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The President's Academic Showcase winners and finalists feature research across disciplines

KIARA AZUMA

LOCAL/GLOBAL EDITOR

On April 10, the winners, along with the finalists, of the 2026 President's Academic Showcase were announced during chapel. The President's Academic Showcase is an annual competition that allows students from any major to work one-on-one with a faculty mentor on a research project of their choice. Twenty-five participants took part in this competition by writing research papers and presenting their posters on March 24. The Tier 1 finalists and Tier 2 winner presented their research in DeNault Auditorium on April 1.

The placements for Tier 1 were: Makena Messing (1st), Hudson Winchel (2nd), Emma Nguyen (3rd), Caleb Fox (Honorable Mention), and Sabrina Stahl (Honorable Mention). Best Poster for Tier 1 went to Callie Butler.

The placements for Tier 2 were: Axel Serrano (1st), Madison Lafon (2nd), and Kayla Reed (3rd).

Makena Messing won the President's Academic Showcase with her research titled, "The Association Between Gastrointestinal Dysfunction and Psychological Health in Individuals with Parkinson's Disease." Her faculty mentor was Associate Professor of Kinesiology, Dr. Nathan Meier.

She used research from Concordia's Lifestyle and Parkinson's Longitudinal Study, a collaborator of the Bess lab at UCI, who were investigating the gut microbiome in Parkinson's disease (PD) patients. "During this partnership, I was exposed to how multifaceted PD is and how it can infiltrate every aspect of a person's life. I was interested in how much control a person has over certain parts of their PD, and maybe the gut-brain axis could be a way for patients to positively influence their health," said Messing, a junior Kinesiology major and Psychology minor.

She explained how the writing process for the showcase was a fun experience for her. "A standout moment for me during this process was finding a narrative to tell. In a scientific paper, especially a research paper, the story being told typically isn't creative or personal," explained Messing. "I challenged myself to find a story amongst the stats and tell it. After establishing my results and their implications, I realized this was an opportunity to discuss patient agency and to treat patients holistically, from a person-centric perspective," she added.

Hudson Winchel placed second with his research, "The Death of Dialogue: Civil Discourse and the Fragility of Democracy." His faculty mentor was English Professor Dr. Camelia Raghinaru. Winchel, a junior majoring in Business Administration with an emphasis in Marketing, also has a minor in Law and Politics. He is part of the speech and debate team on campus, and has been competing in speech and debate for 10 years, witnessing firsthand the decline of

civil discourse.

"My research explores the decline of civil discourse in the United States, searches for the reasons that this decline is occurring, observes the democratic consequences of this breakdown, and finally advocates for solutions to this detrimental deterioration of civil discourse," Winchel explained. "When people lack words, they often resort to violence. I am passionate about this topic because the ability to speak freely without fear of persecution is the bedrock of not only democracy but of freedom itself," he added.

For Winchel, the moment that stood out was the final presentation. "Presenting a slideshow on a topic that had been fully polished into something I was proud of was such an amazing experience. As I looked around the room, I could tell it was genuinely resonating with people, and that is ultimately the real prize, being able to craft a message that impacts others and connects with them on a personal level."

He also valued his mentor and being able to work closely with Dr. Raghinaru. "She is a wealth of knowledge and helped me every step of the way. Every time I went into office hours to speak with her, she was supportive and always had genuinely helpful and insightful feedback," said Winchel.

Sabrina Stahl, who received Honorable Mention, took her research into the classrooms. Her research, titled "Revolution Through Art: Comparing Art-Integrated and Traditional Instruction on the American Revolution," compared a traditional (verbally led) lesson and an arts-integrated lesson plan. She examined students' conceptual understanding, engagement, and perceived understanding of the significant turning points of the Revolutionary War in two fifth-grade classrooms.

As a Liberal Studies major with minors in Art and Elementary Education, Stahl combined her interests into a single research project. She connected with Associate Professor of Visual Arts, Sara Fletcher, as her faculty mentor. "Since I have always loved art, I wanted to see whether and how integrating art and visual elements could help students learn more deeply," stated Stahl, junior. Her research found that arts-integrated lesson plans led to higher levels of understanding and engagement, but it does not aim to dismantle the traditional learning model.

"This study aims to support educators and provide them with the tools and knowledge to bring arts-integrated lessons into the classroom," explained Stahl. Stahl's favorite part of the project was working directly with the students while teaching the two lessons. "I loved seeing the students interact with the learning material in a deep, meaningful way. It gives me joy and excitement to have my own classroom where I will teach every day."

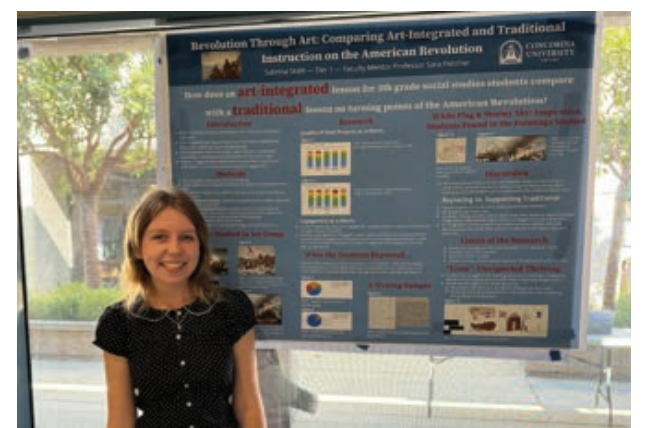
In terms of the paper and presentation, it was both a challenging and rewarding experience for her. "Overall, I found this to be a long, yet rewarding process, preparing

for and writing the paper. Once the lessons were taught, I found it very easy to write the paper; I hunkered down during spring break, rarely leaving my room," shared Stahl. "For the 12-minute oral presentation, I was most nervous about presenting to so many people. Plus, it was the longest presentation I have given. But once I found my flow, the stress disappeared."

Ultimately, the showcase provides students with the opportunity to conduct research they hope to apply in their future work or in the professional world. Messing shared that she would eventually like to go into research with astronauts. She said, "Collecting data, analyzing and dissecting it, synthesizing big-picture implications, and making it approachable and applicable to a general audience are translational skills for any field. I hope to apply these skills both in grad school and in the professional world."

Winchel explained that his research would continue to impact his career, relationships and everyday conversations. "I have aspirations to go into apologetics one day, but even if God has a different plan for me, I am confident that the lessons I have learned about civil discourse will shape how I conduct myself in any vocation and in every relationship moving forward," said Winchel.

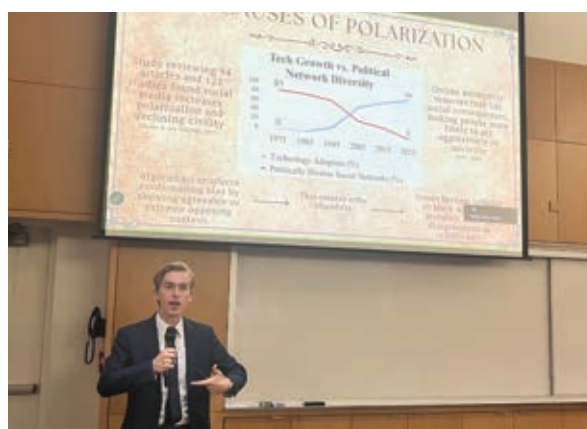
Stahl plans to integrate her research into her future classrooms. She said, "As a future educator and teacher, I will take this data and information gained from this study into my future classroom. I aim to teach at least one to two arts-integrated lessons a month—maybe even more, depending on the group of students! I want to bring my two loves—art and education—together."



PICTURED ABOVE: Sabrina Stahl (junior) presents her poster during the showcase poster session
Photo courtesy of: Sabrina Stahl



PICTURED ABOVE: Tier 1 Finalists line up with President Dr. Michael Thomas to receive their awards during Friday chapel
Photo courtesy of: Kiara Azuma



PICTURED ABOVE: Hudson Winchel (junior) presenting his research in Denault Auditorium
Photo courtesy of: Hudson Winchel



PICTURED ABOVE: Hudson Winchel (junior) stands in front of the poster of his research project
Photo courtesy of: Hudson Winchel

24th Annual Gala of Stars looks to support student scholarships, celebrate 50 years of CUI

KAYLA REED
CAMPUS EDITOR

The Gala of Stars, Concordia's annual fundraising event, is happening Sat., April 25. This is the 24th time the event has been held, but this year is special as it marks the start of the 50th anniversary celebrations.

Tim Jaeger, the Vice President for University Advancement, said the gala, "is a wonderful celebration of Concordia's family, old and new friends. It consists of a number of things – fellowship time, live music, a silent auction and an opportunity for people to give gifts directly to student aid. It also has a musical performance, this year being performed by our own alums."

The money raised from the gala goes directly to support student scholarships. A vast majority of students at Concordia receive some sort of financial aid, and this gala is one of the ways that the university can provide financial support.

Nancy Palmer, the Assistant Director of Special Events, said, "Fund-A-Need takes place

toward the end of the evening, following a student speaker who shares their personal story, including how scholarships and faculty support have impacted their journey. Guests are then invited to give at various levels. This is typically the most impactful part of the night—in 2025, we raised over \$1 million to support student scholarships, and we hope to do the same this year."

Jaeger agreed, "The more students are involved, the more they become aware of what's happening...The gala is here to raise money for student aid. I've been to all 24 of them. I've been here 29 years and love it, and the gala has become instrumental in this."

While the gala is a reminder of Concordia's commitment to funding education, it also provides an opportunity to network and form connections for both students and alumni. "The gala does a lot more than raise money," Jaeger said, "It is a reunion. It is the biggest part of the year for our donors and board members, and they love being together because they love our mission here at Concordia. It's what causes them to give of their time, their talents, and their treasures, so it's a special night in

that way. It's a time when they can all have some fun, and we can focus on involving our students and alums."

The gala will honor Rev. Dr. Steven Mueller for his contributions to the Concordia community. Mueller, a Concordia alum himself, is the Vice President and Chief Mission Officer and also teaches theology classes. Mueller's recognition points to the importance of the alumni network and highlights the theme of the gala—celebrating alumni. Jaeger said, "Our lifetime achievement award is recognizing all of our alumni, so there will be a little more emphasis on our alumni throughout the evening."

As this year celebrates the 50th anniversary of Concordia's founding, the gala's emphasis on alumni highlights the importance of Concordia's history, honoring those who donated time, money and resources to making Concordia the school that it is today.

Jaeger said, "The Gala of Stars is a big enough event that it takes the whole campus to get behind it, and the advancement department is forever grateful to the teamwork across the different departments that help

make it happen. It's kind of an all-hands-on-deck event. The more people are involved, the more successful the event. It reignites people's commitment to this place and their love for it. Obviously, the friendships that have been forged over the years, the people that work here and serve here, and also our donors and friends. They're like family."



PICTURED ABOVE: Guests enjoying the outdoor reception at the Gala
Photo courtesy of: Concordia University
Irvine Instagram

Night of Hope brings together students for food and fellowship and meaningful service

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On Sat. April 11, student coordinators from abbey west, faculty, alumni and the student body joined together for a night of food, fellowship and outreach. Night of Hope has become an annual tradition for Concordia and combines musical and visual arts with ministry and encouragement. In previous years, the event was held in the Nelson Amphitheater and the CU Center and featured guest worship bands. However, this year, Night of Hope took on a new design with attendees gathering in the Student Union.

The Student Union Cafeteria was transformed into a lively event that featured visual art from students, student and alumni musical performances, service opportunities, crafts, tacos and a churro stand. This year, senior Katie Crowder, Witness Coordinator for abbey west took on a leadership role in planning this event. "I went to Night of Hope last year, and it was a fun concert atmosphere in the gym. I was really excited to be a part of it this year," said Crowder.

While many events on campus encourage fellowship, Night of Hope remains a beloved

Concordia tradition for the efforts that are raised towards local missions. As attendees enjoyed their food, students involved in abbey west were present at booths to lead people through assembling various crafts and items to give to those in need.

"We pivoted the event because we wanted there to be a place where people could gather for a long time. Having community over dinner is a great way to encourage fellowship. We were able to collaborate with the Alumni Relations team so we could secure the food and the churro truck," said Crowder. The adjustments to Night of Hope were successful, as the cafeteria was filled with attendees, music and hearts ready to serve.

One specific takeaway from this event is the simplicity and effectiveness of small gestures. Crowder emphasized the significance of adding meaningful crafts for this event that have greater spiritual meaning. "I was in charge of figuring out what crafts would be beneficial and easy. I am brainstorming with others to figure out how to get connected with local charities. We wanted the crafts to point people to prayer and point people to Jesus," said Crowder.

Looking over the making of origami hearts was sophomore Kaelyn Cheney. "The paper hearts are reminders to give to people in your life that they are loved by God," said Cheney. She added, "Student coordinators planned all of the crafts. We have blankets for people who are experiencing homelessness and cards to encourage people."

Hannah Springer, student coordinator of Sunday Source, was overseeing the tying of felt blankets and the event. She stated, "We are tying these blankets for people in need and their dogs. It could go to Charity on Wheels, or local homeless shelters."

By attaching a student event to a wider cause, there is a greater meaning and significance that goes into attending these events. As the name of the event suggests, Night of Hope is designed not only to lift the spirits of students and faculty in fellowship but also to provide comfort to those in need. For more information on future Night of Hope events and other outreach and service opportunities, visit the abbey west instagram at @abbeywest_cui.



PICTURED ABOVE: Night of Hope utilizes visual art and music to bring the love of Jesus to others
Photo courtesy of: Rebekah Michel



PICTURED ABOVE: Students and Alumni gave musical performances while attendees enjoyed tacos and a churro truck
Photo courtesy of: Rebekah Michel

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Intramural Sports conclude an exciting season

KAYLA REED
CAMPUS EDITOR

The intramural sports at Concordia are concluding an exciting season of games. Over the course of the school year, intramural sports provide students with an outlet for pursuing their athletic interests without committing to the demands of being a student athlete.

The list of intramural sports changes every year, but this year included flag football, basketball, soccer, volleyball and bowling. This year's intramurals were coordinated by Jedidiah Rufner and Jessi Borton. Borton noted that the intramural offerings are not limited to joining a sport for the year, saying, "We also offer a few one day tournaments with sports like spikeball, pickleball, beach volleyball and cornhole."

Intramurals typically span four weeks of games, culminating in a championship. Borton said, "Our championship games are the biggest highlights of our year with Intramurals. My personal favorite was the Indoor Volleyball Championship game. The stands were packed, we had free ice cream, and the match went into three sets. It was so electric and thrilling to be there watching such an intense game with other students and friends."

Rufner said, "My highlight of the intramural season would be our first intramural championship: the Flag Football Pepperoni bowl...We had more than 125 people show up, as well as a close game that ended with a 21-12 score!"

On April 13, the Intramurals season concluded with the Intramural Soccer Championship. The game

was a night out for students that featured free tacos from Taqueria Hoy as well as prizes and giveaways from the Orange County Soccer Club. The winning team was Washed FC, which included eleven students. They took the lead 2-1 over Norris Superette to clinch the championship title, to the delight of the students in the stands.

Borton said, "Having intramural sports as a part of Concordia allows people to come and have some friendly competition with their peers. Also, it is a great place to take a break from the stress of homework! Intramurals have brought so many people together and have caused several lifelong friendships that might never have been found without the program."

"My favorite part of running intramurals was seeing everyone who participated and became friends because of intramurals," Rufner said, "We had multiple teams who didn't know each other coming into playing intramurals, but then after the season was done, they became close friends after. It was super cool to see a community built through intramurals and how big our championships were!"

Borton said, "My favorite part of intramurals was meeting all the new friends that I am still close with today. It has been nice surrounding myself with people who also enjoy sports and having a good time!"

Consider joining an intramural sport next year and pursue one of your passions alongside fellow students! For more information about intramural sports, visit the CU Recreation page on MyCUI.



PICTURED ABOVE: 2026 Intramural Soccer Champions
Photo courtesy of: CU Recreation



PICTURED ABOVE: 2025 Intramural Bowling Champions
Photo courtesy of: CU Recreation

Faculty advisors share insights on this year's Aerie

BROOKLYN PIETSCH
STAFF WRITER

After much hard work, the 27th volume of The Aerie, Concordia's literary and arts publication, dropped on Wed., April 22. Professor Zoë Litzenberg, the faculty advisor of the literary submissions, provided insight into the journal's production process.

In December, a student and faculty panel reviews and privately deliberates the literary submissions, which are kept anonymous, before regrouping to make the official selections in January. "Deliberation can be intense, but we try to, as a panel, select what we think is the absolute best of what Concordia offered in the last year," Litzenberg said.

Anyone in the Concordia community, including students, alumni, faculty and staff, can submit to the publication at any time in the year. "The English and Art departments both have judging panels that review all submissions and select the works to include in the publication," said Professor Rachel Soo, faculty advisor of the graphic design and art elements.

Many literary journals begin with a theme and only accept related submissions. The Aerie, however, accepts any art or creative writing. "What is really fantastic is that we often find there are themes that come up over and over," Litzenberg said. "Part of a literary editor and the faculty advisor's job is to find the story that's there and to tell it. The art and the writing are excellent regardless of order, but there's something special about telling another story and allowing the reader to experience something they may not have experienced otherwise." This year, the theme is the passing of a day, and the pieces are arranged from sunrise to sunset.

The literary advisor's main role is to "guide the editors and panel, facilitate the selection of the writing pieces, and oversee the manuscript editing and final layout. I learned a lot about how the mechanics of which side you put a picture on guides the eye into or out of the book," Litzenberg said.

"This is my first year as the faculty advisor for the literary side. It's a fantastic tradition that I feel really

honored to help continue now that Kristen Schmidt is retired," she continued. Professor Kristen Schmidt, faculty advisor before Litzenberg, revived The Aerie over twenty years ago. "I greatly enjoyed working collaboratively with Professor Zoë Litzenberg and our student designers and editors this year," Soo added.

"The student editors and the student graphic designer work together to match each artwork with a literary piece in a rough mock-up. Next, the student graphic designer creates the layout from the mock-up. Then we all work together on revisions and editing," Soo said. "Until we send it to the printers, it's back and forth, arranging, line editing, and double checking," Litzenberg said. The team takes care that every aspect of The Aerie "invites you to spend more time with the pieces and how they connect" with one another.

The official printed version of The Aerie published right before the launch party on April 22, "So everyone will experience it together," Litzenberg said.

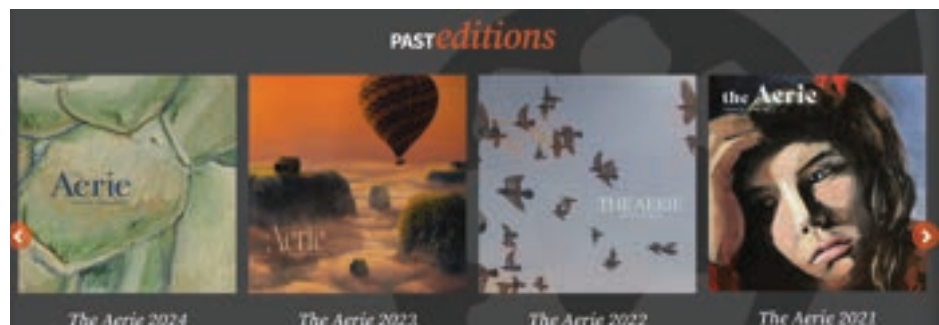
Litzenberg offered advice to anyone considering submitting to The Aerie next year. "Concordia really helps us understand that we were created to be creative, and this is a place where you don't have to major in something to explore a creative piece. Workshop your piece until you're really proud of it, and then submit it. It's scary, and then it's not."

She also suggests visiting the writing studio to get feedback if you're unsure about the quality of your writing. It's where "people would love to talk to you about your creative writing. If that's something you're passionate about, it would be fantastic to, along with a lot of the amazing people who are already in The Aerie, showcase your work."

Free copies of The Aerie will be available on April 23 and 24 during lunch hours outside the cafeteria. "Enjoy the fantastic art and writing, and I hope that it inspires you to be a little bit more creative," Litzenberg said. Information about submitting to next year's Aerie can be found at <https://www.cui.edu/arts/visual-arts/aerie>.



PICTURED ABOVE: The Aerie Magazine highlights all of the artistic disciplines in a magazine that is made by students
Photo courtesy of: Brooklyn Pitetsch



PICTURED ABOVE: Every year students and faculty anticipate the release of the new Aerie magazine cover
Photo courtesy of: Brooklyn Pitetsch

Seniors take on Shakespeare

GISELLE PARRA
STAFF WRITER

From April 23 through April 26, the Theater and Film department at Concordia is putting on "Scenes of Love from Shakespeare." The upcoming performances will take place this Sat., April 25 and Sun. April 26 at 2 p.m. This play is directed by seniors Cara Winkelman, Gracie Leininger and Casey Bolton.

This student-directed play showcases many different stories from Shakespeare's extensive collection. While most of the plays this past theater season have been a journey of one singular story, taking audiences through the work in its entirety, "Scenes of Love" shows the audience just enough to leave them wanting more. Some of the acts to look forward to would be the

romantic comedy, "Much Ado About Nothing," and the renowned "Romeo and Juliet."

As one of the directors, Winkelman spoke on the type of work that it takes to direct a scene like "Much Ado About Nothing." "I did a full dramaturgy on each of the three plays I directed scenes from. There are also a lot of moving pieces as we have a big cast and they aren't involved in all of the scenes, so it takes time to understand the flow of the show." For all those not familiar with drama lingo, dramaturgy is the study and practice of dramatic composition, structure and context.

Playing the role of Ursula, the devoted lady-in-waiting in "Much Ado About Nothing" is sophomore Charlotte Brant, an English major. Brant was able to provide her take on the work it takes

as an actor, saying, "Well, because this is a student-directed production, the amount of work can vary from director to director. My director was Cara Winkelman, and she was very good about our blocking and slight lines. I also had the pleasure of working with Gracie Leininger in her "Romeo and Juliet" scene, and she made the scene follow some music, and as such, our blocking was timely and precise."

Some favorite moments of the performance prep time for Winkelman were when she "saw the show as a full run-through for the first time. It was awesome to see the actors do it all!" While the cast has been enjoying themselves preparing for the show, there have also been some learning moments that have stuck with them as well. "I have never had to block a play where I was being viewed on three sides before. It was frustrating at first because a lot of my natural go-to blocking

wouldn't work, but once you get the hang of making sure two sides can see your face, it's a lot of fun!" Brant said.

"Making a cohesive picture throughout the show is a challenge that the other directors and I had to work through," Winkelman said. Some food for thought for viewers would be that "reading Shakespeare and watching it are two different experiences, and it's my opinion that when you watch Shakespeare, you realize just how timeless his jokes and plots are. The same joke that was a hit at the Globe Theater hundreds of years ago is just as funny now," said Brant.

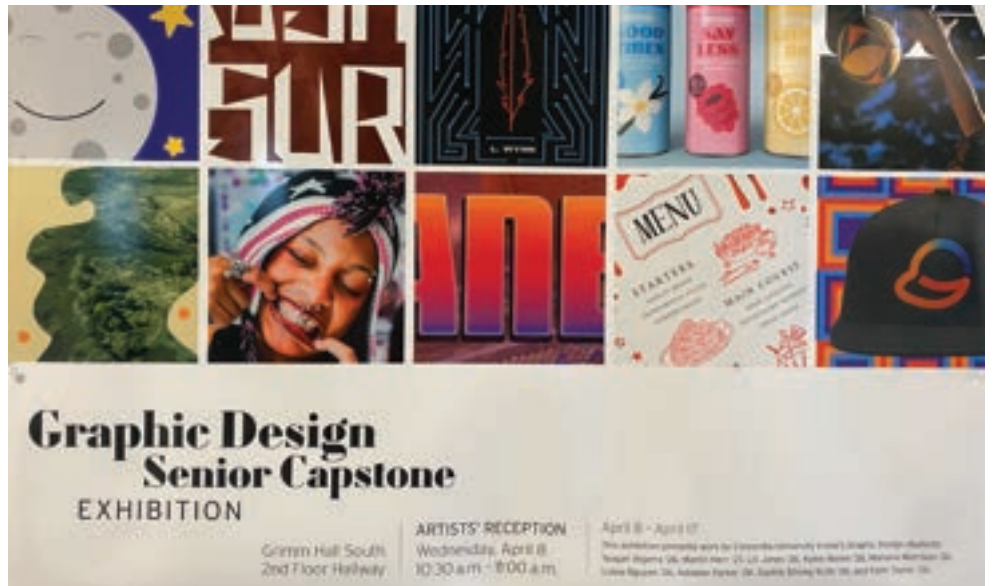
Catch the final showings of "Scenes of Love from Shakespeare" this Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. Purchase tickets at <https://www.simpletix.com/e/scenes-of-love-from-shakespeare-tickets-231063>

Students can use the code CUISTU for free admission.

Graphic Design majors present Senior Capstone

TEAGAN ALGARRA
LAYOUT EDITOR

On Wed., April 8, Concordia's Graphic Design program launched its Senior Capstone Artist Exhibition in Grimm Hall South. The exhibition highlighted the outstanding design work of the program's seniors who are graduating in May. The students dedicated themselves to creative projects of their choosing, over the course of the spring semester, with Professor Rachel Soo as their leading mentor. The display was a sight to see as the hard work of these seniors was presented in visual fruition. Congratulations to the following Graphic Design seniors in the show on their exhibitions and academic careers: Teagan Algarra, Faith Taylor, Kylee Maree, Addalee Parker, Mariana Morrison, Sophia Strong-Scifo, Lili Jones, Martin Herr and Liana Nguyen.



PICTURED ABOVE: (Left) Addalee Parker's Capstone Project (Top Right) Faith Taylor's Capstone Project (Bottom Right) Sophia Strong-Scifo's Capstone Project Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: (Left) Liana Nguyen's Capstone Project (Right) Kylee Maree's Capstone Project Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: Lili Jones' Capstone Project Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: (Left) Mariana Morrison's Capstone Project (Right) Teagan Algarra's Capstone Project Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



Handbell groups prepare for concert and tour

KAYLA REED
CAMPUS EDITOR

Handbells at Concordia are preparing for two exciting events—their end-of-year concert on Fri. May 1, and for Concert Handbells, the Music Department's USA 250 tour to Carnegie Hall in New York.

The May 1 spring concert will take place at Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Lake Forest from 7 to 8:30 p.m. The concert is free and no tickets are required. The concert will feature all three of Concordia's handbell groups—Concert Handbells, Spirit Bells and Resound (a quartet).

Anna Roettjer, a sophomore in Spirit Bells, stated that audiences for the concert can expect “a lot of really cool and surprising music full of many different techniques and fun songs.” She added, “My favorite song that we're playing at the concert is called ‘Exultate’ and it is a really energetic and joyful song and I'm really excited to perform it!”

Troy Randall, a junior in Concert Handbells and the Resound quartet, said, “My favorite piece we are playing for the end-of-year concert is ‘Nexus’ by Matthew Compton. It's a fast, fun and energetic piece of music that was very difficult to put together, but it's a lot of fun to play now that everyone has it down by muscle memory. It is a 22-page piece of music that we complete in under four minutes.”

The concert promises to showcase the best of Concordia's handbell program, including some of the highest level handbell musicians in the country.

Concert Handbells will also be a part of the USA 250 New York tour in May alongside other Concordia music groups such as the Concordia Choir and Concordia Brass. On the tour,

they will give concerts, view musical performances, and sightsee. The tour will culminate in a performance at the famed Carnegie Hall on Sat. May 9, conducted by Dr. Christian Guebert, Dr. Jeff Held, Dr. Michael Busch and Erik Der.

Randall said, “The thing I am most excited about for the Carnegie Hall tour is being able to perform in Carnegie Hall. It is probably the most famous concert hall in the world, and being able to perform in such a prestigious venue is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

The concert will see the premiere of Guebert's newest work, “Inscriptions,” as well as other music by American composers to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the United States. Following the concert there will be an exciting reception cruise around the Hudson River.

Roettjer said, “My favorite part about being in handbells is getting to see all of the different parts come together to make a really cool piece. I also love the community that comes along with it.”

Randall said, “My favorite part of being in handbells is all the problem-solving you have to do. You may initially look at a piece and think your part is physically impossible, but after a few weeks of hard work, it comes together.”

These concerts will showcase the best of Concordia's handbell program. For more information about the May 1 spring concert featuring all three Concordia handbell ensembles, visit <https://www.simplenetix.com/e/handbell-spring-concert-tickets-233457>. For more information about the Carnegie Hall/New York Tour visit <https://www.cui.edu/arts/music/events/concordia-carnegie-2026>.



PICTURED ABOVE: Concordia Handbells prepare the new work *Inscriptions* for Carnegie Hall
Photo courtesy of: Concordia Music Department

Review: Is “Project Hail Mary” reaching for the stars or a failed mission?

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In 2026, Hollywood eagerly anticipated the newest book-to-film adaptation that combined elements of popular films such as “Interstellar,” “E.T.,” and “The Martian,” as well as Pixar Studios. “Project Hail Mary” delivers a seamless blend of the heart, comedy and science fiction elements of these movies. The newest release from Amazon MGM Studios stars Ryan Gosling and is based on the critically acclaimed book of the same name by author Andy Weir.

Abandoned in space with no memory, Ryan Gosling plays the character of Ryland Grace. Ryland is a sixth-grade science teacher who found himself on a spaceship with no memory. As the film develops, audiences quickly learn that Ryland was forced against his will to be sent on a suicide mission to save the Sun from dimming. With nearly all of the film taking place on the spaceship, Gosling is left to flex his acting skills in a solo performance, as the rest of the crew has passed. While Gosling captures the elements of grief, amnesia and discovery that come with being abandoned in space, the lack of character development and relationships in this film can cause certain moments to feel lackluster.

However, what “Project Hail Mary” does capture excellently is Ryland's relationship with his one and only friend, Rocky the Alien. When audiences meet Rocky halfway through the film, Gosling delivers amusing and heartwarming scenes as he creates a mechanism that allows Rocky and Ryland to communicate. The initial scenes and moments of interaction between Ryland and Rocky are some of the most precious in the entire film.

“Project Hail Mary” is certainly a delight for any viewer who is captivated by astronomy and biology. The dialogue of this film is packed with scientific language and a rather complicated description of the mission. As a viewer who was not familiar

with the book, I found the overly technical language and explanations to be a turn-off in this movie. This film wrestles with capturing a full-length novel into a shortened film adaptation. As a result, there is almost no time for audiences who are not familiar with sci-fi or the book to gain an understanding of the mission.

One of the other noticeable flaws of this film, I would argue, is the pacing. With a two-and-a-half-hour run time, “Project Hail Mary” does not go by fast. Gosling delivers a strong but mostly solo performance for almost the first half of the movie, before audiences are even introduced to Rocky. Even with sequences set to music and several flashbacks that feature other minor characters, the lack of dialogue and slower pacing could be jarring for audiences who are expecting a packed sci-fi film.

Yet, do not be discouraged because the second half of this film truly shines as Ryland builds a heartfelt friendship with Rocky. “Project Hail Mary” is an example of a film that starts slow, yet finishes with a vibrant and climactic ending.

Upon my initial viewing of the movie, I strongly encourage viewers to see it in an IMAX theater to fully appreciate the stellar outer space cinematography. There are several breathtaking, colorful shots in the second half of this film that truly deliver the wow factor that I was expecting. After watching it in a non-IMAX theatre, I was eager to experience certain moments of the film on a higher quality of screen. If “Project Hail Mary” is on your list of movies to see, it is definitely worth seeing in a theater. Despite the film's pacing errors, “Project Hail Mary” remains one of the most anticipated films of 2026 and delivered a memorable movie theatre viewing experience.

Commercial Music Ensembles rock on

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On Tues., April 21, the Commercial Music Ensembles of the Music Department took center stage at Campus JAX. The semi-annual Commercial Music Concert is one of the most anticipated music events of the year, as it allows students to execute full sets of music in front of a live audience. As one of the fastest-growing majors at Concordia, Commercial Music encompasses a variety of styles, including pop, rock, alternative and R&B.

Within recent years, the Commercial Music Concert has escalated in popularity, gaining a fully sold-out crowd at Campus JAX. As students and faculty gathered to support two Commercial ensembles and the Vocal Pop ensemble, singers and instrumentalists executed contemporary hits. Junior Psychology major Mia Grund said that her favorite song of the night was "Georgy Porgy" by the 80's band Toto.

For Senior Commercial Music major, Amy Held, she was most looking forward

to performing "Voices Carry" by the rock band 'Til Tuesday. Held added that "her favorite part of the concert was being able to play with all of my friends that are in the band one last time and to see audience reactions to the choreography and the music. We have poured many hours into making this."

While the Commercial Music Concerts offer students valuable performance experience, they also get to enjoy a lively night of food and support from their peers. For sophomore Commercial Music major Emma Martinez, her favorite performance of the night was witnessing the Vocal Pop ensemble's performance of Lady Antebellum's "Need You Now." "The voices of the singers in that performance mixed really well together. They just had a guitar and three vocalists, which made the performance very enjoyable," said Martinez. To find out more information about upcoming music events please visit <https://www.cui.edu/arts/music/events>



PICTURED ABOVE: Commercial Ensembles rocked Campus JAX with their student performances
Photo courtesy of: Amy Held

The Aerie takes the Night by Storm

SUMMER DAISY MEZAK
STAFF WRITER

On Wednesday, April 22, Concordia hosted its annual showcase of the arts. It was a night of honoring the Senior Art Capstone exhibition and the Aerie publication launch party. The evening was filled with commotion over the new edition of the magazine, where students and staff get a chance to see the work that was submitted.

A major highlight of the evening was the release of the newest edition of The Aerie. Attendees eagerly flipped through its pages, exploring a wide range of student-submitted work, including poetry, prose, and visual art. The publication continues to serve as a platform for students to share their voices and talents, making the launch party an especially meaningful occasion for those featured.

As the event began, the Aerie editors, Caleb Jebb Fox, a Junior, and Lucy Swan, a Senior, welcomed the artists and guests and encouraged the artists to share their work through an open mic session. Fox expressed how this party gave the artists and writers a "chance to read their poetry or prose as well as share their artistic process," making the event more memorable to those who came.

There was a sense of community, as students supported one another

by listening, applauding, and celebrating each performance. For many, it gave a newfound appreciation for fellow students and their hard work. Adding to this, Chloe Robinson, a Sophomore and artist published in this year's Aerie, expressed how she "loved getting the chance to see the creative work of my classmates." She added that she "had no idea so many of them were artists and writers," highlighting how the event reveals hidden talents within the student body.

For many students, this event is a highly anticipated tradition. With each new edition of The Aerie, there is always the possibility of students getting published and being able to have their work recognized and appreciated. When asked what could encourage students to continue or begin submitting to Concordia's literary and arts magazine, Fox stated that "the best advice I would give to aspiring writers or artists who want to share their work is to seek out publishing opportunities such as this and start submitting, even a rejection gives you a step into the publishing process."

Overall, the Aerie launch party not only celebrated artistic achievement but also strengthened the creative spirit of the Concordia community.

GRADUATE WRINKLE-FREE IN MAY

April 20-24 & April 27-May 1
8:30-4pm in the Career Studio
****walk-ins only****

Bring your graduation robes to the Career Studio to be steamed for graduation on Saturday, May 2

For more information, please email careercenter@cui.edu

Men's lacrosse season wraps with a series of road wins

SYDNEY WEAVER
STAFF WRITER

Men's lacrosse just closed out their season with a big win over Colorado Mesa on April 18 (10-7). This puts their overall record at nine wins and six losses as they head into the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference.

Sophomore midfielder Joseph Switzer went into the season with his mind set on "stepping up and making a statement for lacrosse on the West Coast." He is now leaving the regular season and entering the RMAC with plans to "dominate the conference and compete in the national tournament."

The team consists of five seniors this year and they are all still as loyal and dedicated to their team as they were from the moment they joined. Senior midfielder Ryan Tabor said, "My mindset was to crush the season and give it everything I have because it's

my last season." As Tabor's lacrosse career is coming to an end, he said that his mindset "hasn't changed." He is going into RMAC with the same determination and hopes to end on a high note.

Tabor has been a big part of the team for the last four years and is super proud of the way he has grown as both a player and person. As his time as a player wraps up, he hopes to leave a lasting reminder of his hard work, dedication and team player mentality. "The legacy I hope to leave is that I always worked hard and had everyone's back no matter what," said Tabor.

This close team dynamic is evident both on and off the field. Switzer said that his biggest takeaway from this season "has been the time spent off the field, meeting and building relationships with the new guys and making memories with the guys that are leaving." Tabor shared similar sentiments and as he

reflected on his time with the team he commemorated them, saying his biggest takeaway was that, "We have a really talented team and we can do amazing things."

As younger players like Switzer become the upperclassmen, they know they must step up to the challenge of leading the team. He said going forward, he hopes to "set an example of the hard work and discipline our team

sets amongst each other."

Their final season win was over Colorado Mesa, and they face Colorado Mesa again tonight in Salt Lake City, Utah, in their first RMAC match-up. Both Tabor's and Switzer's favorite memories were beating Mesa this season, so let's hope they can add another memorable game to the list.



PICTURED ABOVE: Men's Lacrosse wraps their season with beating Colorado Mesa
Photo courtesy of: Men's Lacrosse Instagram

Concordia Track and Field heads to San Diego for conference

JOSEPH PANETTA
SPORTS EDITOR

With the school year coming to an end, Concordia Track and Field is also inching towards the finale of their season. They are in San Diego this weekend competing in the PacWest Conference Championships with many athletes, hoping for a chance at qualifying for nationals.

All of their work will be put to the test this weekend as the athletes look back at all they have accomplished and all of the memories that they have created along the way.

"My favorite part of the season is coming to practice every day, laughing with my

teammates, [and] making jokes, but still getting to put the work in needed to run fast," said senior sprinter Maddy Fearon.

Sophomore thrower Tim Weller also cites his favorite memories as competing with top schools such as USC.

It is also a bittersweet championship as much of the roster is seniors who will be graduating and moving on from Concordia.

"My favorite part of the season so far has been the UCI meet where we got to celebrate the last four years together as seniors on our senior night," said senior distance runner Gavin Hellerstedt. "The energy of the team was high and it was super cool to have this moment with every one of my teammates. We got to all compete as

one team to start that day and celebrate as one team to end the day."

"I am so looking forward to my fitness life outside of track, but I'm going to miss all of the practice days, meets, recovery days and team bonding that is done as a team," said Fearon. "I'm going to miss the family aspect of track."

"The seniors really make the team the way it is," said junior sprinter Zakiya Nunez. "They lead, train hard and generally bring the energy. Every year it's sad to see them graduate but we all just hope to fill their shoes. And going into our final races with them there's nothing but excitement to see them compete one last time."

"There's something different about the end of something like this," said Hellerstedt. "It's truly special and it reminds you to take in every moment and take nothing for granted. I'm more than ready to give everything I got for my teammates and to prove to myself what is possible."

Sentiments for all of the seniors aside, the team is still focused on their goals of performing to their absolute best in the conference championships.

"Going into conference championships, the main focus will be to stick to our Day 1 core values," said Hellerstedt. "Especially being connected, disciplined and competitive. These kinds of things have been the foundation of who we are and we gotta lean into that and stick to it heading into this big weekend. If we stay true to ourselves and pursue excellence, great things will happen."

"Coach Bloomfield has been saying 'flip the list' which means don't settle for the spot you were placed in," said Nunez.

"Instead aim to go to the finals or even place higher. I'm just trying to channel that energy and do the best I can for myself and for my team."

"The focus going into the conference is being present, executing my race plan," said Fearon. "I'm just enjoying my last ever conference meet with the people who I enjoy being around."

Following the conference championships, athletes who perform well enough will have a chance to compete at the NCAA DII Outdoor Championships if they manage to hit the qualifying measurables. While the athletes are focused on conference first, they are constantly pushing themselves with the hopes of qualification.

"Beyond just conference, nationals is always the number one goal... With that being said, getting into nationals is a huge accomplishment and focus. I'm always focused on trying to reach that level of eliteness and with conference this weekend. Crazy things can happen so I'm ready to give it my all and see where the chips fall," said Hellerstedt.

"For me nationals is definitely one of my main goals, it's the highest or most competitive meet in the whole country and I think I have the ability to be among those competing there," said Weller. "I trust in the hard work I have done and my personal drive and desire to be there... I will try my best to increase my chances or even further increase my ranking to go."

Don't forget to cheer on our women's and men's track and field teams for their conference championships from April 23 to April 25. Stay up to date on Instagram @cuitfxc.



PICTURED ABOVE: Concordia Track and Field prepares for the PacWest Conference Championship
Photo courtesy of: Concordia Athletics Department

Women's beach volleyball are first-time national champions

JORDAN VANDER VEEN
STAFF WRITER

The Women's beach volleyball team won their first-ever AVCA National Championship title. The team held a 6-0 record over three days in Gulf Shores, Alabama. The Golden Eagles displayed dominance in defeating their opponents, leading them to cross the ultimate finish line.

The team's motto this season was to Cross the Finish Line. The finish line being a national title. After finishing runner-up the past two years, the girls were hungry for the championship title and needed to cross the finish line.

Junior Rosie Cline said, "I truly believe it comes down to the love and heart we have for each other." This team was special because they played for God and each other.

Senior Teagan Algarra said, "This team's heart was unlike anything we've had before. We experienced so much adversity that ended up bringing us closer together." This team was determined to win a national title and played for something bigger than themselves, leading them to be champions.

The Golden Eagles handled business on championship Sunday, dominantly sweeping Saint Leo in the semifinals. Then, Concordia secured the national championship by beating Texas A&M Kingsville in the finals.

The team ran together to celebrate their long-awaited victory. Algarra said, "I've never felt so many emotions at one

time; my heart was bursting because I felt so proud of everyone."

Senior and All-American Ashley Rossi said, "It was pure joy, it did not even feel real in the moment, it was one of the best feelings."

The team worked hard all season and faced many challenges to get to nationals. Winning a national title was a dream come true, and even more special because of the team they did it with.

Junior Gabby Reinking said, "What made it so special was that we did not focus on winning, we focused on the present moments and being where our feet were planted." After winning the championship, Reinking said, "There was a lot of relief and sense of accomplishment knowing we completed our goal and crossed the finish line."

Algarra said, "It was so bitter-sweet because as I was feeling a surreal amount of joy, I was also feeling the weight of my last season coming to a close."

The seven seniors leave their legacy on the program as national champions. They impacted the team with their heart and determination. The returners are excited to continue their legacy and continue to play for each other and strive for excellence.

The beach volleyball team concludes their 2026 season as national champions and brings home their program's first national title. Check out @cui beach on Instagram to see more of the national champions.



PICTURED ABOVE: Concordia Beach Volleyball celebrates winning their first national championship
Photo courtesy of: Concordia Athletics Department

CUI Women's Water Polo makes history

JOSEPH PANETTA
STAFF WRITER

Week after week, Concordia women's water polo appears in the Courier, and as long as they keep making history, it'll keep happening. The ladies have not only turned in their best record ever, but also won the conference championships for the first time in their Division II era.

On April 12, the ladies beat Biola by a score of 4-3 in the Western Water Polo Association championships. It was a hard-fought defensive battle and turned out to be their lowest scoring of the season. Their semifinal game against Cal State Monterey Bay, which ended up as a 7-3 win for Concordia, was their second-lowest scoring game of the season.

Conference Championship MVP, Jaden Soto commented on the mixed emotions to come with winning the championship. "Winning the conference for the first time in Division II is something that still hasn't fully sunk in. It's a mix of pride and validation; especially for the work this group has put in over the past year. We've had talented teams before, but this time it felt like everything finally came together at the right moment. To be part of something that sets a new standard for the program is honestly really special."

"Honestly, our team bond: It's like nothing else," said senior attacker Kennedy Brubaker. "Last year we only had three returners, but this year we had a lot more experience, so we were able to welcome the new players and really build strong chemistry as a team."

"Coming in as the new team in the conference was daunting, but we came in with big goals," said sophomore center Sierrah Ferguson. "There was no doubt in anyone's mind that we were gonna win through all the ups and downs that our season brought. Winning didn't feel like a surprise, more like a deserved outcome."

Ferguson scored one of their seven goals in the semi-final against Monterey Bay. First Team All-WWPA attacker and Freshman of the Year Mia Hueston added on two goals and an assist. Hueston also led the Golden Eagles in points in the championship game with a goal and an assist.

Brubaker put in consistent performances throughout the tournament, with an assist in both the semi-final and the final despite the low-scoring contests.

"A big part of it was anticipating the clock and pushing the counterattack," said Brubaker. "I was focused on finding the next open teammate and getting the highest-percentage shot possible."

Each player on the roster from top to bottom was vital for the team, with 14 different players scoring points in the first round of the WWPA tournament. Sophomore attackers Munroe Blem and Cassidy Woolley both contributed to the scoreline with two goals that game.

"I'm grateful for my coach giving me opportunities and my team for always cheering me on," said Woolley. "Especially as someone who doesn't get a lot of playing time. That really drives

me to perform for my team and step up when I get the chance. I just jump in and give all I got!"

"Depth in skill set is something most teams can't replicate," said Ferguson. "It's typical to have 1-3 star players that carry the stat board. However, as a team with such a diverse skill set, our second line is just as good as our first and third. Being able to trust that the next 6 girls in can carry out what the starting lineup set up is something most teams can't do."

The championship game was a battle of grit and determination, with only seven total goals being scored. Junior goalie Jaden Soto, who was named MVP of the match, finished with 11 saves. Soto was also named Ms. Defense for the team, along with First Team All-WWPA and All-Defensive First Team.

Sophomore center Lucy Aggs, who was named to the All-Defensive first team, was named by teammates as a key player in the conference championship win. She cites their cohesiveness as a key factor in being stout defensively.

"We have been working on [communication], not just talking but also actively listening," said Aggs. "It's easier said than done. We used to be super quiet, so Jaden and I made it our goal to command the team, and with time, everyone has followed suit."

"At a certain point in the game, it was a matter of which goalie failed first at tending their goal and Jaden came through with the mental toughness and endurance," said avid CUI Wom-

en's Water Polo fan Mikel Villarreal. He added that this was "the most fans at a women's water polo game" and "important for the nest as a whole."

Scoring was spread out in the championship game with Hueston recording a goal along with Amber Lewis, Emeline Smiley, and Munroe Blem. Hannah Edwards and Presley Acosta recorded assists along with Hueston and Brubaker.

Second Team All-WWPA and sophomore attacker Anna Tyukasz was named MVP of their season by Head Coach Casey Greenawalt.

Other award winners include an All-WWPA honorable mention for freshman utility Amber Lewis and All-Freshman Team for attacker Alexa De Villiers.

Following the win, Concordia qualified for the NCAA play-in game and competed against Wagner College on April 22. The ladies are looking to make history again and make a deep run in the national tournament.

"Our goal going into this championship is to play our game," said Ferguson. "Simple as that. If we play to our full potential, only good will come out of it."

"We have spent the past 17 weeks working so hard, so now it's just time to put it all together," said Aggs. "This team will never be the same again, so we want to be present and embrace every moment with the people around us. We are so lucky to have the opportunity, and we can't take it for granted."

Stay up to date with the team on Instagram @cuiwvp.

Students psyched for study abroad opportunities

KIARA AZUMA

LOCAL/GLOBAL EDITOR

Concordia's study abroad programs provide students with the opportunity to explore other parts of the world while taking classes that fulfill their degree requirements. Students can study abroad during the summer, fall and spring semesters. As the 2026 spring semester comes to an end, students who are planning to study abroad next semester shared their excitement.

One popular and competitive study abroad program is the Cambridge program. Students who apply must have their applications reviewed and selected by a committee and maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. Students who are accepted stay at Westfield House in Cambridge, England, for the fall semester.

"I wanted to study abroad through the Cambridge study abroad program because I admire the Lutheran foundation and academic rigor of Westfield House. I wanted to challenge myself academically, and Westfield House offers the academic structure and rigor that I am looking for," said Bethany Weider, freshman Theatre major with an emphasis in Acting and Directing.

itionally, Weider shared that she hopes to immerse herself in a new culture, meeting new people and experiencing new things, allowing her to push herself and prove that she can do things outside her comfort zone.

"Academically, I hope to gain confidence by truly investing in the intimate academic setting that Cambridge has to offer. Westfield House, where we will be studying, offers much smaller, seminar-style courses where the goal is to foster critical thinking and deep discussion. My hopes through engaging in these courses are to learn how to be a more effective critical thinker, and to become a more confident student by engaging in discussion and learning to speak more clearly and eloquently," added Weider.

Her love for history and theater also offers Weider an exciting opportunity to explore England's abundance of historical sites. "I hope to travel to London multiple times to see

West End shows and visit incredible sites like the National Gallery, British Museum, the Tower of London, the Globe Theatre, and so much more," said Weider. "England also has incredible proximity to the rest of Europe, where I can travel to other countries if I so desire."

Another program available to students is studying abroad in Milan, Italy, at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

Giselle Parra, junior English major, said, "I plan to go into publishing post-college, and there is a course there dedicated to publishing and learning to navigate that world. I was deciding between two schools, and the one in Milan had more classes I felt excited about! I get the chance to go early and take a course that will immerse me further in Italian culture with language classes, navigation and more!"

Parra also looks forward to meeting new people and experiencing life in Italy, from the fashion to the nightlife. "I am so blessed to be able to continue to explore what I'm passionate about in another country. I look forward to the friends and memories I will make out there," said Parra.

She also hopes to connect more with her family and faith during her time abroad. "Italy has been such a big part of my upbringing, with my Godmother being Italian, I grew up listening to a lot of the music and making her family's recipes. My family is also Catholic, so I am excited to visit different spots that are located there, connected to my faith," shared Parra.

Study abroad programs are available for students across all majors and disciplines worldwide. Other locations include Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, South Korea and Japan, and many more. Students who are interested in studying abroad or participating in an exchange program can visit the Moon International Center's Programs for Study Abroad or visit <https://www.cui.edu/admissions/undergraduate/academics/programs-abroad>. The website provides a direct link to view all available programs, as well as photos of past students' experiences.



PICTURED ABOVE: Students pose in front of the Trevi Fountain in Rome, Italy
Photo courtesy of: [cui_programsabroad](#) on Instagram



PICTURED ABOVE: Students who were a part of the Concordia Cambridge program in 2024
Photo courtesy of: [cui_programsabroad](#) on Instagram

Golden Eagles leave the nest, post-grad plans for seniors

KIARA AZUMA

LOCAL/GLOBAL EDITOR

Sat., May 2 will officially mark the Class of 2026's graduation from Concordia. Seniors shared their post-grad plans, which range from graduate school and employment to simply enjoying the summer after graduation.

"Of the 229 undergrad students scheduled to graduate this spring, 185 have completed their First Destination Survey, that is a response rate of 81%!" said Mariah Lucas, Director of Career Development and Vocation.

Lucas's team found that students have been accepted into full-time positions at the City of Costa Mesa, The Walt Disney World Company, Modern Woodmen of America, Howard University and the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"I will be working as a financial representative at Modern Woodmen of America, a financial services company," said Nathan Stuewe, a Business Administration major with an emphasis in Finance. "Concordia has taught me to never stop asking questions. I will be taking this with me into my work, always pushing to learn, improve, and challenge the standards," he added.

Track student-athlete Josiah Chin, graduating as a Behavioral Sciences major, stated, "I am planning to take a gap year to intern at the DA's office and get work experience before applying to grad school. I'm also planning to try and work for federal law enforcement by the time I graduate from grad school, hopefully!"

Students have also shared on the survey that they will be attending graduate school at the University of Florida for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine; Concordia University for Nursing, Master's in Business Administration, and Master's in Counseling; California State University, Long Beach for a Master's in Statistics; and California State University, San Diego for a Master's in Accounting.

For the seniors staff of The Courier, these are the plans ahead for them following graduation:

Rebekah Michel (Editor-in-Chief): I will be graduating this spring with a Bachelor of Arts in Music, with a Concentration in Vocal Performance and a Minor in Musical Theatre. Upon graduating, I will be relocating to the greater Orlando area to begin working for the Walt Disney World Company. I was accepted into the Disney College Program back in March and will be working as a cast member. I am very excited to be working at my favorite spot on Disney Property, EPCOT, as a Seater and Hostess at Garden Grill Character Dining. I hope to join Disney Entertainment following my program. Outside of the Disney College Program, I will be in New York, making my New

York City performance debut in May and my Carnegie Hall debut as a soloist in July.

Teagan Algarra (Layout Editor): My major is Graphic Design with a minor in Computer Science. My post-grad plan is to get myself and my design work out there so that I can get some experience and standing in the graphic design field. One day, I hope to be a part of a video game design team. I was also the captain of the volleyball team, and we won our first national championship this year. Even though my college beach volleyball career is over, I plan to still play over the summer! I'm going to spend my first summer in California with a few trips and concerts planned in between. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the beach volleyball program and The Courier team here at Concordia. It has been the most rewarding experience to work and play alongside some of the most extraordinary people.

Joseph Panetta (Sports Editor): My major is Business with an emphasis in Data Analytics and a minor in Communications. After graduation, I'm going to head home to Hawaii for the summer and spend some time with family and friends. While I don't have anything lined up yet, my goal is to come back to California after the summer and start living that big boy life. During my time at Concordia, I was blessed to be a part of the men's soccer team and also the sports editor for The Courier. Sports have been a big part of my life, and I would love to work in an analytics or data science field for a sports team. I'm excited for what the future holds.

Kiara Azuma (Local/Global and Online Editor): I will be graduating with a Bachelor's in Behavioral Sciences with an emphasis in Sociology. I have been accepted and will be attending California State University, Long Beach, to pursue my Master's in Social Work starting this fall. I am really excited to be part of this competitive program and continue expanding my passions for serving and advocating for people in our community. I know I wouldn't have had this opportunity without the professors here at Concordia who ignited these interests and pushed me to keep going and believing in myself to do more. I hope to work as a social worker in a school or medical setting after completing my master's program. But before all of that, I plan to take advantage of a restful summer, hanging out with friends and family, and taking a mini trip to Seattle!

Students looking to support and cheer on their fellow graduates can attend the May 2 Spring Commencement ceremony!