftime — Fedor Zugic with nine points — never added to his total, and no Bluejay surpassed him over the final 20 minutes.

Dix had eight points on 4-of-11 from the field and 0-of-4 from the 3-point line, while Harper scored seven points. Junior forward Jasen Green was completely suffocated, managing just two points, though the Omaha native did pick up seven rebounds.

As a team, Creighton shot 41.18% in the second half from the field and 16.67% from the 3-point line, making just six 3s the entire game.

In a game of runs and droughts, the Red Storm made the Bluejays bleed in all of them, turning two 8-0 runs sandwiching the first half and a nearly nine-minute scoring drought into a 29-point victory over Creighton.

After a mid-week matchup with DePaul, the Bluejays will next play at home for the final time against Providence for senior day on tomorrow, Feb. 28 at 4:30 p.m.

Baseball falters in California

AIDAN FLAIRTY
Sports Reporter

The Creighton Baseball team was 2-1 after winning two out of the three games in their road series with Saint Mary's College in California in their first weekend of the season. Last weekend, the Bluejays returned to Southern California to compete in the Tony Gwynn tournament, which went from Friday to Sunday for Creighton.

Creighton started their performance in this tournament with a heartbreaking 8-7 loss at the hands of the UC San Diego Tritons on Friday night. Creighton's offense showed impressive consistency in the game, putting up a run in seven different innings, but their defense struggled in the bottom of the seventh when the Tritons managed to score five of their eight runs.

In the top of the second, graduate student outfielder Teddy Deters scored a run thanks to a sacrifice fly from redshirt junior outfielder Issac Wachmann. The Tritons responded with two runs in the bottom of the second due to an RBI single from graduate student outfielder Nick Costello, followed by a sacrifice fly from junior infielder/outfielder Antony Potestio.

Creighton's consistency then allowed the Bluejays to build a lead. Senior designated hitter Nate McHugh's RBI allowed sophomore infielder Nick Venteicher to score, tying things up in the third. The Bluejays took a 3-2 lead in the fourth when graduate student first baseman Chris Baillargeon hit a solo homerun to left center. The Bluejays then expanded their lead in the fifth inning when junior catcher Connor Capece had an

RBI that scored Deters, making the score 4-2 in favor of the Bluejays.

The Tritons responded with an unearned run in the bottom of the fifth which cut Creighton's lead to 4-3. However, Creighton took advantage of an unearned run themselves in the sixth, and an RBI from Wachmann in the top of the seventh, Creighton was doubling up the Triton's with a score of 6-3 going into the stretch.

The bottom of the seventh inning is when things started to fall apart for the Bluejays. The Tritons hung five runs on the Bluejays which gave them a two-run lead going into the eighth inning at 8-6.

After a scoreless eighth inning, the Bluejays knew they had to tie or take the lead in the top of the inning to extend the game. Creighton was able to score a run when Capece had an RBI that led Deters to score, but they failed to score a tying run. The game ended with an 8-7 loss for the Bluejays, putting their record at 2-2.

The second game was played against another foe from the city of San Diego. Creighton's Saturday game was against the San Diego Toreros at 7 p.m.

The Toreros started doing their damage early. Senior catcher Jayden Lobliner hit a two-run home run in the bottom of the first inning, giving San Diego a 2-0 lead. The Toreros created significant separation in the second; they put five runs on the Bluejays, and Creighton trailed 7-0 going into the third inning. Graduate student outfielder Andrew Gauna had an RBI in the 4th, expanding San Diego's lead to 8-0.

In the top of the fifth, the Bluejays started showing life. Venteicher had a base hit

that allowed Creighton to score two runs. The Bluejays would then put on another run when Wachmann had an RBI, making things 8-3. Creighton tacked more on, as graduate student infielder Ben North's RBI double knocked in two runs, tightening the score to 8-5.

Unfortunately for the Bluejays, the Toreros scored three more runs in the bottom of the fifth inning. Creighton would never recover and lost by a final score of 15-5, dropping the Bluejays to a record of 2-3.

Creighton's third and final game of the weekend was against the Utah Utes at 1 p.m. on Sunday. In the top of the first, Capece got an RBI. The Bluejays notched two more runs after McHugh scored on a passed ball, and Baillargeon scored on a wild pitch. All of a sudden, Creighton enjoyed an early 3-0 lead.

The Utes came back with a vengeance, scoring in the second and fourth innings and stifling the Bluejay offense to make the game 3-2. The fifth inning was a struggle, as Utah scored six runs, building an 8-3 lead. The Bluejays claimed an unearned run in the seventh. In the ninth inning, Utah junior outfielder Jake Long scored off an RBI.

Utah ended up winning the game by a final score of 9-4, dropping the Bluejays to 2-4 on the season. One positive note for the Bluejays in this game was redshirt sophomore starting pitcher Eli Nissen. During the first four innings of the ballgame, Nissen only allowed two runs on four hits.

The Bluejays are back in action this afternoon against the Tarleton State Texans to begin the REV Texas Tournament. First pitch is set for 2 p.m.

The theology of the game

GRETA WALLER
Assistant Sports Editor

On Bluejay gamedays, the Jesuit residence tucked behind Creighton Hall sits quiet compared to the roar inside CHI Arena a few blocks east. Yet the Rev. Patrick Kelly, S.J., carries the sounds and questions of sport with him into his work as a theologian. His research asks why games matter and explores how play affirms human dignity.

Kelly joined Creighton this academic year as the Charles and Mary Heider Endowed Jesuit Faculty Chair. His position centers on research and writing, along with conference talks and teaching one class each semester. After years focused largely on teaching, he said he is glad to return to sustained writing and scholarship.

His interest in sport began long before academic life. Kelly grew up in Redford Township outside Detroit, playing sports on Catholic grade school teams. At Bishop Borgess High School, then the largest parochial school in Michigan, he competed in the Detroit Catholic High School League, one of the state's top high school conferences. He participated in track but spent most of his energy on football and basketball. As a running back, he earned all-Catholic honors as a junior and served as a team captain.

A few days into his senior season, Kelly broke his ankle during practice.

"I didn't even play a down my senior year, and we ended up having one of the best teams in the state," he said. "These were all my friends I'd played with since freshman year. That was the big year."

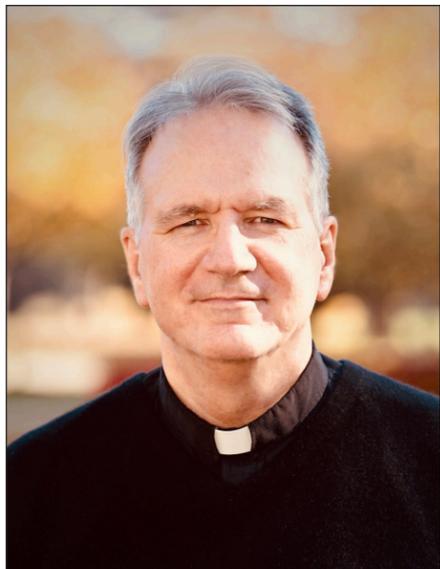
The injury kept him off the field, but the experience stayed with him. Later, when he learned the story of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who was sidelined by a cannonball wound, he felt an unexpected connection. Both moments involved sudden loss, recovery and time to reflect.

Kelly went on to play Division II football at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. He moved to free safety and returned punts, becoming one of the top punt returners in Division II. During college, his attention began to shift toward questions of belief and identity. He joined Bible studies with friends and visited Protestant services while trying to understand his Catholic background more deeply.

Originally majoring in education, Kelly felt little pull toward the field as graduation approached. He looked through the University of Detroit Mercy catalog and noticed a religious studies major. He transferred there for his final year and graduated in that discipline.

"The study of religion really hit the nail on the head for me. That was what I was looking for," Kelly said.

Detroit Mercy also introduced him to the



the Rev. Patrick Kelly, S.J., PhD
Charles and Mary Heider Endowed
Jesuit Faculty Chair

Jesuits. Midway through that year, he joined them for a three-day retreat and experienced what Ignatian spirituality calls consolation, a deep sense of peace and rightness about a direction in life. That feeling surfaced when he considered joining the order.

"You know, I'd been playing sports! Nobody ever thought of me as someone who would [join the Jesuits], and I never thought of myself in that way," Kelly said.

He spent several years teaching and coaching at a Detroit high school, then moved east to attend Harvard Divinity School. There, he earned a master's degree in theology while doing chaplaincy work in Boston hospitals. In 1991, at the age of 31, he entered the Jesuits.

Jesuit formation begins with a novitiate that includes a 30-day silent retreat based on St. Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises. During that retreat, Kelly expected to leave athletics in the past. Instead, memories of games and teams kept surfacing in prayer.

"I thought I was putting all that sports stuff behind me, but then it ended up feeling like, 'Oh, maybe I'm called to do something in that,'" Kelly said. "And almost everything I've done as a Jesuit since then has ended up having that [sports] aspect in it."

After the novitiate, he returned to Detroit Mercy, teaching part time while working with the university's Center for the Study of Sport in Society. The unique program allowed professional athletes from Detroit teams, including the Lions and the Pistons, to finish their college degrees at reduced tuition. In return, they would do outreach with local schoolchildren.

"Part of the deal was they'd go around and talk to kids in schools about the importance of education," Kelly said.

Around that time, a fellow Jesuit, Joe Hopkins, handed Kelly a copy of "Flow" by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. The book describes the mental state of deep focus and immersion in an activity — what many people know as being "in the zone." Kelly recognized the feeling immediately from his playing days.

"That was the first time I'd read something in an academic sort of context that named what my experiences felt like," Kelly said. "Playing sports were some of the most important experiences of my life."

He also noticed parallels between flow and spiritual life.

"The elements of flow — centering of attention, union with surroundings, egolessness ... they are similar to the way people write about spiritual life," Kelly said. "I was interested in that, because spiritual consolation seemed analogous to flow."

Kelly later pursued a PhD at Claremont Graduate University in California, where Csikszentmihalyi became his mentor. His dissertation examined theology, culture and ethics through the framework of sport, and it later became a book. The work is intentionally interdisciplinary, drawing methods from social sciences and theological study to examine how sport is actually experienced.

"I just understand these disciplines as lenses," Kelly said. "In this case, we're looking at the lived experience of playing sports."

While developing the project, he began asking what a distinctly Catholic understanding of sport as culture might look like.

"I had to create my own method, in a way," he said.

He studied Catholic writings from the late medieval period and early Jesuit education, as well as from Renaissance humanist schools, where organized physical activity first entered formal education. He also examined Catholic sports traditions in the United States and connected them to theological ideas from Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Other religious traditions have sometimes treated sport cautiously or focused primarily on discipline and moral risk, but Kelly saw little work presenting a broad Catholic framework.

That holistic perspective shapes his teach-



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE REV. PATRICK KELLY, S.J.

Fr. Kelly meets Pope Leo XIV at Jubilee of Sport Audience at the Vatican in Rome in June 2025.

ing as well. He often turns to the 16th-century French humanist Michel de Montaigne's idea that education forms a whole person.

"We're not educating a body; we're not educating a soul — we're educating a person," Kelly said. "We must not split them into two."

From his desk in California, Kelly's work eventually found its way to the halls of the Vatican. While attending a conference in Spain, he learned that the head of the Church's Office of Sport had read his book. The Italian Jesuit writer Antonio Spadaro later reviewed it, and the book's Italian translation drew wider attention. Invitations followed to conferences in the United States and abroad, where he encountered leaders from international organizations including the United Nations and FIFA.

Those connections led to involvement in the Vatican's 2018 document on sport, "Giving the Best of Yourself," produced through what is now the Dicastery for Culture and Education. Kelly contributed to the document and spoke at the press conference announcing it.

"After the room breaks up, there's cameras everywhere and people speaking different languages," Kelly said of that conference. "It was really a beautiful experience of the global church."

That global perspective reflects his own teaching path. Over the years, he has taught students in Nicaragua, Seattle and Rome, which shaped how he understands sport as a shared language across cultures. He frames athletics through the teaching of Pope John Paul II, who frequently described sport as a path toward personal growth and solidarity when placed at the service of the person.

"The person doesn't exist to serve sport, but rather, sports should serve the human person," Kelly said, "basically, in their development as a whole person, including the spiritual element of life."

He argues this formation often begins with the simple experience of playing on a team.

"In the United States, a lot of young people have their first experience of community outside of the home playing on a team," Kelly said. "They learn how to develop their own skills and work together with others for a common goal. That's important."

That sense of connection appears in small ways on campus, with students wearing hometown team jerseys when their team plays. It also appears in global moments like the recent 2026 Winter Olympics. These

events show how sport is grounded in local culture while also drawing strangers into a shared experience.

"Sports are connected to place and community in a very tangible, concrete way," Kelly said. "It brings people together ... from different socioeconomic backgrounds, political affiliations [and] religious backgrounds."

Kelly relates this to anthropologist Victor Turner's idea of *communitas*, which is the intense sense of shared identity that can arise during collective rituals or major events. Sports create that same feeling among athletes and spectators alike.

"There's something special about our shared humanity that we experience around a game," Kelly said.

His 2023 book "Play, Sport, and Spirit" examines the importance of play as something inherently valuable, not merely as means to an end. Kelly is concerned that youth sports are becoming overly focused on results like scholarships or professional careers. Research shows many adolescents leave organized sports each year, often citing pressure, burnout or loss of enjoyment. Some of these trends are linked to year-round travel leagues and early specialization, which can cause overuse injuries. Ambition has its place, Kelly said, but joy often fuels lasting excellence.

"That kind of instrumental thinking is the opposite of enjoyment, or doing something for its own sake," he said. "Young people usually start playing a sport because they like it, because it's fun. If things become too instrumentalized, the play element begins to be lost."

The same principle applies to college athletes.

"People who excel in any domain, generally speaking, have a love for what they're doing," Kelly said. "That's why they push the envelope. It is important for athletes at higher levels to maintain that fire and enjoyment for what they're doing."

That love of the game isn't limited to the college level. It shows up anywhere people gather to play or watch. Sport endures because people orient their care, effort, and attention toward it. That human element is intrinsic to the experience, inseparable from the game itself.

"You can't do an 'end-run' around humanity," Kelly said.