



TUESDAY
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THE UNIVERSITY STAR

DEFENDING THE FIRST AMENDMENT SINCE 1911

Inside the Capitol: House Bill 281

By Arabella Dichristina
News Contributor

"Inside the Capitol" examines key bills from the 89th legislative session that impact the Texas State and San Marcos communities. The session began Jan. 14 and ends June 2.

Some college degrees with high debt and low earning potential could face restrictions under two new bills in Texas' 89th legislative session.

State Rep. Carl Tepper, R-Lubbock, introduced House Bill 281 (HB 281) which would place certain performance ratings on degrees in public higher education institutions in Texas based on their debt-to-income ratio. State Sen. Mayes Middleton R-Galveston also introduced SB 757, an identical bill in the Senate.

What is the bill proposing?

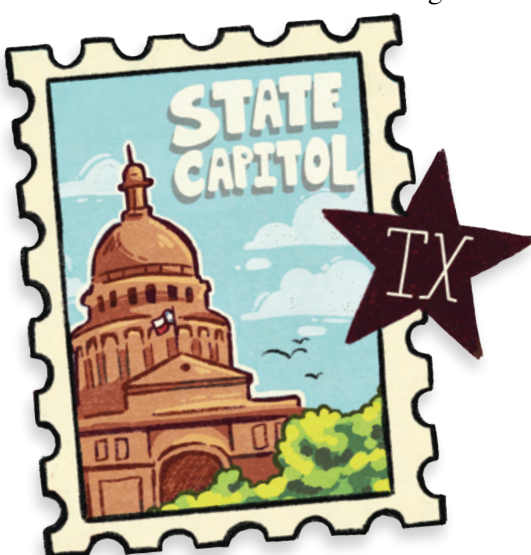
According to HB 281, debt-to-earnings metrics would be used to evaluate academic programs based on graduates' post-graduation debt levels. Here's how the system works:

- Undergraduate programs are assessed two years after graduation.
- Master's programs are assessed three years after graduation.
- Doctoral programs are assessed five years after

graduation.

Programs are rated based on the ratio of debt to earnings:

- Reward: Debt is 75% or less of earnings.
- Monitor: Debt is between 76% and 100% of earnings.
- Sanction: Debt is between 101% and 125% of earnings.
- Sunset: Debt exceeds 125% of earnings.



SOPHIA GERKE | ASSISTANT DESIGN EDITOR

[SEE LEGISLATION PAGE 3](#)

Trump freezes federal aid, effects on Texas State remain unclear

By Ryan Claycamp
Assistant News Editor

The Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum instructing all executive agencies to freeze any loans or grants on Monday, Jan. 27.

The memo instructed federal agencies to freeze all federal loans or grants, except those issued directly to individuals. According to a Texas State spokesperson, the memo does not currently impact student financial aid.

"The U.S. Department of Education is currently reviewing the full impact of the memo issued by the Office of Management and Budget on Jan. 27, 2025, to temporarily pause federal financial assistance programs," An update on the Federal Student Aid website stated. "Per the memo, the pause does not impact 'assistance received directly by individuals.' This includes Title IV, HEA funds, which are provided to individual students."

[SEE UNIVERSITY PAGE 3](#)

'Advocating for themselves': students form organization for chronic conditions

By Jamin Ochoa
Life & Arts Reporter

A group of students launched a new organization aimed at providing support for students with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) and other chronic conditions.

PAWS for POTS is a student organization that tasks itself with creating a community, offering information about the Office of Disability Services (ODS) process and actions that can help relieve symptoms of POTS and other related illnesses.

Ravyn Benfield, criminal justice senior and PAWS for POTS president, was diagnosed with POTS after years of misdiagnoses for anxiety. When she received her diagnosis, support from Alanna Rivas, theater education junior and PAWS for POTS vice president, made her realize she was not alone. They started the organization so other students could feel that same relief for others who may have a chronic illness.

"You can feel so alone and just alienated and it can feel like you can't connect with other people because you experience struggles that they might not be able to understand," Benfield said. "Being able to have that community is just amazing because you can talk to each other."



ALLISON DRINNON | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

PAWS for POTS faculty advisor Amber Cantu (Left) and President Ravyn Benfield (Right) welcome members to the inaugural club meeting, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at the LBJ Student Center.

[SEE CLUB PAGE 6](#)

Texas State softball 2025 season preview

By Kaden Bessent
Sports Reporter

There is only one answer that's fitting for a preview of what's to come for Texas State softball this 2025 season—an exclamation mark paired with a question mark.

There's excitement for the team that returns 12 players from a Sun Belt Conference Champion roster, is tabbed at the top of the said conference in the Preseason Coaches Poll and is home to the SBC Preseason Pitcher of the Year in sophomore Madison Azua.

Questions arise about who will be a regular in the starting nine, what the pitching rotation will look like, which transfers will make the most significant impact and whether any freshmen will be impact players.

The Bobcats' season begins with a 16-game home stretch starting Thursday, Feb. 6, against the Arkansas Razorbacks, who are ranked 13th in USA Softball's preseason rankings. Texas State enters the year receiving votes in USA Softball's preseason top-25 poll.

What's the Hype About?

Of the 12 returners from 2024, outfielder Ciara Trahan earned the Preseason All-Sun Belt nod for the second straight year. Trahan suffered a season-ending knee injury last season, but she was impactful in her 38 games before the injury. She's only one of the two seniors on the roster and will likely be a leader of this fairly young squad.

[SEE SOFTBALL PAGE 7](#)



MANDALYN LEWALLEN | MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

The Texas State softball team celebrates with the Sun Belt Conference tournament championship trophy following the victory over Louisiana-Lafayette, Saturday, May 11, 2024, at Bobcat Softball Stadium.

County to establish jail competency restoration program

By Ryan Claycamp
Assistant News Editor

The Hays County Commissioner's Court approved the first steps toward establishing a program to restore mental competency to defendants in jail on Jan. 7.

Jail-based Competency Restoration (JBCR) seeks to restore the competency of detainees legally deemed mentally incompetent, meaning a judge has found them lacking the mental ability to consent to criminal legal decisions. Individuals deemed incompetent can not legally move forward with their case until their competency is restored.

"If we don't have this program, what happens is someone who is deemed incompetent who's sitting in our jail, waits up to 20 months for a bed at a state hospital?" Hays County Criminal District Attorney Kelly Higgins said. "In my view, this is because Texas doesn't take care of people. It does not spend the money it needs to spend on mental health."

Higgins said due to long wait times for a bed at a state hospital, defendants often spend more time in jail waiting for their competency to be restored than they would if they were convicted and sentenced.

"For me, that wait is just patently, inherently inhumane," Higgins said. "... It's the worst place you could be, and you're mentally ill, that's a bad scene."

According to Anthony Winn, the director of clinical operations for Hill Country MHDD, once implemented, the JBCR would seek to restore competency within a 45 to 60-day window. He said that if defendants fail to achieve that initially, they can ask a judge for a 60-day extension.

Winn said the restoration process

would include 10 hours of treatment a day, which consists of group services, medication, education on courtroom language, mock trials and more. He said the treatment would be individualized for each defendant.

Hill County MHDD's team that will be sent to the jail will include several different types of professionals. Winn said the team would consist of someone who has experienced mental health conditions, a "licensed practitioner of the healing arts," licensed counselors and mental health professionals.

"What we call QMHPs, qualified mental health professionals, which are bachelor level mental health professionals who will be providing a lot of the daily programming," Winn said.

Some members of the community spoke against the commissioner's court approval of a JBCR. Karen Muñoz, justice catalyst fellow for LatinoJustice PRLDEF has been vocal in her criticisms of the program.

"I think my position is that I do

think that it's not logical and it's not compassionate to believe that jails are a place where people can get treatment in the first place," Muñoz said. "We could be having a conversation about creating competency restoration for Hays County outside of the jail setting."

Muñoz said that she believes if mental health resources were more accessible before someone is arrested, it may reduce the number of people who end up in jail in the first place.

"Have we tried every single preventative measure in Hays County, have we truly invested in all of the different menu of items that could be offered up front, and I mean before law enforcement come into the picture? I don't think we have in Hays County," Muñoz said.

Muñoz also raised concerns over whether individuals would still receive care if they were released from jail after their competency is restored. According to Winn, continuing care is a condition of Hill Country MHDD's program.

What is Jail-Based Competency Restoration (JBCR)?

- A program designed to restore a defendant's mental ability to stand trial, accept a plea deal, or agree to a diversion program.

Why Does Hays County want JBCR?

- Defendants deemed legally incompetent face halted criminal proceedings.
- State hospital wait times for restoration can be as long as 20 months.

What are the opponents' concerns?

- JBCR may criminalize mental health conditions.
- Advocates argue mental health treatment is more effective outside jail settings.

ANDY ROJAS NINO | ILLUSTRATOR

"Part of the program requirements include discharge planning, and so one of the things that we're going to do as someone is restorative competency and discharging from the competency restoration program is we're going to work with them to figure out what are the next steps," Winn said.

According to Winn, continuing care means partnering with existing resources in Hays County, such as the Mental Health Court.

One thing Higgins and Muñoz agreed on is that a JBCR can be abused. Higgins said that a "mean-spirited DA" could use the program to force through convictions, but that he would not.

"To me, it's a realistic, hypothetical concern, but it's not realistic here. I mean, I don't even know what our conviction rate is," Higgins said. "I personally as the DA I'm not a wrathful person."

According to Winn, the program is too early in development to have a finalized timeline for implementation.

Transfer students contribute to increased enrollment

By Candace Taggart
News Reporter

As Texas State enrollment continues to break records, transfer students are contributing to that population increase, which is expected to hit 50,000 by 2035.

Gary Ray, associate vice president for enrollment management, said Texas State has 981 transfers who enrolled this spring.

"Typically when you build enrollment, you're looking at new students, which would include new transfers," Ray said. "You're also really committed to retention of students that you currently have, because returning students makes up the largest number."

Texas State has high retention rates for transfer students with 95% of the transfers who started in fall 2024 signed up for spring classes.

Last April, President Kelly Damphousse and Austin Community College (ACC) Chancellor Russell Lowery-Hart signed a partnership for a transfer program between the two schools, called Bats to Cats.

Bats to Cats is a guaranteed transfer program that opened its applications fall 2024 and launches in fall 2025. According to Ray, 285 ACC students joined the Bats to Cats program in the first 90 days of its opening.

Students who declare they want to be a part of the program and transfer to Texas State within their first 30 hours of enrolling at ACC will have guidance from both universities on the correct courses for their degree.

The first declaration period was Sept. 1, 2024. The students only have to fill out the declaration form with no fees to transfer with this program. The next declaration period begins Feb. 1.

According to Ray, the majority of ACC students intend to transfer to a four-year university, but only 25% transfer in three years.

"[Bats to Cats] takes in consideration that ACC is the top transfer-sending institution, so we're starting with those who send more of their students to us and trying to work out these details," Ray said.

Texas State is the number one transfer destination for ACC students according to Renee Esparza, director of transfer services at ACC.

"Bats to Cats helps with that transition by handing off to Texas State staff who will help students on board successfully and easily," Esparza said.

ACC is offering a free tuition pilot program that grants free tuition for up to three years for an associate's degree and five years for a bachelor's degree to recent graduates in the ACC service area.

"My personal experience is that Austin and Central Texas are very expensive places to live, so being able to provide education for free is almost life changing," Esparza said. "We have students who said they didn't think they were going to be able to go to college before learning about these programs."

Bats to Cats also offers financial incentives to students in the program. Once the transfers are at Texas State, they'll receive \$1,000 a year for two years and an additional \$1,000 a year if they transfer to the Round Rock campus.

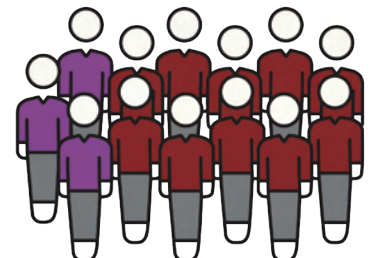
Ray said a priority for transfer students is creating a sense of belonging. Students in the Bats to Cats program will get tickets to certain events

Spring 2024



826 total transfers

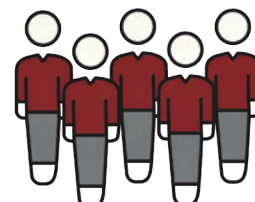
Fall 2024



581 ACC Transfers

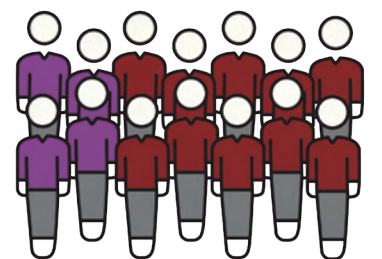
2,682 total transfers

Spring 2025



981 total transfers

Fall 2025



703 ACC Transfers

2,828 total transfers

DESIGN STAFF

throughout the school year.

Stefan Rainbolt, international studies junior, transferred from an Illinois community college to ACC and then to Texas State. Rainbolt said the advising center and career services were helpful in helping him transfer and change his major, but he had to build a community by himself as a nontraditional student.

"I'm 24, and an out-of-state transfer who doesn't live on campus, so meeting people and kind of engrossing myself into the campus culture was going to be harder for me from the get-go," Rainbolt said.

THE UNIVERSITY STAR

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FROM FRONT LEGISLATION

Programs that receive a "Reward" rating are exempt from certain reviews. Programs rated "Monitor" would be closely watched and may face additional review or corrective action if their financial performance does not improve.

In some cases, if phasing out a program would remove a core curriculum course required for other programs, special exceptions may apply.

David Deggs, Educate Texas's senior director of higher education said it is difficult to define the value of a degree.

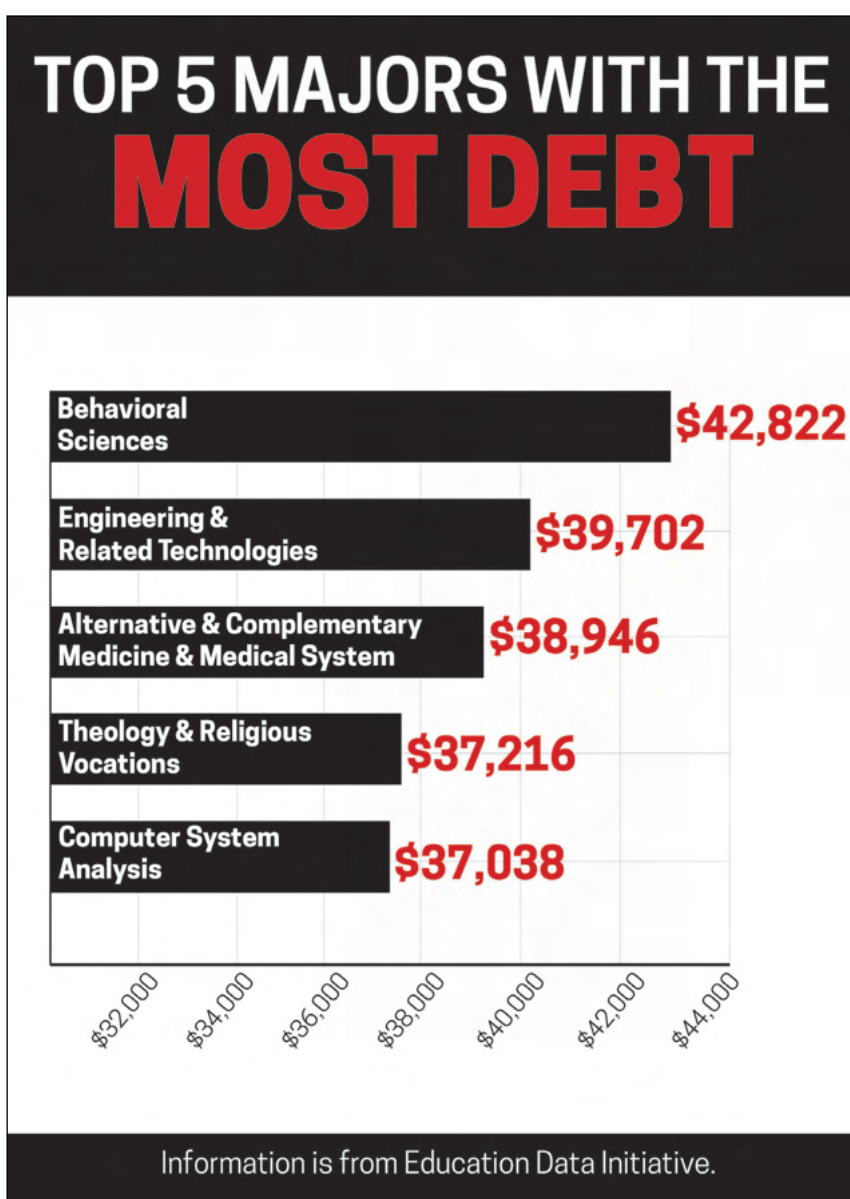
"I think the other thing that could happen [if the bill gets passed], students would drive away from some field that we need them to be in," Deggs said.

According to the Education Data Initiative, Texas had an average student loan debt of \$33,746 as of October 2024.

"Can we even capture the value of a credential, and if we determine that the degree was not bringing the value that it was intended, could you rank people? Could you make courses unavailable and things like that?" Priscilla Aquino-Garza, senior director of policy and programs at Educate Texas, said.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's DataBridge, compared to other degrees, students with high debt are typically in areas like arts, education and psychology.

Aquino-Garza said many colleges have capitalized on the unique strengths of their specific



LUCIA GONZALEZ | ILLUSTRATOR

majors. If HB 281 passes, it could undermine the years of legacy and progress that these colleges have worked to build, she said.

"You cannot measure passion or spark of something you want to explore. [The bill] is cutting off the ability to explore, we want [students] to have a connection with the kinds of careers they want to have," Aquino-Garza said.

that you could put at risk that feels like a slippery slope."

While some majors may not offer high salaries, fields like social work, education and public health are essential to society's well-being despite their potentially low salaries, Aquino-Garza said.

"No one has a guarantee that they're going to get a well-paid job. There's no guarantee that wages will always be competitive in certain areas. It's really difficult to even guess the programs or the jobs that would be impacted by [HB 281]," Deggs said.

Aquino-Garza said if this bill passes, there is a possibility that students will focus on STEM majors that pay more. This could mean there are fewer students in other areas, such as education.

According to the Texas Education Agency, Texas is already suffering from a shortage of qualified teachers in areas such as English, math and special education.

"My art teachers have really taught me valuable lessons like it's okay to mess up, and it's okay to keep on trying and to try new things. So I feel like teachers give you valuable understandings even as kids. It's a huge thing," Bailey Sloas, art education freshman said.

HB 281 has been introduced and will next be read, referred to a committee for discussion and then voted on for presentation to the full House.

SB 757 has been introduced and received by the Secretary of the Senate, and will soon be read, referred to a committee and voted on for presentation to the full Senate.

Scan the QR code to read House Bill 281.



"The bill is cutting off the ability to explore, we want students to have a connection with the kinds of careers they want to have,"

Priscilla Aquino-Garza Senior director of policy and programs at Educate Texas

FROM FRONT UNIVERSITY

According to a September 2024 release by Texas State, 46.6% of students receive a Pell Grant.

In an email to Texas State faculty on Jan. 29, Shreek Mandayam, Texas State's vice president for research, said the memo was rescinded. According to White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt the memo was rescinded, but the funding freeze remains in place.

"This is NOT a rescission of the federal funding freeze. It is simply a rescission of the OMB memo. Why? To end any confusion created by the court's injunction" Leavitt wrote in post on X on Jan. 29.

U.S. District Court Judge Loren L. AliKhan, for the District of Columbia, issued a stay on the memo, temporarily pausing it until Monday, Feb. 3.

Another federal judge, John J. McConnell Jr. from the District of Rhode Island, issued a temporary restraining order against the funding pause on Jan. 31.

"The Court must act in these early stages of the litigation under the "worst case scenario" because the breadth and ambiguity of the Executive's action makes it impossible to do otherwise," McConnell wrote.

McConnell's order said that the original memo gave less than 24 hours before it would have gone into place, preventing bodies that receive federal funds from being able to plan on how to function without those funds.

While the order is paused, it could go into place depending on future court rulings.

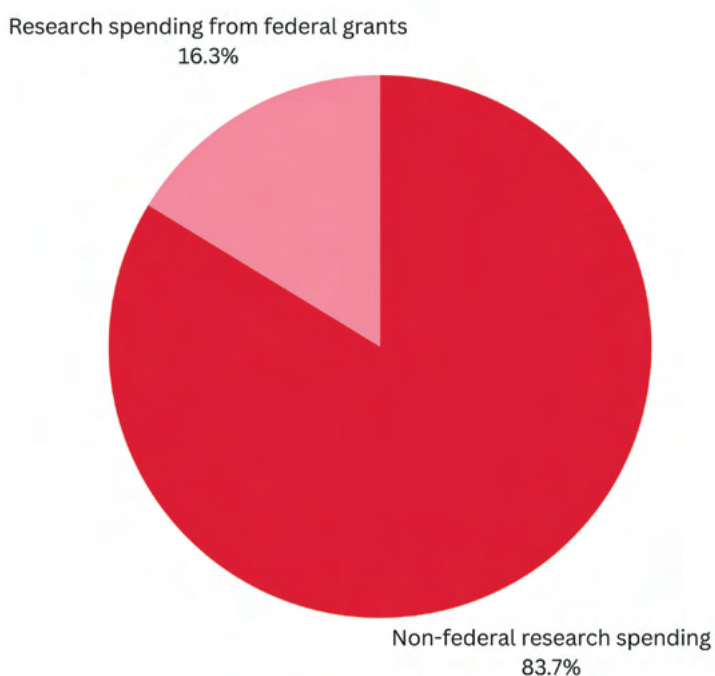
If the funding pause resumes, it remains unclear how, if at all, it will impact research funding or other federally funded programs at Texas State.

"TXST is reviewing the executive memorandum to determine any potential impacts on institutional operations, which includes research funding," A university spokesperson wrote.

In 2023 Texas State spent \$141 million on research, the highest amount on record for the university. Federal research grants accounted for 16.3% of the university's research spending.

The university's increase in research spending comes amid President Kelly Dampousse's Run to R1, a push to make Texas State a top tier research university. Losing federal research funding could interrupt that process, as R1 status requires spending a certain amount on research each year, as well as a minimum number of doctorates issued each year.

Texas State spent \$141.3 million on research funding in 2023



LUCCIANA CHOUERY | NEWS EDITOR



MEG BOLES | ASSISTANT MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

Texas State students study on the second floor of the library, Monday, Feb. 3, 2025, at Alkek

"TXST is reviewing the executive memorandum to determine any potential impacts on institutional operations, which includes research funding,"

Texas State spokesperson

Opinions in The University Star are not necessarily those of our entire publication, Texas State University's administration, Board of Regents, School of Journalism and Mass Communication or Student Publications Board.

Speak On It: MGC President discusses TXST diversity

Speak On It is a collaboration of voices compiled by The University Star's Editorial Board. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of our entire publication.

By Editorial Board

For the first Black History Month "Speak On It," *The University Star* interviewed Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) President Jaylyn Robinson to hear his perspective on the Texas State experience for Black students.

February is Black History Month and Black organizations at Texas State are emphasizing the importance of getting involved.

Robinson started his first term as MGC president this semester, and in addition to his fraternity Sigma Lambda Beta, he said being part of MGC means the world to him.

"I think when people join [culturally-based] organizations, they're looking for a family," Robinson said. "You'll probably never hear me call any of my brothers my friends. I genuinely do believe they're my brothers."

Robinson believes the importance of Black History Month speaks for itself, and students outside of Black organizations should work to participate where they can.

"[Black History Month] is acknowledging that even through the hardship and oppression Black people went through and still go through, we persevered," Robinson said. "It's good to educate yourself. Going to one event wouldn't hurt."

For Robinson, being a Black student at Texas State has been a great experience.

"Speaking as a Black man here, I feel like it's the best experience that a Black student can have," Robinson said. "Texas State is such a unique school in Texas [because] there's so many different cultures."

Robinson applauded Texas State for having all of the Divine Nine chapters, which he said is a testament to how hard-working the faculty and staff are.

According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, the Divine Nine emerged during a "low point in American race relations." Black college students came together to create Greek-letter organizations dedicated specifically to Black communities when predominately white Greek life excluded them.

"When I walk to class, I don't just see one shade of person," Robinson said. "You're not expecting someone to look just like you, and that's what I like about Texas State."

Despite having an overall positive experience, Robinson said Texas State needs to make it a priority to hire more Black professors.

"I think I've only had one Black professor and she was probably my best professor. [We need] more Black professors," Robinson said. "I know diversity, equity and inclusion just got removed so I don't know if that's going to happen. It's not that I don't feel represented, but I would say that's one thing we could have more of."

According to the Texas State demographics website, there were 1,053 full-time white/non-hispanic faculty members and only 47 Black full-time faculty members. There is no data after 2019.

Senate Bill (SB) 17, a bill requiring Texas universities to close diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) offices, went into effect on Jan. 1, 2024. Texas State dissolved the Division of Inclusive Excellence on

Aug. 1, 2023.

Robinson said MGC has yet to feel the effects of SB 17 and the rollback of DEI programs, however, he wishes the university would communicate more with students.

"We wouldn't let anything like a bill stop us from what we're doing [in the MGC]. I think [communication] would definitely reassure a lot of the members," Robinson said. "If there was some type of email or statement, students would appreciate it."

As a minority-majority campus and 11% of the student population being Black, Texas State cannot limit support to Black History Month. The university must amplify Black voices daily.



The University Star is looking for leaders in Black and African-American TXST organizations to speak on issues involving their communities at TXST.

If interested in contributing to Speak On It, please email

staropinion@txstate.edu.

Embracing artificial intelligence could elevate TXST

By Andrew Bencivengo Opinions Contributor

Since its inception, generative artificial intelligence (AI) has had a major impact on the world, revolutionizing virtually all industries that have adopted it.

Texas State is actively investing in AI research to equip students with the means to understand this groundbreaking technology.

In addition to the work already being done, Texas State must adopt a more streamlined view of artificial intelligence to further capitalize on emerging AI technology.

Tanzima Islam, assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science, said Texas State is well-positioned to embrace AI and provide utility to its students using generative AI systems.

"Texas State has a sizable pool of professors in the Computer Science and Business Departments who are making use of research into AI initiatives, making use of the good sides and bad sides of using AI and how this utility can be expanded upon the broader student body," Islam said.

Texas State is embracing AI's potential through research initiatives aimed at addressing key challenges, such as the immense power consumption required to sustain AI data centers. Texas State researchers, such as Islam, are pioneering efforts to improve AI efficiency, ensuring generative AI models process data more effectively while reducing their environmental footprint.

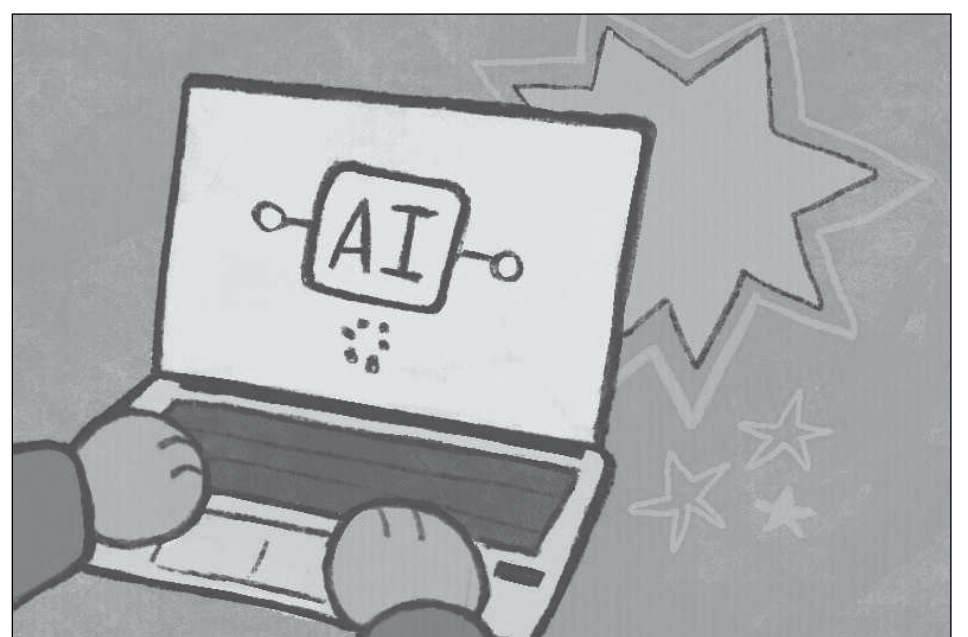
"I am planning to work on scaling a modeling process for generative AI," Islam said. "This means these models reduce computations needed and therefore lessen the amount of data and energy needed to operate."

Generative AI quickly gathers information and accelerates the developmental phase of projects. By compiling relevant data, AI allows researchers to focus more on analysis, innovation and implementation rather than spending excessive time on information gathering. This increased efficiency leads to faster breakthroughs, enabling students and faculty to produce higher-quality research in a fraction of the time it once required.

"What would have taken a couple of months to read 20 papers can now be done in 5 minutes," Islam said. "Students are provided with an opportunity to start very quickly with their research initiatives... [They can] springboard from the research phase to the developmental one while gaining the ability to learn how to source information gained from generative AI models and check its validity."

Despite its benefits, AI presents risks concerning academic integrity and misinformation. While Texas State has guidelines regarding AI use, an official policy has yet to be implemented. The university allows professors to decide how they address AI in the classroom, but a policy is needed.

Universities such as Stanford and Northeastern have already begun



SOPHIA GERKE | ASSISTANT DESIGN EDITOR

implementing advisory boards focused on responsible AI development and use. Additionally, institutions such as Texas A&M University have added courses aimed at developing AI literacy and ensuring proper information sourcing. By adopting similar programs, Texas State could reduce the potential harms of AI while promoting ethical practices.

The university must also prepare students for an AI-driven workforce. Generative AI is transforming job markets by optimizing data analysis, administration and recruitment processes. A recent *Forbes* article stated 71% of employers actively seek AI skills over experience in the field. By integrating AI education into its programs, Texas State can ensure its graduates remain competitive and

proficient in the technologies shaping their industries.

Texas State has a unique opportunity to implement AI for the benefit of its students and faculty. Rather than viewing AI negatively, the university must continue to lead research efforts, refine its academic policies and embrace AI as a transformative educational tool.

Through ethical governance, innovative research and forward-thinking policies, Texas State can solidify its position as a leader in AI education and development, ensuring its students are not just participants in this technological revolution, but pioneers of it.

-Andrew Bencivengo is a business administration sophomore

Letters to the Editor Policy

The University Star welcomes letters from our readers. Letters must be 300 words or fewer to be considered for publication. Writers must include their full name, mailing address, major and academic year designation (for students), phone number and e-mail address when submitting a letter. Submissions that do not include this information cannot be published. This information is seen only by the editors and is used to verify the identity of the

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Letters become the property of *The Star* and may be republished in any format. The letter may be edited for length and clarity. An editor will contact the letter writer if their letter is a candidate for publication. *The Star* will not run letters that are potentially libelous, discriminatory, obscene, threatening or promotional in nature.

Letters can be submitted to staropinion@txstate.edu or by mail to Attn: Opinion Editor, The University Star, 601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX, 78666.

The Gazette games

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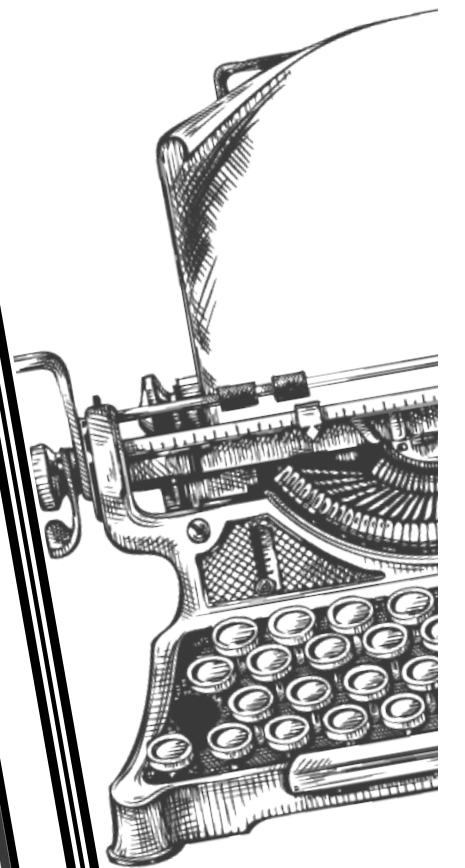
7

SUDOKU

Game by sudoku-solutions.com

1		4					
	2		3	6	1		
8		1	5	7			4
		3		4	2		
5			2			8	
	4			5			
8			1	9		3	
	1	8	6		9		
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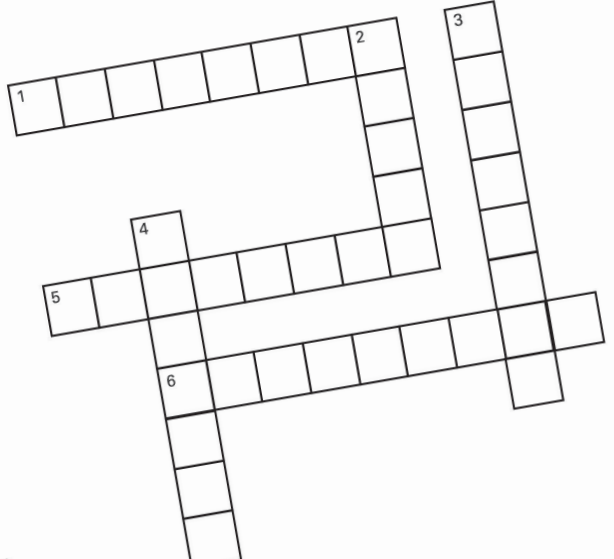
INKJET TYPEWRITER



CROSSWORD

THE GAZETTE GAMES

- ACROSS:**
- The title of a paper located at the top of the front page
 - A youth that tosses the paper at your door.
 - Where a reader can pick up the paper
- DOWN:**
- A paper that is distributed almost every day of the week
 - This text is usually at the top of a story
 - The fourth section/page of our paper.



WORD SCRAMBLE

THE GAZETTE GAMES

- TSAND _____
- CMIOC _____
- GLEAN _____
- ATERCIL _____
- TWPNENRS _____
- AORTHGPHOP _____

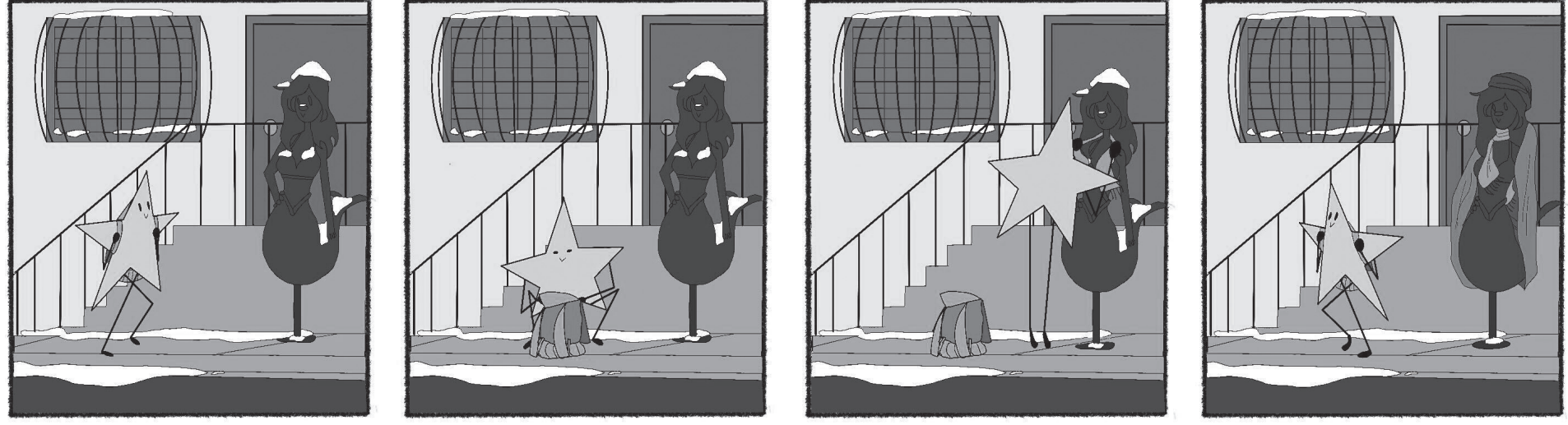
Word Scramble
 (1) Lunar (2) Fortune (3) Zodiac (4) Tradition (5) Dumpster (6) Snake (7) Envelope (8) Lion (9) Noisemaker (10) Snake (11) Noisemaker (12) Snake (13) Noisemaker (14) Snake (15) Noisemaker

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NOVAS SNOW DAY





LUCAS KRAFT | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

'Romeo and Juliet' cast members rehearse a scene, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at the Patti Strickel Harrison Theatre.

'Romeo and Juliet' portrays brutal world

By Trae Solis
Life and Arts Contributor

Texas State opens the spring 2025 semester with a production of *Romeo and Juliet* that takes place in a nearby future.

Director Kathleen McDowell changed the setting of the show so audiences could view the story in a fresh new way. She said a specific historical setting would have boxed in both the audience and the team, but a nondescript future left room to experiment.

"The aesthetic is not like puffy sleeves and corsets, it's just a little bit strange," McDowell said. "It looks kind of like a punk rock Dune future. It allows [the text] to stay heightened and universal while not letting people come in with preconceived notions."

McDowell has one big question she's exploring: "What are the consequences of the future being sacrificed for the sake of the present?" A future that failed its youth is painted all over the show. Max Estudillo-Cantu, set designer, took inspiration from

brutalism and the real-life frescoes of Verona, Italy to emphasize this idea.

"If I can create a world where it's uncomfortable, and they find comfort within themselves, that's perfect because then we're going to care for these kids," Estudillo-Cantu said. "It's a lot more tragic for us to process because they really tried, even in a world that they're not set up to succeed in."

McDowell said she also removed the swords and replaced them with hand-to-hand combat to draw out the violence in the text.

"I don't know what's more violent and raw than people just bashing each other's faces in with their bare hands," McDowell said. "[It's] pretty brutal, but I think it helps us tell the story stronger. We see sword fighting as this kind of antiquated, polite way of fighting, and it's not what's happening in this show."

The actors worked hard to make this version of the play unique. Faraz Mobli, acting sophomore, plays Romeo. He wanted to create an entirely original version of Romeo from scratch, so he avoided watching any other portrayal of the story except

for one.

"The first theatre production I even was relatively a part of was *Romeo and Juliet*, and I was Romeo's understudy in sixth grade," Mobli said. "Having that happen, having that full circle moment has been pretty crazy, and I'm pretty lucky."

Despite all of the changes, the main goal of the production isn't just to be different but to tell the story. Nyah Adler, performance and production junior, plays Juliet. She believes the play is about "what hate and violence can do to pure, innocent love."

"It's sweet and endearing and you would think that everyone would be on their side," Adler said. "But because of the world that they're living in, these two young people can never be together. Star-crossed lovers – they're doomed from the beginning."

Texas State University's production of *Romeo & Juliet* will be performed at the Patti Strickel Harrison Theatre at 7:30 p.m. on Feb. 4-8 and at 2:00 p.m. Feb. 9. Tickets can be purchased at txstatepresents.universitytickets.com.

FROM FRONT CLUB

The organization accepts members with POTS or other related conditions and to those willing to learn about the chronic condition and its effects on students. Jack Werran, graduate student and PAWS for POTS treasurer, doesn't have the condition himself but gained insight from working with those who do.

"As someone who's lived the 'normal college life,' I can say that it's not fair these people can't live that life," Werran said. "It's not their choice to have this condition. It's not on them."

Werran said in the beginning stages of forming the organization, he noticed there wasn't as much research on POTS on college campuses as he expected, including Texas State. He hopes this organization and its purpose will inspire others to take on similar projects.

"POTS is a real thing that should be talked about on college campuses," Werran said. "We wanted to be that bigger influence on the POTS community and start that kind of train on the research."

Rivas understands students who may feel nervous about embracing a part of themselves they may not be sure of. When she first arrived on campus, she tried to ignore her symptoms and live college life 'normally.' She now also understands the importance of embracing what makes people special.

"It lets others know they aren't alone when they see others advocating for themselves," Rivas said. "Even if I'm a little different, there are people just like me, and we're gonna find our own way."

Benfield has high hopes for the future of PAWS for POTS, which includes creating a safe community for students who may not feel accepted anywhere else. She believes the organization's goal of accepting others



ALLISON DRINNON | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

Psychological research graduate Dean Shannon raises his hand to share that he attended the Office of Disability Services' previous mobility aid decoration event during the inaugural PAWS for POTS meeting, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at the LBJ Student Center. PAWS for POTS' next meeting is 6 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 13.

is reminiscent of Texas State as a whole and hopes the two will continue to work together in the future for students with POTS.

"We're a family and being able to accept others who are going through more difficult times is kind of what Texas State is all about," Benfield said. "That can be super valuable when you feel like networking and making connections is a little bit harder due to your health."

Scan the QR code to
learn more about PAWS
for POTS.



MEN'S BASKETBALL

A midway outlook on TXST's season

By Kendall Berry
Sports Contributor

The Bobcats' overall record is 12-11 with a conference record of 5-6, and are projected by VSIN to be the No. 11 seed team for the conference tournament. However, with eight regular season games left to play, the Bobcats have a strong identity that could result in the team succeeding come late February.

Positives

Starting with the basic basketball fundamentals, the Bobcats lead the Sun Belt in team free throw percentage. They have made 396 free throws on 511 attempts for 78%, the best in the conference.

"Nothing will be said in the locker room. We lead the conference in free throw shooting percentage. [The poor free-throw shooting performance is] just something that doesn't happen very often," Johnson said after the Bobcats shot 61% against Georgia State.

The Bobcats rank second in total offense in the Sun Belt, averaging 76.7 points per game—a massive jump from last season, when they ranked dead last with 69.9 points per game. They also lead the conference in not only field goal percentage but three-point percentage as well. Shooting about 47% from the field

and 38% from three, this team has made drastic improvements on offense to show why it can be a contending team in the conference.

Senior forward Tylan Pope has taken a big leap in his collegiate career, leading the Bobcats in scoring with 15.5 points per game on 52% shooting. Elevating the Bobcats with energy and efficiency, Pope is the clear-cut player who has established the tone of the team.

Although Johnson knows Pope can make plays, he still thinks he hasn't reached his full potential. In the loss against Arkansas State on Feb. 1, Pope showed early game struggles, picking up two early fouls, which led to him being benched for most of the first half. He shot 1-for-6 in the first half but finished the game leading Texas State with 17 points.

"The game is about impact. [Pope's] energy was good, but he picked up two fouls early and had to sit for a long stretch," Johnson said. "So when you're trying to make plays throughout a meaningful time in the game, [whether to comeback] it's different... I still think he is capable of making a larger impact away from points."

Negatives

Games where the Bobcats would clean up turnovers would be traded



KRISTEN HADNOT | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Texas State men's basketball team huddles before their game against Georgia State, Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025, at Strahan Arena. Bobcats won 94-80.

off for a poor shooting performance and getting outrebounded completely, where they're ranked 12th in the conference, just two spots above last place. However, allowing 72.6 points per game, 9th in the Sun Belt, is a likely reason for the poor rebounding stats.

"[We must] put together 40 minutes," guard Kaden Gumbs said. "I think that's a simple answer, put together 40."

Turnovers are an issue for the Bobcats, as their turnover margin is -0.04, ranking them 6th in the conference.

Next, Texas State will face Old Dominion on Wednesday, Feb. 5, at Chartway Arena in Norfolk, VA.

TENNIS

Freshman earns unique scholarship

By Hope Monte
Sports Reporter

Looks of surprise took the faces of the Bobcat tennis team as professional player Frances Tiafoe appeared during a Zoom call in January to surprise freshman Chantajah Mills with a Frances Tiafoe Fund scholarship, telling her, "I'm a huge fan."

Tiafoe is a top-10 tennis player worldwide and has competed in a U.S. Open semifinal. Mills has followed Tiafoe's journey for years and even previously watched him compete in person.

"I've always looked up to [Tiafoe] because he's an American player, and not only that, he's an African American player," Mills said. "To see someone who achieved it and is still working towards his goals and still pushing every day to achieve more...having someone like that to look up to and having direct contact with... it's mind-blowing to

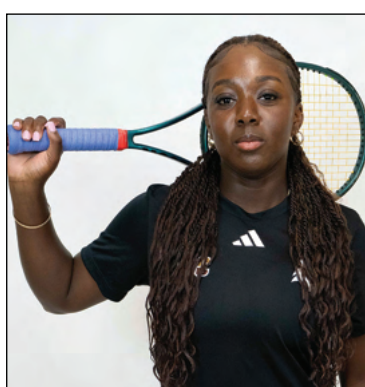
me."

Life drastically changed for Mills in 2022, when her future in tennis became ambiguous after she broke her kneecap playing high school sports. Although the injury occurred at a prime time for college recruitment, Mills remained optimistic.

"It was like a huge setback, but I think I just embraced the time off. I made sure I used it as time to reflect on how much I actually want tennis and where I want to take it," Mills said.

After multiple surgeries and months of rehab, Mills got back to the court. In the meantime, a highlight reel on YouTube caught the attention of Texas State tennis head coach Kendall Brooks.

"We felt like she was kind of a hidden gem under the radar with how good she looked on video," Brooks said. "[We were] really impressed with a lot of the things that she did prior to coming [to Texas State]."



TXST ATHLETICS | COURTESY PHOTO

Brooks characterized Mills' active community engagement and leadership as factors in her recruitment and the support for her nomination and receipt of the scholarship.

Moving from New York to Texas, Mills spent her first semester in fall 2024 adjusting to a new environment. However, she aspires to make a positive impact in her new home and says the scholarship has deepened her motivation for growth.

"I just want to go 10 times harder than I was before. I want to get as much

better as I can every year. I want to help improve the team environment [and] give back to my teammates as much as I can," Mills said.

While acclimating to life as a college athlete, Mills recognized new challenges ahead but faced them with determination.

"You have to realize that it's not just about you anymore. It's about how much you contribute to everybody around you," Mills said. "If you're slacking, you're hurting not only yourself, you're hurting everyone...that was something I had to understand."

This mindset does not go unseen by her coaches and teammates, who express an appreciation for how fast she connected with the team.

"She is very competitive, which, of course, you know you should be in tennis. But I think seeing that at such a young like place in her college tennis career is such a green flag," teammate

Kiana Graham said. "I think that because she's already in such a good place now that, like, in the future, I'm sure – and have no doubt, that she'll only keep building on that foundation."

Mills exemplified that competitive spirit early on alongside Graham, when they swept their doubles, matches 3-0 in her debut college tournament during the fall season.

With a whole spring season ahead and years of college eligibility left, Brooks sees a promising future for Mills.

"I think she's only scratched the surface of how good she can be," Brooks said. "I don't think the ceiling is very low... it's very high, and so I'm excited to see, you know, her push and just really see what she can do here... not only individually, but for our team as well."

FROM FRONT SOFTBALL

Transfer outfielder Keely Williams and infielder Aiyana Coleman both came to San Marcos from College Station. Williams will have to compete for her spot in the outfield, but career numbers show she has what it takes to be in the lineup. Coleman was a go-to pinch-hitter for the Aggies, so adding a consistent stick is just what the Bobcats need.

Infielder Kate Bubela comes from North Carolina, where, as a freshman last season, she found her way into the lineup and compiled a .383 batting average. This is another crucial bat added to a team that was single-heavy a year ago.

Texas State head coach Ricci Woodard could be the bulk of the hype. Woodard enters her 25th season at the helm and hasn't had a losing season since 2014. She surpassed 800 career wins last season and has established herself as one of the most decorated Bobcat coaches. If anyone knows how to manage a team successfully, it's Woodard.

Who Could Play?

This may be the Bobcats' biggest question mark of them all. Though it's normal for teams to figure out a few positions through trial and error every season, more than half of Texas State's lineup from game one could look vastly different come conference play.

"Even right now, I don't feel like there's a starting nine," Woodard said. "I feel like we're going to rotate the lineup from day-to-day and game-to-game until those positions are solidified."



MANDALYN LEWALLEN | MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

Texas State softball Head Coach Ricci Woodard gets ready to high five her players as they run to home during the Texas Tech game, Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024, at Bobcat Softball Stadium.

Woodard said watching this year's group compete for starting roles has been fun.

"We have a couple of really good transfers that are going to help us [and] we got some really young freshmen that I feel like are going to be impact players for us this year," Woodard said.

Pitching Probables

There's no doubt Azua will be the ace pitcher for the Bobcats. In her freshman season, she pitched just under 100 innings, recorded 81 strikeouts and had an earned run average of 2.17 in 30 appearances.

"Last year, I really didn't know what to expect, and I think now that I do, it's definitely helped my confidence a lot," Azua said.

Jessica Mullins handled the bulk of the pitching in 2024, but Woodard believes Texas State will have more variety in the circle this year.

"Obviously, Azua can hold down the fort for a while," Woodard said. "But I think we have a good mixture behind her that's gonna help with that this year, too, so there won't have to be that one kid that pitches 300 innings over the season."

The second senior on the roster, pitcher Presley Glende, saw some action last season so she could find her way into the rotation. Additionally, transfer Emma Strood from Louisiana State was brought in for a reason and is another name to look out for.

Time Will Tell

As the Bobcats begin their Sun Belt title defense, they will have a target on their back. But can they go back-to-back? Only time will tell.

"I think we're going to be really good this season," Azua said. "And I think that if we can all still work together as a team and be there for each other, then we can do it all."

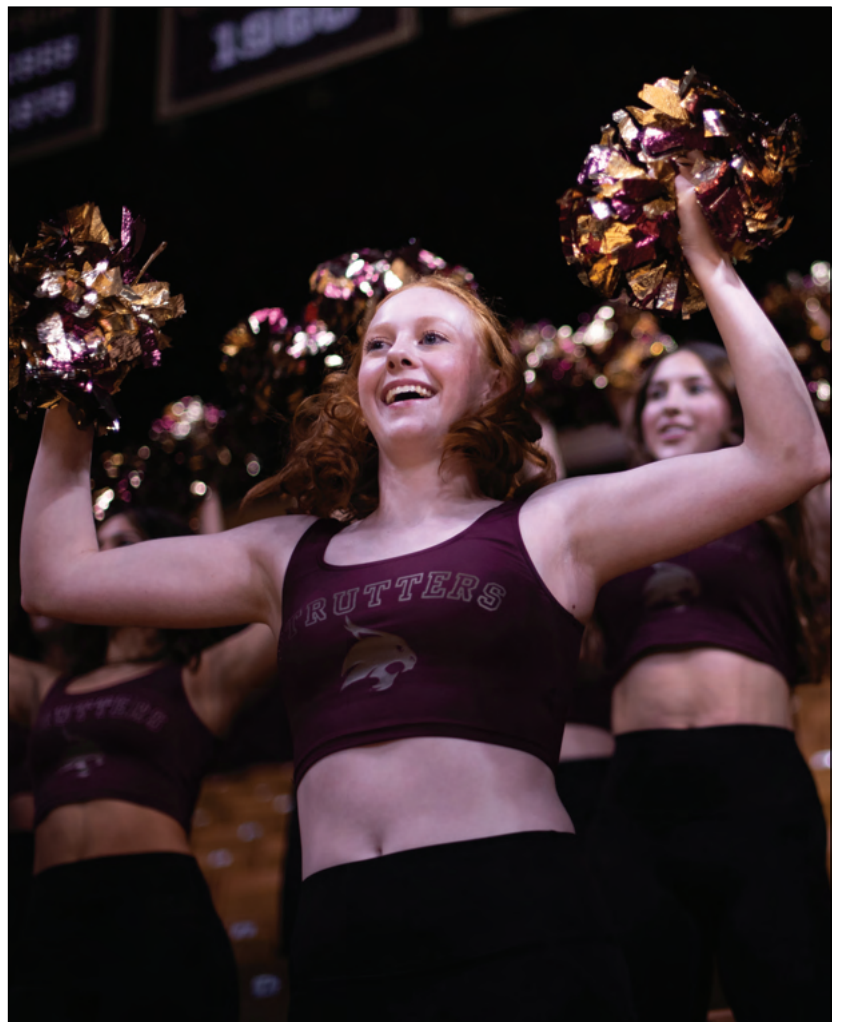
All the necessary talent and coaching are there for the Bobcats to compete with the best in the country. Growing pains are expected, but Woodard and the team aim to play their best in May, so patience will be key for the Bobcats as their 2025 quest begins.

THIS WEEK IN SMTX



MEG BOLES | ASSISTANT MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

Texas State history senior Sammy Wells performs with his band The Trips during Toons at Noon, Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2025, at George's. The band composed of triplets performed original music from their debut album "Gotta Start Somewhere."



KATE MADDISON | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

Texas State dance freshman Abigail Cox performs on the sideline of the mens basketball game as they faced Southern Miss, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at Strahan Arena. Texas State lost 46-52.

Texas State aquatic resources and integrative biology graduate student Tatiana Velasquez (Right) and postdoctoral mechanical engineering student Zechen Xiong (Left) pass a coin with chopsticks at a Lunar Year Celebration, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, in LBJ. The event was put on by International Student and Scholar Services.



KATHERINE REA | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

Members of Sigma Delta Lambda, interior design sophomore Emerie Maravilla (Left) and criminal justice senior Melanie Martinez (Right) chat during the Student Involvement Fair, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, in the LBJ Ballroom. Sigma Delta Lambda is focused on supporting Latina women in higher education.



ALLISON DRINNON | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER



Molly Ann "Duchess" Rosas-Garcia waits offstage to present the award for Best Rock Artist/Group at the second annual San Marcos Music Awards, Friday, Jan. 31, 2025, at the Price Center. Our Last Daze won the award for the second year in a row.

ISABELLE CANTU | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER



KATHERINE REA | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

San Marcos based artist Cannon Edwards performs original music, Saturday, Feb. 1, 2025, at Sewell Park. Edwards released his most recent single, "Mi Ama Amor," August 30, 2024 on Spotify.



MAYA CONTERAS | STAR PHOTOGRAPHER

Texas State University President Kelly Damphousse poses with the Texas State Hellcats during the mens basketball game versus Southern Miss, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, at Strahan Arena. The Hell Cats are a co-ed spirit fraternity that supports Texas State athletics.

Scan the QR code to view the gallery online.

