

THE CATALYST

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Finding Flaco: Catching Flight With New York City's Favorite Owl



Photo by Jacqueline Emery.

By Suha Syed

The crisp, lightly frigid breeze of late February serenaded my senses as I drove to Central Park for a photo shoot for my friend's small business. Headed west-bound on the Long Island Expressway to the Upper East Side, Apple CarPlay interrupted my off-pitch singalong to Coldplay's greatest hits. "I'll meet you guys in front of the Conservatory Garden! Finding parking right now. See you soon!" read the text. After finding parking, I walked over to the staggering Vanderbilt Gates. I was soon embraced by my friend Nida and my fellow models. As camera equipment and peacoats were strewn across park benches and the hunt for perfect lighting began, a distraught passerby caught our attention. A red rose in her grasp, she asked in a shaky breath, "Do you know where the Flaco memorial is? For the Central Park owl?"

The question lingered in the air. "Flaco?" I echoed, unfamiliar with the name then but intrigued by the hurt in her voice. She explained that Flaco was a

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Breaking Ground at the Natural Science Building



Photo Credit: Ethan Ford

President Sams pictured at the Groundbreaking Ceremony

By: Alexia Croll & Mary Jane Hernandez

On February 5th, SUNY Old Westbury faculty, staff, and students gathered outside of the Natural Science Building to break ground for its pending renovation and expansion. The 60,000-square-foot facility was built in 1985 and has been the university's home for STEM classrooms, laboratories, and lecture halls for over 40 years. Over recent years, the building has become dilapidated, with dated facilities, classrooms, and ventilation systems, leading to student and staff relocations across campus. This has provided many

challenges for STEM students as they have undergone years of educational disruption.

SUNY Chancellor John B. King gathered alongside university President Sams, Board Chairman Meryl Tisch, and State University Construction Fund Leader Bob Haelen with hard hats and shovels in hand to commemorate his historic occasion. They dug into the grounds of the



Photo Credit: Ethan Ford

basketball court, just outside of the rear of the NSB, smiling with anticipation for what's to come for the future of the institution.

The \$200 million renovation and expansion is the first update to the building since its inception and will be one of the biggest construction projects in the institution's history. It is anticipated to be completed through 3 phases over seven years. The new facility will boast 70,000+ square feet of new labs, a campus greenhouse, collaborative spaces and faculty offices.

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John Friedman's Documentary: "Plunderer" The Life and Times of a Nazi Art Thief

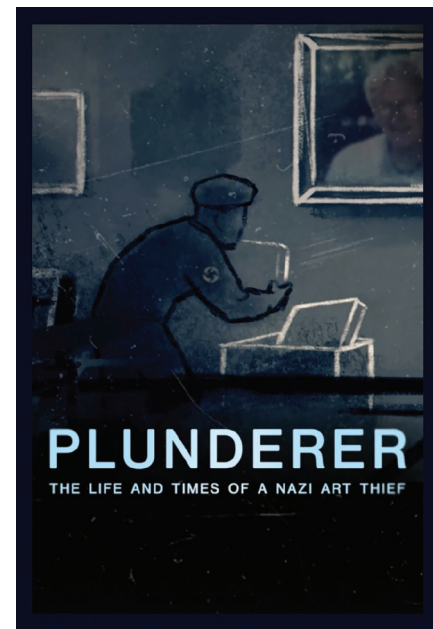


Photo Credit: PBS International

By Mary Jane Hernandez

On February 19, 2025 Professor John Friedman appeared on Fox 5 NY's Good Day New York in advance of his film's premiere on PBS channels WNET (New York City) and WLIW (Long Island). Friedman discussed his new documentary *Plunderer: The Life and Times of a Nazi Art Thief*. Friedman co-produced *Plunderer* with Hugo Macgregor and David M. Milch.

Friedman recounted the moment he met the author of the book that inspired the film, "I originally met the author of a book about Hermann Göring because Bruno Lohse, the subject of the film, was Hermann Göring's top dealer during the war." Friedman continued, "So Jonathan Petropoulos had written a book about or was working on a book about Lohse, and I went up to him and

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Letter From the Executive Editor

By Alexia Croll

Thank you to everyone who has supported, and will continue to support *the Catalyst*. This is the first and only print edition of the semester, as well as my first print edition as executive editor. I am extremely proud of the efforts that all contributors and editors have made in making this edition happen.

The Catalyst acts as a platform for student voices and a source of information for the campus community. Regarding our editorial policy, we are guided by core journalistic principles: truth, integrity, fairness, and transparency. Thank you to our executive board, including our editors Juliana Vasquez, Mary Jane Hernandez, Diana Colavita, Jackie Martinez, Quinn Dobson and Olivia Ambery.

Thank you for supporting student journalism. We hope you enjoy this edition!

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Finding Flaco: Catching Flight With New York City's Favorite Owl

By Suha Syed

Eurasian Eagle owl who had captured the hearts of New Yorkers. Born in captivity at the Central Park Zoo, Flaco had escaped and made his home in the sprawling urban wilderness of one of New York's most iconic landmarks. His majestic presence and deep orange eyes had become a beacon for bird enthusiasts, photographers, New York City natives, and curious onlookers alike.



Soaring to Storytelling

The question about Flaco stayed with me long after that day in the park. His story, both inspiring and tragic, led me to explore the broader issue of bird safety in urban environments.

To gain deeper insight into Flaco's life and legacy, I turned to my Senior Seminar professor, Dr. Jacqueline Emery. As Chair of SUNY Old Westbury's English Department and a passionate birder and wildlife photographer, she offered a wealth of knowledge about Flaco and the challenges faced by birds in urban settings. Her connection to wildlife, and especially to Flaco, runs deep.



Flaco, a Eurasian eagle-owl, first landed on Fifth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan on February 2nd, 2023, bewildered and distraught after vandals destroyed his enclosure at the Central Park Zoo.

Many feared for his safety as he

could not fly well and had never hunted before. For two weeks, Flaco evaded rescue, gradually adapting to his new-found freedom.

He eventually settled in Central Park, exploring the park's vast wilderness and even embarking on winged adventures into nearby Manhattan neighborhoods. Flaco's majestic presence, brilliant orange eyes, and resilience enchanted New Yorkers everywhere he went, making him a symbol of survival and beauty in an otherwise bustling, unforgiving metropolis.

Dr. Emery and her partner, David Lei, were captivated by Flaco from his release. "It was a very windy and cold day, February 3rd, 2023," she recalled. "I could not believe my eyes. The first thing that struck me was his size. He was huge. He had these gorgeous, deep orange eyes."

Over the course of the year, the pair observed Flaco more than 150 times, documenting his remarkable transformation as he learned how to hunt, establish territory, protect himself from mobbing birds, and adapt to the four seasons.

Their experiences inspired them to co-author *Finding Flaco: Our Year with New York City's Beloved Owl* which chronicles Flaco's incredible journey and the profound impact he had on bird enthusiasts, photographers, and everyday New Yorkers. Their narrative compares Flaco's behavior and that of other owls in the park, showcasing how he thrived despite the odds. Finding Flaco also celebrates the community that rallied around Flaco, sharing stories and artwork from his most fervent admirers.

A Feathered Farewell

Flaco's adventures ended unexpectedly on February 23rd, 2024, when the hazards of bustling urban chaos finally caught up to him. His body was discovered in a courtyard on West End Avenue.

His death, attributed to secondary rodenticide poisoning and the many risks faced by urban birds, was a devastating reminder of how challenging it is for wildlife to coexist in cities.

A memorial service for Flaco was held on March 2, 2024 beneath the oak tree where he roosted, near the 102nd Street crossing in Central Park. While he had once been caged, Flaco's final chapter was one of fierce, unrelenting freedom. Part of his wing is now preserved for scientific study at the American Museum of Natural History.

Spreading Wings at SUNY OW

On February 11th, 2025, students and faculty at SUNY Old Westbury got a special opportunity to take flight with Flaco's story through a live event hosted by the English Department and CEEC. Professor Emery and David Lei shared their photography, answered questions,

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John Friedman's Documentary: "Plunderer" The Life and Times of a Nazi Art Thief

By Mary Jane Hernandez

said this should be a film and one thing led to another." In the interview, Friedman disclosed that it took more than 10 years to make the film.

While working on the film, Friedman and his team spoke to over 50 people in seven countries, including "perpetrators, investigators, victims, and art dealers. This is a detective story, an international detective story. As the Germans were not only the greatest mass murderers in history, they were the greatest art thieves in history."

The film explores what happened during the war and what happened after the war, which in general is believed not to be commonly studied in history. Friedman stated, "What's been happening after the war is that Bruno Lohse was able to come to the United States. At first he was banned from coming to the United States and then he dealt with art dealers, galleries, museums in the United States so the story is about the art world, which is like the drug world and the arms world, Friedman continued, "it is one of the only international worlds that is not regulated."

Many Jewish families lost valuable art after the war. This is due to art dealers and lack of regulation. Friedman stated how the families are being impacted by this, "Don't forget that this art is very valuable. Bruno Lohse, himself the subject of our film, when he died had about 47 great works of art and the value was in the tens if not in the hundreds of millions

of dollars." Not only is this art valued at millions of dollars but they tell stories that have been erased. There was no paper trail or evidence of theft or even of the art's existence.

Families have lost art during the war due to Lohse. Friedman said, "museums and individuals and others obviously want the money, but for the families, the Jewish families whose art was stolen from them, it's not just the money; it's the memory." For many of these families, this stolen art is the only thing connecting them to what has been erased. Now in the 21st century, their history is still threatened, making the art even more valuable than ever. They're looking back at their past, trying to regain their memories and their childhood experiences. This stolen art is more than just property—it's a vital connection to a lost heritage, a tangible piece of memory that families are still fighting to reclaim.

Here is a description of the film that can be found on PBS.org, "Historian Jonathan Petropoulos investigates former Nazi art dealer Bruno Lohse's role in post-war America. Lohse established relationships with curators at some of the nation's most important cultural institutions and became an invisible hand, dealing in looted art – even as the families of the original owners pursued the restitution of works rightfully theirs." There are a total of two episodes available now.

and recounted their heartfelt experiences birding in New York City. It was an emotional tribute to Flaco and a call to action for environmental awareness and protection.



A Caw to Action

Flaco's story didn't just ruffle feathers- it sparked change. Two laws have since been renamed in his honor, includ-

ing The Flaco Act (Feathered Lives Also Count), which advocates for bird safe building practices.

Want to help protect birds like Flaco? You can:

Use the dBird app (<https://dbird.org>) to report collisions.

- Learn more about bird-safe design (<https://nycbirdalliance.org/our-work/conservation/project-safe-flight/bird-friendly-building-design>).

- Support the Audubon Society (<https://www.audubon.org>) and get involved in conservation work.

- Visit Sweetbriar Nature Center at 62 Eckernkamp Drive, Smithtown, NY 11787. Call (631) 979-6344 to learn more. It's free to visit, and you'll meet birds like Diego the kestrel, Nugget the screech owl, and Stitch the red-tailed hawk, all feathered ambassadors for wildlife.

Be sure to get your talons into Finding Flaco: Our Year with New York City's Beloved Owl. Let Flaco's legacy take flight in your heart, and may we all work to ensure our skies remain safe for the winged wonders who champion the heavens above.

Dr. Danielle Lee: Director of the Social & Environmental Justice Institute

By Alexia Croll

Dr. Danielle Lee currently holds the title of Director of Old Westbury's Social and Environmental Justice Institute. She is also the Associate Dean for Academic Institutes & Programs, as well as an associate professor of the English department. As an Old Westbury Alumna, she recounts her journey from undergrad to graduate school, fostering her inquisition and later specialization in pre-modern Critical Race studies. This would prompt her to become the illuminant of social justice that now radiates throughout the university's Black Studies Center.

A former E.O.P. student, Dr. Lee grad-



Photo Credit: Alexia Croll

uated from the institution in May of 2010 with a bachelor's in English and Multicultural Literature. "It took me 20 years to get my bachelor's," Lee stated. She says her path was "non-traditional" and pursued a career in publishing for a few years before returning to finish undergrad. She was able to get into a master's program, then later a PhD program at St. John's University, a feat she never believed was possible. "As I was finishing up my degree here, two of my English professors called a meeting with me. I thought I was in trouble, I didn't know what it was about. Then they said to me, 'we think you need to go for your PhD, for your doctorate', and I argued with them, 'I'm not smart enough'." She thanks her professors for challenging her doubt and pushing her to achieve more. "It took two people to unlock me... if I could go back to myself at that time, I would hug myself, and I would say, 'Stop being stupid'."

Her work in graduate school focused on the ways in which race is constructed, depicted, and represented in the early modern period. She began with studies of Shakespeare, specifically on one of his last plays, *The Tempest*. This piece of literature cultivated her interests into the African slave trade, as the play served as an allegory for imperialism. "My work, at least for my dissertation, was on tracking the trajectory of black monstrosity." She had studied the fetishization of the black body in early travel narratives of voyages to Africa, carefully dissecting the lan-

guage used to describe the Ethiopian people, as merely a "head" or "foot". Recognizing the lack of humanity used to describe the African peoples, she would later go on to indulge herself in the works of Frederick Douglass, and pre-colonial black figures. She returned to teaching at Old Westbury in 2013, then became a full time professor in 2015.

At the time of her graduation, Dr. Lee was chosen to be a part of the documentary, "We Press On: New York State Celebrates the Legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.," as she had participated in the inaugural cohort of the SUNY's Black Leadership Institute. The documentary invited interviewees to speak on Dr. King's leadership and its impact on the current social climate. "I'm only in about three seconds after an hour and a half interview, but those three seconds were special." She explains how her involvement in the documentary directly ties into her work in the SEJI, located on the first floor of Woodlands Hall 1. She raised the question, "What does it look like to have this institute in a dorm?" and went on to explain, "We have the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies, we have the Art Lab, which is an annex of the art gallery here, then we have the Black Studies Center. We also have the Campus Environmental Education Center... We went from, like, two or three little centers, and now we're expanding outwards."

After successfully implementing close to 60 programs last semester, Dr. Lee has launched a new SEJI Sections program. She describes the program as her "form of resistance," as current attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives have created an aura of uncertainty amongst college administrations. "DEI is very misunderstood as a term. It's very misunderstood for its intention, and it's very misunderstood for what it does." She places emphasis on the intersectionality of social justice, highlighting how integral it is in everything we do. "And that's really where the value of the program is for me, right? Because the idea is students have to participate in some form of social justice, whether it's they do a social media campaign, they write letters, whatever it is, something that really gets students immersed in doing this work." This has given both students and faculty the ability to engage in projects that may be unrelated to a particular major, but helpful in understanding issues such as scientific racism or statistical inequality.

As an educator, Lee wants students to recognize the power they hold as they continue to build, learn, and grow. She believes that a greeting or check in with a student is one way we can implement social justice on a micro scale. "As simple as that, you don't know what that one question does for a human being that's never been asked that by the people closest to them. That's social justice too." She added, "I just want students to understand they are not powerless... Powerful seems too cliché, but they're not power-

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Breaking Ground at the Natural Science Building

By: Alexia Croll & Mary Jane Hernandez

In an interview, President Sams highlighted how pivotal this renovation is for the future of the university. "The renovation and expansion of our current science facilities into a modern center of learning are crucial to our ability to continue to grow as an institution and to prepare young men and women for the positions in hospitals, laboratories, wind and chip manufacturing, public health, and more that await them." President Sams's vision for the university will ensure we foster a community in which professors and students can collaborate.

Although the renovation has taken under 5 years to plan and execute, students can expect a change for programs like CSTEP and OW STEAM that cater and foster projects and research to stem majors and faculty. Sams stated, "It's our stake in the ground to become the national leader at the intersection of diversity and stem. We want to be the place known across the nation, where we provide access and tremendous opportunity within a stem framework for diverse students across the nation. For me, it is essential for the future and elevation of our university." This will encourage exchange students to come study in a university that has state-of-the-art laboratories and classrooms for immersive STEM programs.

Here are the phases according to the SUNY Old Westbury website. "The Natural Science Building project will be con-

structed in three phases. The first phase, moving forward with the recent groundbreaking, focuses on the replacement of outdated laboratory spaces, the relocation of the specialized research equipment and support space, and the creation of surge space. This initial step lays the groundwork for the comprehensive modernization and expansion of the building. The second phase will construct a new addition to the building to house additional space for the departments. The third phase will include the renovation of the balance of interior as well as the exterior rehabilitation of the facility." We are currently in phase one of the three phases, which are expected to take more than 7 years to be complete.

President Sams is focusing on diversity in STEM, stating that the renovation is just the first step in the university's strategic plan and vision. The university is improving its sustainability through this state funded renovation. According to the university website, "...the project will see the complete renewal of the building, which first opened in 1985, including a deep energy retrofit in keeping with SUNY's Climate and Sustainability Action Plan." This sustainability action plan secures resources to help aid sustainability efforts in New York State. This allows for more sustainability not just on campus, but on Long Island.

less. I want students to know that, and I think a lot of students that are black and brown and otherwise that are coming from the boroughs are not told that very often. And if they're going to hear it, they should hear it here." She hopes students recognize the importance of their own voice, and that they are empowered no matter what the world tells them. "I also wish that guys in your generation would learn that other people's voices are just noise. It's just noise. Even though it's hard to blast it out completely, no matter how much you turn up your music, it's still a choice. You have to choose yourself first."

When Dr. Lee reflects on the confidence that was instilled in her by her family, she feels gratitude for their wisdom and awareness. "My grandmother was a domestic and my grandfather was a butler, and they still owned property. They still traveled the world." She notes how they instilled the importance of high esteem and pride in her blackness, stating, "They were very, very, very particular about my behavior... because they were very much like, you are a black woman, you are not the 'N' word." She feels as though she would not be in the position she is today, if it were not for the guidance of her family. She understands that generations of sacrifice allowed her the privilege and comfort that she has now, but is still attuned to what it means to be privileged in society. "They

didn't raise me to come have all of this. And number one, forget where I came from. Number two, forget that there are people suffering in the world. And number three, that when I have too much, it's okay to give some away, and even when I have too little, it's still okay to give some away to somebody else, right?" Lee wants young black people to recognize the resources they have available to them.

Dr. Lee feels motivated in recognizing the progress she has made within the university. "And when this opportunity came, I was so excited about it, but I wasn't as excited as Professor Lee. I was excited as that old student from way way back. That's what I was excited as... and it was energizing to see us move in such a way where we can have not just a campus, be just a social justice campus, but we have an actual beacon now." She is grateful that the institution has granted her the support she needed to succeed, but also recognizes the difficulties that preceded her. "...here we are in 2025 and I'm in this position as a black woman, and I get to do this work, but 20 years ago, 10 years ago, longer than that, maybe it would have been very dangerous, and now it's dangerous again. So it doesn't make me love the work any less. It makes me love the work even more."

The Office of Services For Students With Disabilities Opens New Sensory Room

By Diana Colavita

Tucked away in a corner of the ground floor of the New Academic Building, among the computer labs and IT desk, is a new space designed with the needs of disabled students in mind. This is the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) Sensory Room. It is a fairly small room, but it contains a vast array of sensory experiences that can help anxious and dysregulated disabled students calm and soothe themselves.

This space was added to the resources that OSSD offers because of the obvious need for a place where disabled students dealing with an overwhelming campus, heavy course loads, and the other stressors of daily life could come and relax and recharge. Psychology major and senior, August Romeo, who is neurodivergent, shared with me over email, "I actually asked Stacey [DeFelice, the Director of Services for Students with Disabilities] in Fall 2024 about if they had any availability to rooms where I could hang out since it was my first time back on campus after a year of online classes and I was having anxiety. To my surprise, over the summer, she, Natalie [Caesar, the Accommodations Coordinator], and Aly [Membreno, OSSD student intern] had worked on a sensory space."

A visitor to the room will notice right away that the small space, about the size of a faculty office, is kept dark and quiet. The overhead fluorescent lights are rarely

on, the room is instead lit by a choice of a floor lamp with dimmer control and a light projector that displays colorful designs and can be paired with a soothing sound machine if wanted. There is a



August Romeo enjoys sitting in the swinging egg chair in the new OSSD Sensory Room.

chair and desk, with art supplies and a sand tray. But along with that more typical seating, there are bean bag chairs and an egg swing, along with weighted blankets and weighted stuffed animals for a variety of sensory and tactile experienc-

es. The shelves around the room are filled with fidget toys and there is a freezer stocked with cooling neck rings and cold gel eye and forehead packs.

In their email, Romeo told me, "I enjoy the spinning egg chair the most, and the access to art supplies and the colorful light projector." They also explained why they find the sensory space so useful: "It allows me to have a space to calm down during a meltdown or overstimulation with the feeling of privacy since before I would have to calm myself in the stairwell." Finding a quiet, private place to manage a meltdown, panic attack, or other form of dysregulation is difficult on a campus that is bustling with activity. The classrooms and hallways are full of people, the Campus Center often has a DJ playing loud music – before the sensory space existed, there were limited options for privacy and peace, the stairwells, as Romeo mentioned, and sometimes the restrooms, if those weren't also full of people. Having this space is a welcome addition for the almost six hundred students registered with OSSD.

In order to use the Sensory Room, a student must be registered with the OSSD. If you are dealing with a disability or condition that impedes a major life function, such as academics, you can reach out to Stacey DeFelice to request accommodations. Her direct number is

(516) 628-5666, her email is defelices@oldwestbury.edu, and her office is 2065 in the NAB. According to DeFelice, it doesn't have to be stereotypical things such as being a wheelchair user or blind or deaf or having a learning disability. Many students have accommodations for mental health conditions, autism spectrum disorder, neurological disorders, and chronic health conditions. Once a student is registered with OSSD, Stacey and the other staff will work with them to figure out the reasonable accommodations that the student needs to succeed as a student at Old Westbury. Along with the typical accommodation of extra time on exams at a separate location, there are a variety of others available – from Messenger Pigeon, a note-taking program, to Kurzweil, a screen-reading software. Accommodations are not limited to these options however, Stacey works with each student to figure out what accommodations will best help support them.

August Romeo is so happy with the current sensory room, that they encourage everyone to push the administration for more spaces like it. They want to let fellow students know, "Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself! Send an email to the dean of students, or President Sams about OSSD sensory space so they know that it is working and should be added to more buildings!"

OPINION

SUNY Old Westbury Has an Emergency?

By Aaliyah Laldee

At SUNY Old Westbury, ensuring student safety should be a top priority, especially given the campus's vast, wooded landscape. However, the placement of emergency call buttons designed to provide immediate assistance in case of danger or distress raises serious concerns. These critical safety devices are disproportionately concentrated near the Woodlands residence halls, leaving much of the campus, particularly the Academic Village dorms and more rural areas, without easy access to emergency assistance.

While the Woodlands Halls benefit from a relatively higher concentration of emergency buttons, the rest of campus lacks sufficient coverage. Students living in the Academic Village residence halls, for example, have significantly fewer emergency buttons in their vicinity. For example, the bus stop by Gate A is a place where most of the shuttle drop students before going on their break. However, that area is known for having no cell reception and often is vacant. In spots like this one it is extremely important to have working buttons. This discrepancy is troubling, as these students also navigate the campus late at night or in isolated areas. The lack of emergency buttons in these locations puts residents at greater risk, especially during evening hours when foot traffic is minimal.

Beyond the residential areas, emergency button placement across the academic and recreational portions of campus is also sparse. Many students

walk long distances between buildings, parking lots, and dorms, often passing through dimly lit or heavily wooded areas. Without emergency buttons strategically placed in these locations, students may find themselves in unsafe situations with no immediate way to call for help.

SUNY Old Westbury is unique in that it is surrounded by dense woods, with some parts of campus feeling particularly secluded. While this natural setting contributes to the school's peaceful atmosphere, it also increases the potential for safety concerns, such as encounters with strangers, wildlife, or medical emergencies. After an interview with Jedidah Zervos my argument was further strengthened. Jedidah, a resident student in woodlands halls is more than disappointed with the placements of the emergency buttons. He stated "The emergency buttons are too few and too far". Especially speaking from the commuters perspective. Mr. Zervos left me with a plethora of quotes, one being, "UPD should get more in safety with commuters, the campus is already poorly lit." Emergency buttons

serve as a crucial lifeline, allowing students to quickly alert campus security in case of danger. Yet, these essential devices are missing in the very places where they may be needed most.

For students who have late night classes, work shifts, or study sessions, traveling across campus in the dark can be intimidating. Without emergency buttons placed in strategic locations, such as along major walking paths, parking lots, and near bus stops, students are left vulnerable. Expanding emergency button placement to these areas would greatly enhance campus security and provide students with peace of mind.

Ryan Garcia, a commuter at SUNY Old Westbury, gave some much needed insight on his position on safety buttons. Explaining how as someone who typically goes home late the campus being poorly lit is unsettling. Not to mention the little to no emergency buttons located in the rural areas."Student safety needs to be at the forefront of the school's priorities." Garcia stated. He believes that especially for the parents who are dropping off their child that it raises some

questions as to how safe their children actually are. "Their child is left exposed and unprotected." (Garcia) Based on all the evidence and feedback from various students and some staff around campus it seems like there needs to be a change. Garcia was one of the very few to speak up on his beliefs.

Addressing this issue requires the administration to take proactive steps toward improving campus safety. Conducting an assessment of current emergency button locations and gathering student input could help identify high-risk areas in need of coverage. Additionally, increasing the number of emergency buttons throughout campus, especially in remote areas, would demonstrate a commitment to student safety. However after interviewing Morgan Russelle, an administrative assistant in the residential office for 19 years, she stated that she's always felt very safe on campus. She believes that more button placements can be beneficial in an easily accessible area. "Here at Reslife we may not be privy to everything, however we have no major concerns." The rest of the interview would later be off the record.

SUNY Old Westbury's large, wooded campus requires a security infrastructure that meets the needs of all students, not just those in select residential areas. Expanding emergency button placement is a necessary step toward creating a safer environment for everyone.



Photo Credit: Aaliyah Laldee

WGSS Center Celebrates Audre Lorde's Birthday

By Diana Colavita

On Tuesday, February 18th, the SUNY Old Westbury Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) Center held a birthday celebration for the late Audre Lorde on what would've been her 91st birthday. Lorde, who described herself as a "Black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet," was born in 1934 in Harlem to Caribbean immigrant



Photo credit: Diana Colavita

Collage by Aly Membreno

parents. During her life, she published multiple works of poetry and feminist theory from an intersectional perspective. She was also a social justice activist who worked to make the world a more just and liberatory place.

Lorde's powerful words have become part of the cultural language of racial and gender justice. Her quotes, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," "Revolution is not a one-time event," and "Your silence will

not protect you." appear on protest signs and posters throughout the world, not always with attribution. The WGSS Center celebration was a chance to get to know the woman behind the words.

While WGSS Center volunteer Alysandra Membreno shared a presentation with some details about Lorde's life and her path to poetry and intersectional activism, guests enjoyed unicorn mini-cupcakes, chosen in honor of her book of poetry titled *The Black Unicorn*.

After the presentation, guests took turns reading from the books and printouts of Lorde's words provided by the WGSS Center adviser, Dr. Jill Crocker. One reader quoted her famous passage on self-care from *A Burst of Light*, her chronicle of living with terminal liver cancer and her experiences with a racist and sexist medical system, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

Another reader shared passages from an open letter Lorde wrote to a white feminist academic, Mary Daly, addressing Daly's racism and erasure of the work of Black feminist academics. These were just two of the many examples of Lorde's unflinching ability to confront bigotry and oppression head-on.

Then, the guests were invited to collage birthday cards for Audre Lorde, using images of her, as well as her own words and other craft material. People were encouraged to "get creative" with

their cards, and many of the finished products showed that they did just that.

WGSS Center intern Ari Arquer, a senior majoring in sociology and minoring in social work, said that while she had read some of Lorde's quotes before, but she "really learned who [Lorde was] and where she came from and what she stood for" at the event. When asked if she would follow through on Dr. Crocker's directive to read more Audre Lorde on their own, she answered that she would, especially because Lorde's family was from the same home country, Grenada, as Arquer and there isn't a lot of West Indian representation among writers.

A quote that stood out to Arquer was "When we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard nor welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid, so it is better to speak." Arquer appreciated that Lorde's feminism addressed the "structural inequalities in our institu-



Photo credit: Diana Colavita



Photo credit: Diana Colavita

Powerpoint by Aly Membreno

tions" and felt that SUNY Old Westbury should do more programming honoring people who made an impact with their work, especially during Black History Month.

This birthday celebration was a fun, low-stress way to learn about an important figure in multiple movements to end oppression, focusing on her own words and experiences to get to know her as more than just quotes on whiteboards and stickers. As Audre Lorde herself said, "This is how I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."

President Sam's Strategic Plan

By Ethan E. Ford and Mary Jane Hernandez

A new and improved OW is underway! On Wednesday, March 19th, Ethan E. Ford, a Catalyst reporter, interviewed President Sams about his upcoming plans for the institution. In a bold vision for the future of SUNY Old Westbury, President Timothy Sams has unveiled a comprehensive strategic plan aimed at sustainability, innovation, and student empowerment. From expanding solar energy and launching a campus community garden to deepening medical research partnerships and fostering inclusive campus spaces, Sams envisions a campus that not only transforms lives but also leads in academic and social progress on a global scale.

Sams talked about a campus community garden organized by the university, one of many cosmetic changes made to campus. "There is a collection of people who are getting together to create a campus-based garden," Sams hopes it'll inspire more garden co-curricular events and activities on and around campus for residents and commuters.

In its almost 60 years, SUNY Old Westbury has always prided itself on its sustainability. One of the campus's youngest buildings, The New Academic building, makes a huge statement about SUNY Old Westbury's carbon footprint.

President Sams brings this to light, saying, "I want to note that the NAB

was the first building to be gold certified lead on the island. So we made a big play in the green space in the reduction of carbon footprint and sustainability when we built that building." Sams says he will continue to better the footprint of our campus community.



Photo Credit: Ethan E. Ford

Another measure made to improve the footprint on campus is the usage of solar panels around campus. President Sams said, "One of the things I'm not sure everyone is familiar with is that we have solar. We have solar in two places. We have solar in the library and the Clark Athletic Center. The Clark Center's pool is run by solar power. In the library, a

significant part of the infrastructure is based on solar power."

In efforts of improving the STEM framework and allow for lab and medical research, President Sams states he will work on the university's partnership with Northwell Medical. SUNY Old Westbury is dedicated to innovation and research, President Sams wishes to highlight the university's partnership.

The strategic plan focuses on improving all aspects of medical research, starting with student-based research. "We have been talking for well over a year. That conversation initiated around cancer research opportunities for students and as well as faculty. We expect to grow such that students see themselves in all strata of the Northwell Health industry." Sams is confident in the Public Health Major due to this partnership, stating, "I'm very impressed with our public health program, very impressed." These introduce exciting new pathways for pre-medical students to consider.

As for the campus as a community, President Sams is moving to create spaces for veterans. In Fall 2025, students and faculty can expect to see a veterans lounge for our veterans in the student union, a sensory room for students who need to relax during classes, and more, as plans are underway!

A new ritual is coming to campus for Fall 2025. Students will sign the white ring where the old 24-hour store used to be. This is meant to create a supportive community within the campus and is also a memory site for students and alumni to go back to.

Sams is confident that the university's role as a Minority-serving institution is in the heart of our community, emphasizing that our student body has found success in social mobility. "When they came here, we can document that their experience at Old Westbury gave them a great lift in terms of occupying a different strata or social rung on the ladder upon graduation." This reflects the profound role Old Westbury plays in fostering upward mobility and opening doors to new opportunities for its graduates.

In a statement to the student body, President Sams states the following: "The transformation we seek from our students is not only a personal one, it also extends by virtue of our mission...it also extends to the work that they do once they graduate from here and go back to their community." Sams continued, "Our strategic plan calls for a cosmopolitan graduate...we make a statement that our graduates will be so well learned and so well trained. That they'll have the ability to go anywhere in the world and be meaningful and impactful."

Birds of Prey Take Flight at SUNY Old Westbury

By Jackie Martinez

On March 4th, 2025, SUNY Old Westbury hosted a presentation by Sweetbriar Nature Center. It was sponsored by OW STEAM, the Honors College, CEEC, SEJI, the OW English Department, and the Environmental Sustainability and Melittology Club. The presentation consisted of the display of several live birds accompanied by interesting facts about them. The presenter, who goes by Jim, brought some birds from Sweetbriar Nature Center, as well as some birds he keeps as pets.



Photo Credit: Ethan Ford

Solo shot of Aurora, the spectacled owl

According to Jim, Sweetbriar Nature Center takes in injured animals with the intention of rehabilitating them. Although rehabilitation is ideal, some of the animals' conditions are too severe to release them back into the wild, such as Diego, an American kestrel. Diego was

stolen from his nest as a baby, a regular practice within the illegal bird trade, and he was taken into custody at the Mexican border by officials who recognized that he was being illegally sold.

Because Diego was kidnapped as a baby, he learned to be fed by humans only, which inhibited his ability to learn how to hunt for himself. He also imprinted on the staff at Sweetbriar Nature Center. All of this combined made him an unsuitable candidate for release, and he will continue to live at Sweetbriar Nature Center. Another bird that was showcased was Nugget, an eastern screech owl, who is missing an eye due to unknown reasons, and cannot be released because of this.

Jim stated that eastern screech owls like Nugget can be found all over campus, and there is allegedly one of these birds for every 5 trees on campus. Nugget had an accident during the presentation, which stirred laughter throughout the room. The last bird from Sweetbriar Nature Center was Stitch, a red-tailed hawk who has a half-amputated wing. Stitch was unfortunately hit by a car, and his eye exploded. This, along with his one and a half wings, stops him from being able to thrive in the wild.

The birds from Sweetbriar Nature Center did not seem to be big fans of humans, and they sometimes tried to bite Jim. However, Jim's pet birds took quite kindly to humans. He brought out his birds, Aria and Aurora, for people to pet (and even kiss). Aria is an Eurasian

eagle-owl, the same breed as Flaco, the owl who gained popularity for escaping the Central Park Zoo about two years ago. Some students reported that the back of Aria's neck had a pleasant, woody smell; a natural perfume of sorts. Aurora is a spectacled owl, who will be turning two years old this

July 4th. She was socialized from a very early age, as she was purchased by Jim as a baby. Jim made it clear that these birds are not easy to obtain, and he was only able to purchase them as pets because of his status as an experienced bird handler and employee at Sweetbriar Nature Center.

Jim encouraged students and faculty to visit Sweetbriar Nature Center, located in Smithtown, New York. It is free to visit, but donations are encouraged. There are a few exhibits that require an entrance fee, but none that cost more than ten dollars. There are several acres of land to roam on, as well as many different kinds of animals who live there. Should you find yourself in the area, consider paying a visit!



Jim with Stitch, the red-tailed Hawk

Photo Credit: Ethan Ford



Photo Credit: Ethan Ford

Aria, the Eurasian eagle-owl

Black Student Union Hosts "A Night in Hollywood" Met Gala

By Sam Hamilton

On Thursday February 13th, the Black Student Union hosted "A Night in Hollywood" Met Gala for the student body, an evening of unity, fashion, and fun during the heart of Black History Month. Dressed for the occasion, both under and upper-classmen were able to come together and celebrate black excellence, taking pride in each other as well as the achievements made throughout the community.

The Student Union Multipurpose



Image Credit: Sam Hamilton

Room looked a lot different, decorated in a multitude of stars over black, red, and gold drapery. Attendees could take photos in front of the cinema-esque BSU sign on the red carpet, or go for a 360 panoramic video with friends. The real festivities began with a heartfelt poem by BSU President Kayla Simone Wilson. An ode to the

importance of black history, Kayla delivered a powerful message on how black accomplishments are woven into the seams of our nation, unable to be stifled, and a reminder to continue being unapologetically proud of our roots. Following Kayla's speech was a fashion walk by Glamazon, showing off the variety of elegant outfits worn to match the gala theme. Food was served shortly after, with no shortage of good music once the dance floor was opened. I took this opportunity to interview several attendees.

"We contribute so much to society," said Elijah Black, a senior and Biology major, when I asked what black history means to him. "Whether it be culture...math....music, literature, you know, Langston Hughes [and] Octavia Butler...STEM...we wouldn't be [in] space without Katherine [Johnson]. Black history is recognizing what black people have done for the planet." Jara Gonzalez, a Psychology major, shared similar thoughts. "Black history, of course, is American history. But it's not just centered [on] Black History Month. It's the whole year,



Image Credit: Sam Hamilton

the whole decade, and everything, honestly."

The gala was one of many Black History Month events planned for February. It stands as a beacon of empowerment as Donald Trump's second presidential term has brought on a slew of executive orders. The rders have undermined Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in government positions and federally funded programs. Elijah Black, upon me asking if this function had additional impact because of current events, continued: "[...] Events like

this, especially now with the rise of fascism and white supremacy...more black hosted events like this are really important in this climate."

At the end of the night, as the music started to wind down and people took their leave into the cold, I got to talk with Kayla Simone Wilson about her thoughts on black history and her successful gala. "Black history means struggle, prevalence, success, pain. It's everything in between. I think [this gala] means a lot. We're giving a, for lack of better terms, a big F you to things trying to keep us down. This is showing people...we know what's right. We know that DEI is what keeps us interesting, it keeps us together, connected. So it's things like this that need to keep [happening]."

The BSU did a fantastic job at boosting morale in a time where it is few and far between. "We're here. Come join [the BSU], come see us," Kayla encouraged fellow Old Westbury students as we concluded our interview. "Everybody's welcome, every walk of life. Whoever wants to learn, share, laugh, love, we're here for you."

A Day of Commerce: CSLI Hosts Expo for Black-Owned Businesses

By Sam Hamilton

Last month, SUNY Old Westbury's entrepreneurial population had a chance to market their wares on Thursday, February 20th at the Power of Black Business Expo, another community strengthening event in honor of Black History Month. Hosted by the Center for Student Leadership & Involvement, Black-owned businesses were encouraged to use the opportunity to gain traction for their endeavors during common hour in the Campus Center Atrium. Students perused tables of various shops and services, ranging from clothing and jewelry to hair and nails. Two tables were able to give a brief overview of their merchandise and the experience hosting a pop-up shop on campus.

The Finest Touch (@thefinesttouch_ on Instagram) provides wig making, wig installations, closures, sew-ins and hair styling services in Brooklyn and Long Island, owned by Shylene Labardy, a

freshman and Business Administration major, and Modesty Baugh, a Public Health major and Freshman as well. Shylene mentions that the expo has been extremely helpful to the business, saying: "It brought me a lot of exposure, I definitely got a lot of followers on my Instagram, so it really helped me a lot." The Final Touch lists their prices on the aforementioned Instagram, with methods of getting in touch for bookings.

Saint Inertia (@st.inertia on Instagram) is another business that benefited from the event, owned by Nutifafa Colly, a junior majoring in Management Information Systems. His streetwear-based clothing line, he says, "takes inspo from my surroundings, what I like, my culture...just [things] interesting." He explains that the nature of the business expo has given him additional opportunities that wouldn't have been accessible with his regular marketing as the Atrium

became a hub for commerce this afternoon. The Saint Inertia Instagram boasts the eclectic designs of the shop, allowing a look into the artistic vision of its creator.

According to the Pew Research Center data from 2022, Black-owned businesses only comprise an estimated 3% of all registered businesses in the US. It is for this reason that putting a spotlight on these businesses and spending locally is an integral way of building community, an attribute that we strive to



'UDem' clothing table at the Campus Center Business Expo (@officialudem on social media)

cultivate as a school both on and off campus.

OPINION

The Mind, What a Terrible Thing to Waste

By Liselle Powder

Just the idea of the heading makes you wonder. The mind goes through so many battles. So how can the mind be free? In this life, which is getting more and more complicated, bringing the mind in line with self, body, and soul, could end in a struggle. Eating the right foods, exercising, and positive thoughts can develop a healthy mind. It's never a dull moment to keep the mind active.

There are some thoughts that trigger the mind to be vengeful or hateful. Bitterness and envy

carry a heavy weight too. There's ups and downs in keeping the mind out of trouble, it's always a push to be alert and not stressed. The mind can take you places, if you are not careful. It can take you through the open doors of blessings

and the open doors of destruction. The mind needs to be developed strongly in order to think straight, because it is constantly being attacked. The mind is the battlefield between good and evil. The way that this life is going, it's more evil than good. It is to say, waking up the mind to the things that it deserves, walking in the light of spiritual growth, gives it a breath of fresh air. Controlling anger issues, habits, and things that put the mind to the test is a task. The fight is real. It's never ending to control the positive way of life. It takes time and practice to have that peace, to surround yourself with peace. With every step of a changing day, a new theme arises, a new win, a new walk or a new solution. This urges the mindset to propel in a pathway to

success and growth. It's preparation, it's work, to keep working on the mind. Don't waste it, feed it the good food, nurture it. It sounds hard right? This world plays so much a big part, especially social media. Young minds that find the time to indulge in the things of interest. Parents have to keep a close eye on what is deemed to be safe for the young ones. Safety comes first. Protecting the mind, protecting self, will always be the number one fight. The battle intensifies, as the tug of war begins. Not only in the young minds, but the older ones too. Again the trigger to be on top of the ills of life, centering the mind to flow in peace, unity and love, can be challenging. Using different methods of meditation, prayers, self-care, doing the healthy

habits can ensure that the mind develops positively and maturely.

The journey to self is part of rebuilding, restructuring and maintaining that focus, which the mind plays a very important part. Speaking to your mind positively fuels the challenge to be better and do better. It takes every part of the anatomy to function and flow to win. There is still a chance to bring back the mind to a safe space. Always create the atmosphere to reconstruct, rebuild and transform. The renewing of the mind is just a thought away. Secure it, elevate it and look out for it. The keys are there, the tools are there, just use them. Destiny awaits.

REVIEW

A Nostalgic Journey of Sound with Selena and Benny

By Aaliyah Laldee

The Selena Gomez and Benny Blanco collaboration that the world was waiting for has finally come alive through a new nostalgic album showcasing their individual artistry in exciting and fresh

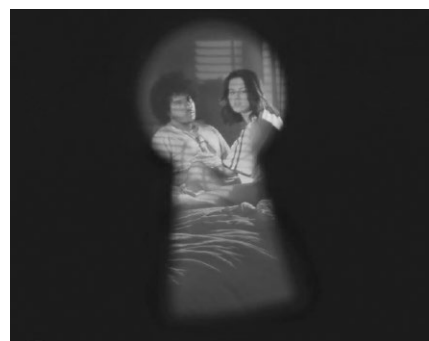


Photo Credit: Apple Music

ways. This new album "fails at keeping the wounds open" combines pop, R&B, indie undertones and serves as a time capsule transporting its listen-

ers back to late 2000s and early 80's. While at the same time pushing the boundaries into the unexplored realm of new eras and sounds.

The album consists of 19 songs all telling a story in their own way. A fan favorite thus far is 'how does it feel to be forgotten' and 'Don't take it personally'. Both songs tell significant moments that altered Selena's life. The song 'How does it feel to be forgotten' speaks of an incident where she was approached in a disrespectful manner in regards to a former partner. The lines "please don't take it personally we both know that he loves me." In an interview Selena stated how she knew fans would "assume it's about a former relationship and stated that she would make an album explaining each song"

Benny Blanco, Selena Gomez's finance best friend, helped produce and

write the album. He stated on Jay Shetty podcast, "When you're dating someone you're dating all their exs and trauma." Benny stated that when creating their album it was important to allow Selena's true and authentic emotions to be publicly displayed. It was important for him to give her a space to feel vulnerable.

Every Gomez and Blanco fan would agree that this project comes at the right time. Gomez's diehard fans grew up on her chart topping hits, while the Master Producer turned Bandera Blanco had the Midas touch with albums from Ed Sheeran, Justin Bieber, and Halsey, forever etched into our memories as timeless works. Yet this collaboration with Gomez perhaps reveals her mature sound and emotional depth unlike before.

What makes this album particularly special is the nostalgia it stirs. It galvanized emotions powerfully with nostal-

gic relief. The 'Younger and Hotter than Me' music video takes us back to the set of Wizards of Waverly Place covered in beige drapes alluding to an ending of an era. An era where she's no longer her younger self. Accepting her age as not a burden but a beautiful and transformative thing. The light and smooth instrumental bolsters lyrical themes of love, heartbreak, and growing up, tapping deep into the memory of a generation that turned into pop music not long ago.

Having come to the spotlight during the Disney era, Gomez's vocals sprinkle a feeble yet striking strength to the album like those of early 2010s pop. As they enter a new era of music, Gomez and Blanco remind us that when we can grow, the music that shapes us remains timeless.

Melvis Santa Presents: Jazz Orishas

By Alexia Croll

“My music is mine” were the opening words to Melvis Santa’s musical selections.

On March 6th in the Green Lounge of Woodlands Hall 1, the Social and Environmental Justice Institute, Art Lab, MIC and OWWR hosted a live concert. Musician Melvis Santa presented “Jazz Orishas: A Fusion of Afro-Cuban Spirituality and Jazz.”

This event was held in commemoration of the exhibition, “The Nuevo Muntu and Los Sonidos de la Nueva Atlántida” at the Art Lab of SEJI, co-curated by Zaika dos Santos and Dr. Reynaldo Anderson. The exhibition aims to bring together members of the Black Speculative Arts Movement in Latin America. The concert reflected the sounds of cumbia, samba, kawina and North American jazz, blending together each genre’s cultural echo throughout the diaspora. Santa, along with her bandmates Rashaan Carter, Marcus Gilmore, Vinicius Gomes, and Josh Evans, gave a soulful performance that accentuated the message of their music.

Melvis Santa is a Grammy-nominated vocalist, instrumentalist, composer,

and multi-disciplinary artist from Havana, Cuba. She is also an art advocate and educator, and has taught Afro-Cuban music and dance workshops at The National Jazz Museum in Harlem, NYU, CUNY Graduate Center, Yale University, and Tulane University of New Orleans, amongst others.

Her journey as a performer began when she was just four years old, and at age seven, she began playing classical piano. At age fourteen, Santa formed the women-led collective, Sexto Sentido, which was revered as “the best Cuban vocal quartet of the past 30 years” by jazz icon Chucho Valdés. She went on to become one of

the lead vocalists of Cuban Timba-Funk fusion band Interactivo, led by Roberto Carcassés. That would propel her to pursue a solo career, forming the band she leads today.

When asked about the inspiration of her music, she emphasized the impact of her rich cultural heritage on her art and performance. “The times that we’re in, it’s really a conversation between that tradition, preserving that tradition, but also making our mark.”

She reflected on the intentionality behind her music, stating, “I let the music speak for itself, but intentionally, I do want to tell a story. For so many years, there was a lot of restrictions, especially being a woman, a black



Photo Credit: Alexia Croll

woman from Latin America, there is so much that we care about, but this is a different time. The music is the perfect moment to express and to say, at least our perspective, that we are heard.”

“We all have so much to share, so much to talk, so much to bring to the table that it’s redefining how we approach music. It’s through sound, but it’s also through storytelling.” She added. She highlights how the music is a reflection of the Yoruba tradition and Afro-cubanism, which incorporates lots of percussion and trumpets, particularly over the album’s poetry selections.

Her latest album, *Jazz Orishas* is a multidimensional exploration of “rebirth and call”, inspired by the intuitive nature of women, as described on the album’s Bandcamp. Each track is originally composed and written by Santa, seamlessly blending jazz poetry with layers of vocals and piano. The album released on May 31st, 2024, is currently available on all streaming platforms.

SPORTS

Inside the NCAA: My Experience at the Student Immersion Program

By Juliana Vasquez

The NCAA annually hosts the Student Immersion Program, inviting 40 minority students from Division III institutions across the country to explore careers in coaching, athletics administration, and NCAA governance. The goal of this program is to increase diversity within intercollegiate athletics leadership, exposing student-athletes to opportunities they may have never considered before.



Photo by: Juliana Vasquez

This year, I had the privilege of attending the NCAA 2025 Convention in Nashville, Tennessee from January 14-17. Going into the experience, I wasn’t entirely sure what to expect, but from the moment I arrived, I was surrounded by an incredible cohort of student-athletes, dedicated mentors, and top professionals in collegiate athletics. Every conversation, panel, and session reinforced why I am so passionate about the future of athletics and why I want to be part of shaping that future.

Throughout the program, we attend-

ed sessions designed to educate, inspire, and prepare us for careers in sports. Workshops like the DISC Leadership Assessment, Maximizing Your Resources, and DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) in Athletics provided us with real world insights and tools to grow as future leaders. These sessions weren’t just about learning the technical aspects of the industry, they challenged us to think about the impact we want to make in athletics and how we can use our voices to bring change.

A standout moment for me was attending the Women of the Year Awards, a ceremony honoring outstanding female student-athletes for their achievements in academics, athletics, leadership, and service. As a woman in sports, seeing these incredible women being recognized for their hard work and dedication was incredibly inspiring. It reinforced my belief in the importance of representation and the impact women can have in shaping the future of athletics.

One of the biggest takeaways was realizing just how impactful Division III athletics really is. Often, as DIII athletes, it feels like we don’t get the same level of recognition as other divisions. However, being in that space surrounded by leaders who are deeply invested in advocating for the DIII student-athlete experience was empowering. It reminded me

that Division III athletics is just as meaningful, offering unique opportunities for both personal and professional growth. I also gained a new appreciation for the behind-the-scenes work that goes into advocating for student-athletes. We tend to focus so much on our sport, practices, games, training that we don’t always recognize the countless decisions being made at the administrative level that directly affect our experiences. The program gave me a clearer understanding of

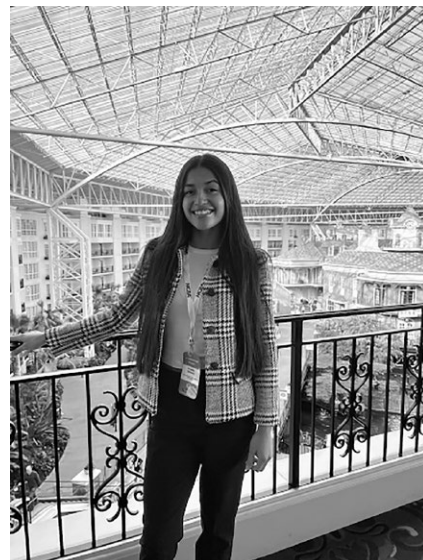


Photo by: Juliana Vasquez

Day 2 at NCAA Convention

how policies are developed, how decisions are made, and how leaders in intercollegiate athletics fight to enhance the student-athlete experience every single day.



Photo by: Juliana Vasquez

Attending the NCAA Student Immersion Program was a truly eye-opening experience. Not only did I explore potential career paths in coaching and administration, but I also gained a deeper appreciation for the dedication and effort that goes into shaping collegiate athletics. This experience reinforced my commitment to supporting student-athletes and ensuring that their voices are heard. I left feeling more inspired than ever to take on a meaningful role in the future of sports.

For any student-athlete looking to make an impact beyond competition, I highly recommend exploring opportunities like this. It’s more than just a networking event, it’s a chance to learn, grow, and be part of the ongoing evolution of collegiate athletics.

OW Athletics Hosts Inspiring Women in Sports Panel

By Juliana Vasquez

In celebration of National Girls and Women in Sports Month, Old Westbury Athletics hosted a panel on Tuesday, February 25th, during common hour in the Panther's Pad. The event was both powerful and insightful, highlighting women from various sectors of the sports industry. The panel was a unique opportunity for students and attendees to engage in meaningful conversations with professionals who have made significant contributions to athletics.

The panel brought together influential women from diverse backgrounds, each offering a wealth of experience and personal insights. They shared their journeys, discussed the challenges they've faced, and highlighted the lessons they've learned along the way, inspiring those in attendance to pursue their own careers in sports.

Gail Wasmus, a former coach at Division II New York Institute of Technology (NYIT), kicked off the panel by providing a deep dive into her decades-long coaching career. Wasmus spoke about how coaching methods have evolved over time and reflected on how the relationship between coaches and players has transformed across generations. She emphasized the importance of adapting coaching styles to meet the needs of today's athletes, and how creating positive relationships with players can enhance their growth and performance both on and off the field.

Melissa Reilly, the commissioner of the Skyline Conference, passionately discussed her career in sports administration and her path to leadership. As one of the few women in such a prominent role in collegiate athletics, Reilly shared how her experiences as a collegiate athlete prepared her for the challenges of managing a conference. Reilly also encouraged the attendees to consider leadership roles in sports, reinforcing the message that women have the power to shape the future of athletics.

Ali Castellano, one of Old Westbury's very own athletic trainers, shared her insights into the critical role athletic trainers play behind the scenes in ensuring athletes' health and performance. Castellano discussed her passion for injury prevention, rehabilitation, and empowering athletes to reach their full potential. She spoke about the growing recognition of athletic trainers as essential members of athletic teams and how her career in sports medicine allows her to make a direct impact on athletes' success by keeping them healthy and competitive.

Jerilyn Marinan, a former Division I soccer athlete and current assistant soccer coach at Old Westbury, offered her perspective on the commitment and discipline required to succeed in sports. She highlighted the unique challenges faced by women in sports and how resilience and adaptability have shaped her



career. As a coach, Marinan is passionate about helping female athletes develop both their skills and their confidence, stressing the importance of building mental toughness to succeed in athletics and life.

The panel provided an invaluable opportunity for students, faculty, and community members to hear firsthand from these trailblazing women, each of whom has navigated a different path in the sports industry. Whether aspiring to be a coach, administrator, athletic trainer, or player, attendees gained valuable insights into the many opportunities available in sports and how to navigate

the challenges of a career in athletics.

Each speaker's personal story demonstrated the significant progress women have made in athletics and the ongoing efforts needed to break barriers and expand opportunities. The event also highlighted the importance of empowering future generations of female athletes and professionals to take on leadership roles in sports. The inspiring discussions were a testament to the growth and empowerment of women in sports, leaving attendees motivated and equipped with the tools to succeed in their own careers.

Panthers Fall Short to Mount Saint Vincent in a Hard-Fought Conference Matchup

By Anthony Payamps

The Old Westbury Panthers faced a tough road test on the night of February 5th, as they traveled to Mount Saint Vincent for a 6:00 PM men's basketball conference game. The Panthers, who entered the game with a conference victory against Mount Saint Mary's, were looking to keep the momentum going against the Dolphins, but after a competitive contest, they ultimately fell short, losing 82-76. Despite their efforts, Old Westbury's turnovers and missed opportunities in the closing minutes allowed Mount Saint Vincent to secure the victory.

A Competitive Start, but the Panthers struggled to maintain momentum. The game began with Joel Ofori winning the tip-off for Old Westbury. Chris Smith quickly made his mark by hitting the first basket of the game from deep 3-point range, giving the Panthers an early lead. However, the Dolphins quickly answered, and both teams went back and forth for much of the first half. At the 7-minute mark, the game was tied at 12-12, as both teams displayed solid shooting performances.

Old Westbury struggled to keep pace towards the end half of the first period, as Mount Saint Vincent pulled ahead. With just under 3 minutes remaining in the half, the Dolphins had extended their lead to 41-31, with Old West-

bury trailing by 10 points. Despite a late surge from the Panthers, the half ended with Mount Saint Vincent holding a 46-37 lead.

Several Panthers had solid individual performances in the first half. Joel led the team with 7 points on 3-of-5 shooting. Amadi Lee Kane also contributed 6 points, going 3-of-6 from the field. Zion Williams had 6 points as well, shooting 2-of-5, including a strong 2-of-3 performance from behind the arc. Despite solid shooting percentages Old Westbury hitting 45.7% from the field and Mount Saint Vincent shooting 45% the Panthers were undone by their turnovers. Old Westbury committed 9 turnovers in the first half compared to just 3 for the Dolphins, and Vincent capitalized by scoring 8 points off those turnovers, while Old Westbury only managed 2.

The second half began with a quick burst from Old Westbury. Jamari started the half with 2 made free throws, followed by a defensive rebound and an assist to Joel, which made it 41-46. The Panthers came out with renewed energy, going on an 8-3 run to close the gap to 51-48. Zion was instrumental in this stretch, recording back-to-back assists one to Amadi and the other to Kellen Leakes, who found his shooting rhythm in the second half, starting 2-of-3. With just over 10 minutes left in the game, the

Panthers had fought their way back and briefly took the lead, 62-61, after a well-timed assist from Zion to Michael Obi.

However, the lead was short-lived, as Mount Saint Vincent regained the advantage with 5:43 remaining in the game. In the final stretch, Old Westbury's inability to protect the ball and execute under pressure hurt them. Costly turnovers allowed the Dolphins to pull away, and despite a valiant effort, the Panthers were unable to recover. The game ended with a final score of 82-76 in favor of Mount Saint Vincent.

Despite the loss, several players had standout performances for the Panthers. Michael Obi had an impressive 11 points and 2 rebounds on 5-of-8 shooting, including 1-of-1 from 3-point range off the bench. Joel contributed another double-double with 12 points and 10 rebounds, shooting 5-of-9 from the field. Zion also finished with a double-double, tallying 10 points and 12 assists while shooting 3-of-10 from the field and 2-of-4 from 3-point range. Kellen added 18 points, despite his struggles in the first half, and shot 4-of-11 from beyond the arc. Jamari and Amadi struggled to make their usual impact, as Jamari finished with 9 points on 3-of-8 shooting, while Amadi scored 9 points on 4-of-8 shooting and had 6 rebounds, 7 assists.

The game saw 8 ties and 7 lead

changes. However, the turnovers were a significant issue for Old Westbury throughout the game. In the second half, Old Westbury shot 46.7% from the field and 44.7% from 3-point range, while Mount Saint Vincent shot just 36.4% from the field and 21.3% from behind the arc. Despite these statistical advantages, Old Westbury's 17 turnovers compared to 6 for Mount Saint Vincent proved costly. Another key factor in the game was Mount Saint Vincent's strong bench play, as they outscored Old Westbury's bench 36-23. The Panthers will need to improve their bench production moving forward to remain competitive in conference play.

The Panthers showed resilience in their comeback attempt, but Mount Saint Vincent's ability to capitalize on mistakes and maintain control late in the game secured them the win. Looking ahead, Old Westbury will need to focus on limiting turnovers and improving their execution in high-pressure situations to secure future victories in conference play. Next up for the Panthers is another tough conference away game against Saint Joseph's University Long Island who are 7-4 in conference play, on February 8th.

Panthers Secure Senior Night Win

By Anthony Payamps

The Old Westbury Panthers delivered an exhilarating victory on Senior Night, securing a hard-fought 71-68 win over St. Joseph's University Brooklyn on February 15th. Before the game started there were tributes to seniors Michael "Ocho" Obi, Amadi Lee-Kane, and the team manager Cameron Harewood.

The game started with high energy, as the Panthers quickly grabbed the lead. Joel Ofori won the opening jump ball, and Amadi Lee-Kane followed with a smooth floater to put Old Westbury on the scoreboard. By the 6-minute mark, the Panthers were up 13-4, displaying their dominance on both ends of the court. However, St. Joseph's didn't back down and with 8 minutes to go in the first half the score was 26-22. The Panthers had a late surge that extended their lead to 43-34 at the end of the half.

At halftime, Old Westbury's offense was firing on all cylinders. Freshman Zion Williams led the charge with 14 points, 2 rebounds, and 4 assists, shooting 5-9 from the field. Jamari Williams (#0) chipped in 10 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists, and 2 steals, while Kellen Leake contributed 11 points, going 3-4 from beyond the arc. Old Westbury's shooting was impressive, hitting 53.1% of their field goals (17-32) and 45.5% from three-point range (5-11).

Brooklyn had a balanced attack, with Collin Mills leading the charge with

9 points. Chris Williams (9 points, 4 rebounds, 2 assists) and Jaylen Gordon (6 points, 3 rebounds) kept the game within reach.

Brooklyn came out the break on fire starting with a 15-5 run to tie the game at 49-49. With 14 minutes left, the Panthers faced the pressure of needing a victory to keep their playoff hopes alive. Despite regaining some rhythm, Old Westbury found themselves down 58-59 with 10 minutes to go.

As the clock ticked down, the game's intensity rose. Kellen Leake's clutch free throws put the Panthers back on top at 65-63 with 6 minutes remaining. With Brooklyn still within striking distance, Amadi Lee-Kane delivered two critical free throws to push the lead to 71-68 with 30 seconds left. Brooklyn had one last chance to force overtime but was unable to hit a contested three-pointer with 5 seconds on the clock, thanks to stellar defense from Old Westbury.

The Panthers have now won two straight games, building momentum as they head into the final stretch of the regular season. Their next challenge will be against their rivals, Farmingdale, in a must-win game at home on Wednesday February 19th at 5 PM. With only two games left, the Panthers are determined to finish strong and secure a playoff berth.



Credit: OW Athletic Communications

Second-Half Stats:

St. Joseph's Brooklyn

- Collin Mills: 19 points
- Justin Nazon: 13 points, 5 rebounds, 5 assists
- Chris Williams: 11 points, 4 rebounds, 3 assists

Old Westbury

- Amadi Lee-Kane: 20 points, 3 assists (4-7 from 3)
- Kellen Leake: 16 points, 4 rebounds (4-7 from 3)
- Zion Williams: 15 points, 7 assists, 5 rebounds
- Jamari Williams: 10 points, 11 rebounds, 4 assists (Double-Double)

Panthers Baseball Off to Strong Start

By Juliana Vasquez

The SUNY Old Westbury baseball team is off to a solid start this season, posting an 11-13 overall record and going 2-8 in Skyline Conference play. Despite a few setbacks, the Panthers have flashed resilience, potential, and a drive to contend as the season unfolds.

Old Westbury opened the season on fire, picking up three straight wins beginning with a 13-12 thriller against Penn State Berks on March 1 in Yaphank, NY. The offense exploded early in the year, and the Panthers carried that momentum into their next two victories.

The Panthers then traveled south for the Myrtle Beach Spring Break Games, opening the trip with a thrilling 6-5 comeback win over Western Connecticut State. Sophomore Donny Whalen played the hero, delivering a clutch two-run double in the ninth to seal the victory. Unfortunately, that would be the Panthers only win in South Carolina, as they dropped their next three games to close out the trip.

Returning home, the Panthers fell to Baruch on March 22nd, but quickly found their rhythm again, winning three

One of the season's biggest highlights came on April 6th in a 12-inning battle against Farmingdale State. Junior

Sophomore RJ Azarieh came on in relief, throwing six scoreless innings, striking out five, and allowing only two hits. The Panthers sealed the win in the 12th inning, clinching one of their most exciting victories of the season.

Azarieh has been one of the Panthers' top all-around contributors, leading the team with a .444 batting average and 36 hits in 81 at-bats, while also dominating on the mound with a stellar 0.79 ERA. Defensively, senior infielder Joe Morreale has been a model of consistency, posting a perfect 1.000 fielding percentage with 68 put-outs.

As the second half of the season gets underway, Old Westbury is locked in and focused on climbing the Skyline standings. With plenty of baseball still to be played, the Panthers are determined to maintain their momentum and make a push for the playoffs.



Credit: OW Athletic Communications

Freshman Jimmy Stroehlein pitching in Maritime match-up on March 30th.

straight and continuing to battle through a challenging schedule.

Kyle Cavatio set the tone with six strong innings, allowing just one run on six hits.

Panthers Aim High After Historic 2024 Run



The Panthers at the Championship game vs. Manhattanville College on May 11, 2024

By Juliana Vasquez

As the 2025 season begins, the Panthers look to build on a historic 2024 run that saw them finish 24-14 and reach the Skyline Conference Championship for the first time. With a 13-8 conference record, they stunned top-seeded opponents in a resilient postseason push. Now, fueled by momentum and high expectations, they're ready for another shot at glory.

The Panthers have a veteran-heavy roster led by eight seniors, including myself. With only two freshmen, experience is a key strength. A graduate student adds leadership, while five new players bring extra versatility, giving the team a solid foundation.

Among the senior standouts is ace pitcher Layla Ramos, who made 20 appearances last season, recording a 2.04 ERA with 57 strikeouts. She is set to start the season alongside three former teammates from her previous institution, a connection she believes will boost the team's chemistry. "I'm excited for the opportunity to pitch alongside my teammates one last time," Ramos said. "The chemistry we've built over the years will be a huge asset to the depth Panthers softball has developed. I trust my teammates completely and can't wait to see how far we go this season."

The Panthers return key offensive leaders, including Senior designated hitter Madison Danin, who dominated at the plate last season with a .445 batting average and 49 hits. Her consistency and power make her a crucial part of the lineup. "Last year showed us what we're capable of, and now that's the standard," Danin said. "We have the talent and drive to take that next step and win a championship."

Senior Alaina Reilly, who posted an impressive .475 batting average and 48 hits last season, is eager to make her final year with the Panthers one to remember. With an experienced roster, she believes this team has a rare chemistry. "This

group is special, and there won't be another like it for years. We've played together for a long time, and that connection gives us an edge," Reilly said. She has also witnessed the program's growth firsthand. "We went from not having fields and barely making playoffs to being conference runner-ups. That wasn't enough, we're ready to take the championship."

Head Coach Tom Pennino, who has led the program since 2020, has high expectations for this experienced Panthers team. "Strong leadership and experience make a huge difference. We have a solid group of veteran players who set the tone, and that gives us an edge," Pennino said. "With this team's talent and maturity, I fully expect us to be at the top of our conference."

The Panthers were set to open their season against York College on March 8th, but the game was canceled. Their official start will now come in Clermont, Florida, from March 16-22, where they will face tough competition and build team chemistry. This trip provides a key opportunity to set the tone for the season ahead. They'll return home ready to compete, kicking off their conference schedule on April 3rd against Baruch College.

Redemption is at the heart of the Panthers' 2025 season. With 10 student-athletes playing their final year, the team is determined to make a statement and finish what they started. After falling just short last year, the Panthers are more motivated than ever to claim the championship and carve their names in program history.

Don't miss the chance to support the OW Panthers as they chase greatness once again, come out and be part of history in the making!

The Panthers Men's Volleyball Team Falls Flat Against Conference Team



Old Westbury Panthers team huddle during timeout in the 2nd set

By: Muhamed Doucoure

The Old Westbury panthers played hard in their March 7th game against the Ramapo College Roadrunners but ultimately, that wasn't enough. The Panthers lost this match 3-0, unable to pass the 20 point threshold in a single set.

As the Panthers fall to 4-9 in the season and only have a few remaining games, their future is looking gloomy. With their playoff window closing quickly it doesn't look likely that the Panthers will make it to the postseason but freshman Torrence Fredericks still has faith in his team. Fredericks who led his team in Kills (7) and Blocks (3) in the game against the Roadrunners still has high hopes for his team saying "If we win these next couple of games I think we can make the playoffs and we can go on a good run. All we can do is play hard and play our best". The Panthers were unable to win a single set in this match. Players will have to reflect on themselves, as well as their teammates, to see how

they can improve on all ends. Fredericks felt there were certain areas in which they fell short, stating they failed mainly in "Serve receive, I think we stepped it up after the second set. Also our defense could've been better [while] our offense was kinda okay". Since Fredericks knows what to work on he'll see if his team truly made improvements as the Panthers are set to face the Roadrunner again in a rematch on March 22nd.

When asked what he feels he can exploit in the next game after witnessing the Roadrunners in this match, Fredericks stated, "They make mistakes just like us and I think if we keep up with our defense [we'll be fine]. I think honestly if we work on blocking it will make a big difference in our next game with them". After losing in such a one-sided game, many eyes will be on the Panthers in their upcoming matches to see how much have they truly improved.