Program review signals larger financial turmoil at Puget Sound

By Albert Chang-Yoo

The University of Puget Sound is undergoing a Comprehensive Academic, Administrative, and Financial Review, a committee that began in Fall 2021 and will evaluate every academic department and program, non-academic revenue center (e.g. dining services), academic service center, and administrative service center. The final report can be found on the University’s website.

There are about 40 members on the Program Review Committee. The committee is represented by Faculty, Staff, the Board of Trustees, Students, and Alumni. The University of Puget Sound hired a higher education strategic consulting firm, to help with committee review. The review was approved by the University in June 2021, with final recommendations expected by October 2022. According to the Board of Trustees, and the university serves “to move the university toward an optimized program mix, enrollment stabilizes, and financial health improves.”

Monica DeHart is a professor of Anthropology and the Director of Global Studies. She is also the chair of the Mission-Centered subcommittee, one of the five subcommittees that comprise the Program Review. The comprehensive review, in general, is trying to get a sort of a diagnostic of the university to understand how to deal with the short term crises that are both pandemic related and enrollment-related...but also to think about the long term, where we want to go and what we want to be,” said Professor DeHart.

Over the course of a decade, the University witnessed about a 25% decline in enrollment. In the Fall of 2020, there were 2,130 total enrolled students and a 70% retention rate among first-year students, significantly less than the Fall of 2015, when the University had an 86% retention rate and a total of 2,774 students. While the University took a major hit due to the Covid-19 pandemic (reflecting a nationwide trend), they have dealt with under-enrollment since 2012, when enrollment was at about 2,853 students.

The committee evaluates programs based on quality, marketability, and financial cost. These factors are determined by thorough data collection from each department or center. Professor DeHart emphasized that data is analyzed through a holistic view: the work we’re doing allows us to think about what are some strategic directions that we want our universities to go in. Our goal is to make our academic programs, and how each of our individual majors or departments fit into that.

Annie Sullivan, the sole student representative on the Program Review Committee believes that the review is a worthwhile venture. “I mean, our students are spending so much to be here. And so I think having people look critically at, you know, the cost of tuition is like $72,000, or whatever it is, is, how can we take this money and give students the best experience possible?” she said. Sullivan acknowledged the necessity of being the only student rep: “I was kind of nervous about what kind of contribution I would be able to make as the only student.” However, she still feels that students are well-represented in the process. Student data and opinions can be collected from sources such as climate, diversity surveys and class evaluations. “It almost feels like that we have a bet- ter representation than I could have given,” she said.

The program review could help make University programs more coordinated. Sullivan cited advising as an example: “We have so many different departments working on advising. And so that would be a situation where all of these different departments are understaffed, underfunded, but are all doing the same thing.” The committee has the potential to increase communication between departments to reduce redundancies.

As each department is evaluated, faculty and staff are under the looming cloud of restructuring and potential budget cuts. Professor DeHart wanted to make it clear that the objective of the steering committee is not to strain faculty. The purpose of the committee is to think strategically about the long-term. “And that does mean resources go one direction and not another. But the goal is not to look at small versus large programs and decide which to cut,” Professor DeHart said.

Sara Freeman is a professor in the theater department and chair of the subcommittee heading data/finance. Professor Freeman recognizes that faculty may have concerns and she also shared their worries. “It’s very scary to undertake processes of organizational self-evaluation and change...but I don’t know how individuals don’t keep prospering if they don’t undertake self-evaluation and change and it’s the same for organizations. So I don’t think not doing it would help us either,” Professor Freeman stated.

For Professor Freeman, it’s important that the University considers its sustainability. “The pandemic helps us see that this is the end of one type of era. And we’re definitely – it feels like there are some new forces gathering. What are those going to be? What is that arc for, you know, 15, 20, 25 years? And I think we’re still figuring that out.”
The Bonneville Dam Complex sits in the Columbia River between Portland and Hood River. Say the complex is Bradford Island, historically used by the Army Corps of Engineers for chemical and equipment storage, as well as a hazardous waste landfill. In late March of this year, after nearly two decades of protests from the Yakama Nation, other tribes and environmental groups, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listed Bradford Island as a Superfund site—a priority list for the most contaminated sites in the country.

The levels of contamination in the water around Bradford Island more than qualify for Superfund site listing. According to Rose Longoria, the Regional Superfund Projects Manager for the Yakama Nation, testing for the levels of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) in the tissue of fish is a major indicator of contamination levels. The fish near Bradford Island were found to have over 300,000 times the acceptable level of PCBs for human consumption—the highest levels of PCBs in fish in fish across the nation. These PCBs can cause cancer and other serious health problems when consumed. For instance, the Les-Downwashed River that runs through Seattle is also a Superfund site, but the highest levels of PCBs ever found in fish there are around 1,100 times the acceptable levels.

While Bradford Island has been in use since the 1940s, the Army Corps of Engineers only began testing for contamination in 1982. Despite being aware of the record high levels of PCBs for decades, they largely ignored the Yakama Nation's requests to implement a clean-up plan. “For seven years we tried working with them and reaching a path forward. And then we finally sued them,” Longoria says.

Even after the Yakama Nation won the lawsuit, Longoria says that the relationship between the Corps and the Yakama Nation did not improve, but “what did improve is our ability to really dig into and understand information more and be able to do our own analysis,” she explains. Longoria says they began to understand that the Corps was attempting to avoid the issue. “They were trying to manage this in a way that would get it off their plate as soon as they could but it wasn’t working.”

According to Longoria, the state governments of Washington and Oregon— as well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service—were helpful partners once the issue was brought to their attention. The state and federal agencies worked with the Yakama Nation and the Army Corps to develop an understanding of how all the parties would work together on the project. After two years of negotiating the Army Corps decided to pull out of the agreement. Longoria says at this point the Yakama Nation decided to petition the EPA. Yakama Nation had tried petitioning the EPA in the past, but the Trump administration had shut them down. “As soon as Biden was elected, we reached out to the White House transition team and actually set up a meeting with their liaison to EPA,” Longoria says. After the EPA went through their ranking process, the island got listed as a Superfund site in March.

However, the listing as a Superfund site is only the beginning. According to Longoria, it typically takes 22 years to reach a clean-up plan for a Superfund site. To ensure Bradford Island isn’t neglected due to bureaucratic inefficiency, the Yakama Nation has received guarantees from the EPA to treat this project as an environmental emergency. The EPA has set up milestones to expedite the process and some removal of the toxic waste in the waters around the island will begin within the year.

Meanwhile, the communities near Bradford Island continue to be affected by the high levels of contamination and the Army Corps lack of response to the issue.

UBaldo Hernández, a senior organizer for the environmental group Columbia Riverkeeper, works with the Yakama Nation on contamination issues for the Bradford Island project. A big part of his role in this project is to get the people who fish the waters to be aware of the dangers. According to Longoria, much of the impact disproportionately affects the Native community as the waters around the island are a traditionally important fishing ground. “In terms of an area, the people who fish it’s densely populated,” she said. “According to Hernández, the Army Corps had issued a warning not to eat fish from this section of the river. However, as Hernández went to inspect the area, he found no signs or indications to warn fishermen (locals and those coming from Portland and surrounding areas) of the danger. ‘I approached them and told them ‘hey, you know, this is a highly contaminated, toxic site.’ And they were like ‘I never heard about it. I fish here all the time ,’” Hernández says.

In addition to warning people of the health hazards, Hernández works to involve the community in activism. Hernández found that the listing would have been impossible without the participation of the Native communities and other locals. “This is how we work,” he says, speaking of Columbia Riverkeeper, “Empowering voices of our community, giving information and presenting tools to participate.” Hernández emphasized that the biggest way for people to get involved is to spread the word. According to Longoria, tribal members are typically targeting salmon when fishing around Bradford Island. Because salmon are not resident fish (only passing through while traveling upstream to spawn) the danger of contamination is lower. However, it is common for fishermen to catch salmon and eat them.

Without being informed by the agencies responsible, the health hazard remains a significant risk for the community until a clean-up process is started.

The University of Puget Sound is during a financial recovery process after 2 years of low attention, under-enrollment and staff turnover. According to Provost Laura Behling, the University is equipped to handle the situation.

Behling was appointed Provost in 2019 by President Isaiah Crawford. Since then, University enrollment declined as the Covid-19 pandemic hit colleges nationwide. Enrollment dropped from 2,608 students in Fall 2019 to 2,130 in Fall 2020.

“Certainly, the pandemic really changed our University’s strategies,” Behling said. “We thought that it changed a lot of colleges and universities enrollments,” Behling stated. “Students were hesitant to take classes this year because they didn’t want to do their first year in college online... that’s probably a great experience for someone who had to like have had to do it on campus.” Nationally, college enrollment declined by over 3% in 2020.

Behling emphasized that under-enrollment goes beyond the pandemic: “there are people who are high school students. And that’s coming in the next mid to late 2020s. And that’s something that we’re watching out for, too.”

The so-called ‘demographic cliff’ is the expected decline in higher education enrollment following low national birth rates, which plummeted during the 2008 recession. Nationally, enrollment is expected to decline 15% by 2025.

The slide in enrollment will make Behling’s job much harder. “When you’re seeing a steady decline, this is going to make us have to work harder and up our game to make sure that people know who we are and the kind of education that we offer,” Behling says.

As a small liberal arts school, Puget Sound is in a unique position. Behling believes that many families don’t have the financial and time to balance both recruitment and retention: “everything we do, should be and I think is guided by what is the experience that our students are having on this campus…we want to make sure that it’s attractive to students, right, [for] students who are here but also students who will be here 10 years from now.”

Behling is confident in the University’s ability to tackle the challenges. “We have an excellent academic institution. We have excellent students who are here. I think we run a very good operation at the university and are very thoughtful about the ways that we spend money,” Behling said. Puget Sound’s endowment is valued at over $450 million, and about 4% of it is spent annually on operations. In the coming months, the program review will finalize its recommendations to improve University functions. Although there is some worry among faculty about the changes, Behling asks faculty to both “trust the process as it is important that the people who are in the process.”

Despite student pushback and faculty reservations, Behling continues to work. “I hope we get new ideas, new programs, new ways of doing things out of this and that we are not afraid to think different and take some calculated risks about thinking about what we do,” Behling said.
Capriana Jiang, third-year, took action after witnessing a groundskeeper spraying Roundup on campus in March. Concerned about its effect on pollinators and potentially carcinogenic properties, Jiang reached out to the Director of Sustainability, Lexi Brewer, and the Manager of Grounds and Automotive, Phil Hancock. Upon receiving an email from Jiang, Associate VP for Facilities Services Bob Kief conceded to halt the use of Roundup immediately.

Roundup is an herbicide containing glyphosate and neonicotinoids. Roundup bears a poor reputation and has been investigated for causing adverse effects in non-target organisms - organisms that suffer from effects not intended for them. Glyphosate is a powerful antibiotic that disrupts the gut microbiome of pollinators. Research shows that Neonicotinoids have similar effects to glyphosate and are believed to cause Colony Collapse Disorder. Since our campus houses bumblebee hives, it struck Jiang as hypocritical for a campus that touts its environmental efforts to put pollinators at risk.

Roundup on campus - Loggers Live Green

By Emma Loenicker

Tacoma’s Unity Christian Ministries Youth Center is home to Gerardo Peha’s “I Am Tacoma,” a mural representing Tacoma’s diversity. The mural was defaced on March 20th. Peha, known as “Periko the Artist,” said that he painted the mural to represent “all of the different kinds of faces” he sees within the community, and to capture the “migration spirit” of the Payalup land we share.

The mural depicts a pair of monarch butterfly wings, surrounded by four children’s faces - those of Caucasian, Latinx, Asian, and Black children. When you stand in between the butterfly wings, you are embracing your place within Tacoma. The Tacoma Arts Commission funded the mural, which Peha finished in March of 2020.

Pastor Lenall Battle, who runs the Unity Christian Ministries Center, informed me that a neighbor’s surveillance camera caught an elderly man that formerly worked for the church exiting his vehicle with a paint roller in front of the mural. This same man is known for using racist slurs. The man, who previously designed advertisement artwork for the church, defaced the Black child first and returned in the following days to deface the remaining children.

The mural is beloved by the community. Pastor Battle referred to Peha’s vision as “the type of mural that would bring the community together and ease the tensions with everything going on in politics.” Pastor Battle filed a police report in response to the vandalism. Peha expressed that his disappointment and sympathy go out to the people feeling targeted and hurt by this crime. Peha relayed sentiments of community members that this “felt like an attack on our community, and it felt personal.” Peha explained that painting a public mural is like “giving it to the public.” Once it lies within the community, it becomes theirs. Peha keeps his public works as controversial as possible seeking minimal backlash against the community. In this case, a mural that pays homage to Tacoma’s diversity was still not welcomed by all.

Peha remains optimistic and wants people to focus on healing and moving forward because “the majority of people didn’t want this to happen.” Peha explained that “keeping it optimistic is important. We’re going to repaint it. There is such a small percentage of people that really want to react to it. I mean it’s one person in the whole community.”

Peha and Pastor Battle agreed that the mural should be re-painted as soon as possible because the vandalism is a discredit to the community. “Leaving a piece like that defaced for too long, it speaks. We want to restore it so people can be optimistic again,” said Peha.

Within 24 hours of the vandalism, Peha received enough donations from Tidy Up Tacoma, Spaceworks, and dedicated community members to repaint the mural. He hopes to repaint it within the next month. Pastor Battle and Peha are planning to use multiple coats of sealer when repainting, and to install a surveillance system to deter future vandalism.
Tacoma nonprofit gives away produce to build community

By Sabrina Hubbell

Back in 2015, David Thompson, a local Tacoma resident, became curious about how he could share the products of his backyard garden with those in need. Now, Thompson runs an organization called Food is Free Tacoma, with dozens of gardens that provide free food to communities and individuals experiencing food insecurity.

At the time, Thompson’s home garden was growing more produce than he could use himself. He also found it very difficult arranging for family and friends to take some of the produce off of his hands. “I was growing a lot of stuff at my house and I couldn’t give it away. I would try and get my family to come pick it up and they wouldn’t pick it up on time. I just grew way too much stuff so the only thing I could do was try and give it away,” Thompson said. Consequently, Thompson found himself in a dilemma. “There’s no place to put all this stuff you grew and it’s too much fun to grow it!” he said.

Thompson then read about the Food is Free project in Austin, Texas in 2012. The organization currently has 350 food sharing projects worldwide. Thompson thought this would be a great solution for sharing produce became much harder to manage. “The tables didn’t work. We’ve moved away from the tables,” Thompson said.

So Thompson decided to start expanding the nonprofit and finding other methods of sharing the produce. “In 2018 I decided to try and build gardens in town. So I built them in the parkways with a couple of grants” he said. The construction of the gardens was a huge success. We built about 35 of them in those first two years” Thompson added. “Last year we got a grant from AARP to build 40 garden beds”.

Food is Free Tacoma distributes the produce from those gardens at events in Tacoma’s parks. “What we do is set up in local parks and we’ll do one of those events once a month at one of those parks,” Thompson said. “We’re in south Tacoma a lot.” Thompson explains that lots of people take food from their events and that “usually no food is leftover!” And if there is, Thompson takes it over to the Buddhist temple and they use it in their cooking there.

Thompson explains that both the eastern and southern parts of Tacoma have poor access to grocery stores, making the project’s operations there extremely important. Thompson uses the term “food desert” to describe an area or community like the eastern or southern parts of Tacoma that seriously lacks food availability, especially fresh produce. “It’s a bad food desert. We try to work our way in, so there’s fresh produce available to people in those areas where they don’t really have access and have to drive quite a ways to get produce” Thompson said. Furthermore, Thompson explained why fresh produce is so important in food deserts. “If you have to take a bus or something like that to go to the grocery store, we’re not gonna see fresh produce that often. That’s why we set up in the parks there,” he said.

Food is Free Tacoma not only acquires produce from individuals but also receives food from bigger organizations and food rescues. “Say there was a truckload of bananas going somewhere and whoever was going to take them couldn’t take those bananas so they are just sitting on a dock or something like that. Food rescue organizations will call me up and say ‘hey we’ve got this truckload of bananas do you want them and will bring me the truckload of bananas,’” Thompson added. What started as an overflowing backyard garden has since snowballed into an important provider of fresh vegetables in some of Tacoma’s most vulnerable neighborhoods. Including everything from salvaging bananas to dozens of gardens around Tacoma, Thompson’s Food is Free project has become a heartwarming story of community aid.

**Corrections:**

The Trail apologizes for consistency issues in the previous publications. “Naomi and Maya” at the bottom of page one of the JSU Interview were misprints, intended to reference Neomi Ngo and Maija Petterson. Additionally, “Fullerton” has been corrected to Fullarton in our online Issue #4. The Trail appreciates the time our peers take to speak with us and respect the intrinsic value names hold. If you see your name misspelled in an article, please email trail@pugetsound.edu
Everyone knows the situation is becoming untenable, evolving into a crisis that threatens thousands of lives. However, universal recognition of the problem is where agreement on the issue ends. The roots of the issue remain hotly debated, and potential solutions are twisted into knots by cynical and warped discourse. Students at the University of Puget Sound have a generally higher level of socioeconomic status which elevates the importance of their voice in the construction of discourses. As such, they have a responsibility to use that power to create more compassionate, reasonable conversations on the issue of homelessness. Beyond fixing the systemic issues that leave people on the streets—which are actually quite clear, despite the endless attempts to muddy the waters by those on the right and their allies in the center—it does not matter why someone is homeless. The reasons for someone’s suffering should have no bearing on how they are treated. Yet, powerful political discourses, which have taken over much of the conversation, advocate the exact opposite.

Right-wing narratives moralize about people suffering from lack of housing. One 2018 article in the conservative publication City Journal, "Seattle Under Seige," delights in calling homeless people "rats" and conjuring up an image of the homeless population as one rampant with rape and murder. The author paints all unhoused people as dirty drug addicts who take advantage of Seattle’s liberal attitudes.

The homeless population is frequently blamed for rising property crime, a narrative familiar in Tacoma, as organizations like Tacoma Safe grom on the impacts of homeless encampments on their businesses. Evidently, concern for profits exceeds care for human life. This dehumanization of homeless people as undesirable, crime-causing drug addicts who deserve their lot in life, operates functionally to permit any action deemed necessary for removal. And that’s exactly what has happened. Homeless people have been turned into objects of hate.

Take the comments on Matt Markovich’s, a journalist for Fox 13 in Seattle, Twitter post on the 25 of March depicting the removal of a homeless encampment in Seattle. They compared people experiencing homelessness to a violent and other inhumane measures affectionately refer to it as "tough love." The growing homeless population shows that this tactic doesn’t actually solve the base issues that cause homelessness, and is only exacerbating the issue.

The narrative peddled by the right has been wildly successful. Any sense of empathy for the homeless population has seemingly morphed into detached fear. A few tents are all it takes for a area to be called sketchy, and suddenly Seattle and Tacoma are going down the tubes because people are trying their best to survive.

In response to the rhetoric of dehumanization that is propagated by the right, like Tacoma Safe, organizations led by good people committed to helping people experiencing homelessness have sprung up around the Sea-Tac area. Groups like Serve The People Tacoma and Stop the Sweeps Seattle are all doing their part to listen, serve, and help members of our community who are experiencing homelessness.

Students at the University of Puget Sound have a part to play too. Stop viewing homeless people with fear. Stop saying areas with tents are sketchy. Stop internalizing right-wing rhetoric about people in our community. Start calling people out when they parrot malicious narratives. Start constructing a new narrative on homelessness, one that emphasizes the humanity of those struggling to meet their basic needs as they are systematically disenfranchised.

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Start today.
Swimmer bid farewell to beloved Myhre

With the conclusion of the NWC 2021-2022 swimming season, veteran head coach Chris Myhre has announced his retirement, after a distinguished 32-year career. He boasts three NAIA women’s national titles (96’, 98’ 99’), and three men’s NAIA national titles(95’96’97’), having won NAIA coach of the year for both men and women during his time (96’ and 97’). His program created a culture of winning at Puget Sound, and the stories from his swimmers depict an atmosphere of positivity and support. This is a coach who will be dearly missed for his swimming expertise and the inclusive environment he’s created for these athletes.

Part of that environment of inclusivity is built on a tradition of making personal connections to all of the swimmers on his team. Myhre credits Bob Duncan, the head coach of university swimming the 37 years prior to himself, for the creation of a legacy to which he’s added ‘little wrinkles’ of his own. “When I took over, there were certainly big shoes to fill but they were easy shoes to fill for sure. Now the next coach will add their little wrinkles,” Myhre said about the Puget Sound swimming legacy.

Myhre’s passion for the sport and his work. “I think all coaches take a little bit from the coaches they had when they were swimmers. I think the biggest thing I have taken from Chris is that it’s the coaches job to figure out why a swimmer is motivated to be on the team and then work from there.” Myhre said Derek was massively successful at the University and is continuing his passion for the sport as coach, he is a great example of the legacy Myhre will be leaving behind at UPS. The program Myhre established has provided results for decades; he attributes some of the program’s success to his leadership in creating a legacy to which he’s added his own mark.

By Luke Ahearn

The politics of soccer: The fight in the PNW for soccer fans to stand against fascism

Soccer’s popularity is growing quickly in the U.S., but it’s not taking the typical path of major league sports. According to Collins, soccer fans do things a little differently. “It’s a little counterculture here,” he says. Referring to the fans and their political sentiments, clearly, no institution will be able to take these values away.
Abortion accessibility in the U.S.

By Anna Sweeteland

On March 30th, 2022, Arizona became the first U.S. state to sign a 15-week abortion ban into law. Florida, Kentucky, and West Virginia are not far behind, each having successfully passed a 15-week abortion ban within their state legislature and only need their governor’s signature to put the law into effect. However, Arizona was not the first state to propose unconstitutional abortion bans. In 2018, Mississippi proposed a similar 15-week abortion ban, which at the time was halted by the federal courts, but in May 2021, the Supreme Court (with its now 6-3 conservative majority) decided to hear the Mississippi case. Roe v. Wade is a federal ruling which declares that states are unable to outlaw abortions before 23 weeks of pregnancy. Anticipating that the Court will uphold the Mississippi law and overturn Roe v. Wade in June 2022, many states like Arizona began drafting and passing a variety of restrictions on abortion. Planned Parenthood labeled the Texas abortion ban “one of the most extreme abortion bans in the entire nation.” In May 2021, Senate Bill 8 was signed into Texas law, banning abortion at six weeks — before most people know they’re pregnant — with no exceptions for rape or incest. SB 8 allows private individuals, not the state, to enforce the law. Anyone can take legal action against individuals, not the state, to enforce the law. Anyone can take legal action against SB 8 allows private individuals, not the state, to enforce the law. Anyone can take legal action against individuals, not the state, to enforce the law. Anyone can take legal action against citizens’ right to abortion. However, some UPS students are from states implementing abortion bans, and for this reason, I’ve outlined the resources in Tacoma for students who may experience an unexpected pregnancy. Firstly, on the CHWS website, they mention offering emergency contraception (the morning after pill) as well as pregnancy tests. Senate Bill 8 is one of the better options for abortions, pre- and post-abortion counseling, and education would be Taft Community Health. 10742, 7 minute drive from campus. You can schedule appointments confidentially on their website. There are two walk-in clinics for emergency contraception. Also, if you are uninsured, Planned Parenthood can assist in either state funding or calculating a lower fee scale. Additional abortion providers in Tacoma include All Women’s Health (a 12-minute drive from campus) and Cedar Rivers Clinic (a 7-minute drive). Similar to Planned Parenthood, these clinics provide counseling and assist patients in making the best decision for them. These 3 clinics provide medical abortion; if you’re looking for an STI test, birth control prescription, gynecological exam, cancer screening, and much more, these would be great resources. Feelings of hopelessness and defeat in the face of these arising abortion bans are incredibly valid, and I share in them as well. If anyone on campus needs assistance accessing resources for an unexpected pregnancy and finds medical clinics intimidating, consider reaching out to me or other peer allies — while pregnancy and abortion are not our main focus as a club, we are a trained confidential support system for students. I could provide transportation to any students wanting to visit a local clinic or sit in on appointments.

RACK. It’s more than just a synonym for boobs. In fact, it’s an acronym! RACK stands for Risk Aware Consensual Kink, a safety protocol for those participat- ing in BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, Sadism and Masochism). RACK was created in 1999 by Gary Switch, a contributing editor for the kink-focused magazine Promethea in reaction to the first BDSM safety protocol coined SSC (Safe, Sane, Consensual). They felt that nothing can ever be guar- anteed 100% safe or 100% sane, and the BDSM consent guidelines should reflect that. For this reason, RACK is specifica- lly popular among those who engage in edgeplay: riskier sexual activities with a greater chance of injury. If an injury is the antithesis of safety, then many in the edge- play community felt SSC was inapplicable to them because injury and risk were the appeals. Rather than prohibit injury, RACK en- courages risk awareness. To be risk aware within BDSM means participants ac- knowledge that their sexual activities may have physical risks like bruises or burns, mental risks like stress and anguish, as well as emotional risks like humiliation. For example, if my partner and I were down to incorporate choking in our sex life, we would need to be aware that this may interfere with my bloodflow or ability to breathe. By knowing the risks, we can prepare to combat them. In this case, my partner might decide to pay close atten- tion to my breathing patterns. This demonstrates methods on how to continue breathing whilst being choked, and we should establish a safeguard or signal if either of us wants to stop. One BDSM blog explains that we are all risk-aware in our everyday lives — check- ing both ways before we cross the street, fastening our seatbelts in the car, etc. — and this willingness to take precautions allows us to take risks while still enjoying ourselves. The same goes for edgeplay: by assessing risks at the moment and abiding by the boundaries and plan you prepared with your partner(s) priorly, you ensure sex can be simultaneously safe and fun. Beyond risk awareness, the R in RACK stands for consensual. For sex to be consensual, all parties involved need to enthusiastically agree, in a comfortable environment safe from coercion to all ac- tivities that are going to take place. There should be a conversation prior to sex in which every individual establishes their boundaries and agrees upon a safeword. As a self-identified masochist, I’ve been brainstorming how to incorporate RACK into my sex life. I once asked a sexual partner to spank me in the heat of the mo- ment, but then they got flustered, unsure of how hard to hit me in fear of inflicting pain. This awkwardness occurred because my partner and I was not risk aware. To abide by RACK, before sex, my part- ner and I must discuss our desires, their potential risks, and how to best respond to those risks. This conversation is critical to respect both my boundaries and my partner’s during sex. Even if you wouldn’t consider your sex life to be very high risk, there are import- ant lessons to take away from RACK. Any interaction with another individual incor- porates risk, especially when considering one another’s boundaries. One’s own definition of risk will likely be differ- ent from another’s, so making open and honest communication among all parties is imperative; before sex starts, all the way until the end. This ensures safe informed experience those dreams can become reality.

Like your RACK

By Anna Sweeteland

April 15th, 2022

The Happy Trail is the Trail’s sex column that seeks to inform the community on issues related to sexuality and gender by addressing these topics in an educa- tional and demystifying way. Our mission is to make the campus a safer place by normalizing and demystifying topics like safe sex practices, sexualities, kinks and polyamory, while shedding light on topics like trans rights, sexual and domestic violence, gender inequalities and intersectionality. Happy Trail correspondents are not medical professionals; if you have a medical concern contact CHWS or a local clinic. Otherwise, direct your sexuality and gender questions to vagray@pugetsound.edu.

The Happy Trail articles in the form of a letter to the editor sent to trail@pugetsound.edu.

Response to Happy Trail articles in the form of a letter to the editor sent to trail@pugetsound.edu.

HAPPY TRAIL

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The April 15th, 2022 events included open mic nights, poetry readings, and other art showcases. The KUPS radio station hosted an open mic event on March 31 at Kittredge Gallery. The gallery featured a vibrant exhibition of art and poetry, as well as live music. The event was open to all students, and it was a great opportunity for students to showcase their talents and connect with the Puget Sound community.

During the event, around ten students performed songs and original poetry. Everyone was impressed by the high quality of the renditions, which encapsulated joy, hardship, and resilience. Though I enjoyed all of the impressive performances, my favorite was the beautiful song by a student named Rolf Wilhelm. He played the guitar and sang on his original songs, which were motivated by his personal experiences and his love for music. His performance brought tears to my eyes, and it reminded me of the power of art to inspire and uplift.

As an audience member, this description was meaningful to me because it highlighted the importance of art in our lives. Art is not just aesthetic, but it is a way to express our emotions and connect with others. It is a powerful tool for healing and self-discovery. I hope that more people will attend events like this in the future. They are a reminder of the beauty and richness of the human experience, and they inspire us to continue creating and appreciating art.

The open mic event was a great opportunity for people to share their talents and connect with the community. It was a reminder of the power of art to bring people together and to inspire us to be our true selves. I hope that everyone who attended the event enjoyed it, and I look forward to attending more events like this in the future.