

the reflector

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**A DIFFERENT KIND
OF GRADUATION:**
What it feels like to
graduate during a
pandemic
(Pg. 5)



Students reflect on racism, campus culture in SAMRU open mic

Noel Harper
News Editor

When Alannah Providence-Toho began her studies at Mount Royal University (MRU), she attended a class in which a discussion about Inuit peoples took place. The professor, Providence-Toho said, referred to the community by a racial slur.

"I was shocked that it came from a professor, and it bothered me because no one said anything," she said, adding that she later reached out to the professor to inform her of the incorrect term she used, who was receptive, but seemed reluctant to change.

"In her defense, that's one of the terms she knows. The only term, actually."

Providence-Toho, a member of the Dene Tha' First Nation and fourth-year Bachelor of Child Studies student, was one of several speakers who shared their stories during 'The Loudest Silence: Anti-Racism Commemoration Open Mic', put on by the Students Association of Mount Royal University (SAMRU).

The inaugural event, hosted by SAMRU President Spirit River Striped Wolf, brought students, faculty and staff together to listen to the experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of colour) community members. Ten student speakers gave presentations to the virtual audience. Representatives of MRU's leadership, faculty association and staff association spoke as well.

"[Students] will present poetry, spoken word, music, and a part of themselves," said Striped Wolf, introducing the open mic.

"I feel really strongly that safe spaces for dialogue, and a building of awareness and understanding of each other, are truly critical elements of Mount Royal's continued growth and education," said Phil Warsaba, MRU's vice-provost and associate vice-president of students, an



Spirit River Striped Wolf, president of the Student's Association of Mount Royal University's (SAMRU) Representation Executive Council, serves as MC for The Loudest Silence: Anti-Racism Commemoration Open Mic event. Photo courtesy of SAMRU

observer of the event.

Diamond Reid talked about the lack of spaces in her life in which, conversations about race take place, including home, school and MRU itself.

"My apparent racial ambiguity has confused people, made them uncomfortable even. I've been a puzzle that people have wanted to find the colour in, and this gave me a certain level of guilt-covered camouflage," Reid said.

She continued to discuss the various instances when she wanted to speak up against what she saw and experienced on campus, such as an absence of BIPOC faculty to discuss provincial affairs, and professors who dismissed land acknowledgements as "anti-professional" or decreed out-of-date terms correct because they were written in policy.

"I didn't know where I fit into the conversation," said Reid.

Tala Abu Hayyaneh, a recent SAMRU council

candidate, brought up the origins of her name and how it is often misinterpreted — and when this happens, she is told her name is "unusual" and that she shouldn't take offense to its mispronunciation.

"My name ... is my story. It is the fact that I wrote this speech today in Arabic before I wrote it in English. It is the fact that I speak in English, but my mind speaks in Arabic," she said.

"If I can perform so well with a bilingual mind ... then so can you simply ask me how you should pronounce my name and address me correctly."

Other students told their stories through various forms of art. Courtney Vital shared examples of bead work she had completed, a metaphor for wanting increased representation of Indigenous culture at MRU, while Joe Plant presented a song called 'The Cliff' about yearning to find one's identity.

The afternoon's final

student speaker was Camille Rhose Tabaccla. While serving as SAMRU's current VP of student affairs, Tabaccla said she would remove herself from the position and speak solely as a student.

"I was so ecstatic when I saw the MRU slogan was 'You Belong Here'," said Tabaccla, who selected the university as her only post-secondary choice following high school — during which she was bullied for the colour of her skin and expressing her culture.

"Now imagine how I felt when I sat in my very first MRU class ... when the professor laughed at my last name, and did not want to call me by that. And when I corrected him, he asked how you say it in Canada," she continued, recounting the experience in a poem titled 'We Are Not All The Same'.

"Thank you for listening to what we have to say now, but this is just the start," Tabaccla added.

Striped Wolf ended the event by reflecting on his role within the student's association and how every student can continue to better themselves.

"We can all be problematic and experience some form of discrimination in our lives. It is human to bump into walls. As human beings, we are flawed creatures who are prone to make mistakes — it is in our very nature," he said.

Another event observer, Lee Easton, president of the Mount Royal Faculty Association, remarked that, "What we've heard here is the effects of overwriting, erasing, ignoring ... the knowledge that Indigenous peoples have and have had for millennia, and we need to really work on that."

"We could start on a much more accessible level, and that would just be remembering respectful relationships start with recognizing names," Easton said.

MRU prepares students for on-campus learning in Fall 2021

Riggs Zyrille Vergara

Publishing Editor



Beginning this September, students may return to studying on campus in spaces like this one. A directive from the Alberta provincial government encourages as much in-person learning as possible after more than a year of remote education due to COVID-19. Photo by Riggs Zyrille Vergara

With Alberta's COVID-19 immunization program promising to have administered every adult with their first dose of vaccine by the end of June, Demetrios Nicolaides, the province's minister of advanced education, is encouraging all post-secondary institutions to prepare for face-to-face classes in the fall.

"As we plan to transition back to in-person learning, the safety of students, staff and faculty will be our top priority. We will be working closely with Alberta Health and our chief medical officer of health, Dr. Hinshaw, to ensure a safe return to campus in September 2021," read a statement from Nicolaides.

Following this, Mount Royal University (MRU) President Tim Rahilly decided that the university will be offering as many courses and services in person as possible within public health guidelines.

"Mount Royal prides itself on having a close-knit community that values face-to-face interaction. I look forward to welcoming as many people as possible to campus this fall," Rahilly said.

Despite this goal, not all course offerings will be returning to campus by that date. In an email from Interim-Provost and Vice President Academic Elizabeth Evans, she said that MRU's academic units are still exploring what offerings will remain available for remote learning in both the coming fall and winter semesters.

Included in Evans' statement is a working plan on the fall reopening, which includes using technology that supports blended and remote delivery for students who are unable to return to campus. Other salient points of the plan are having safety protocols in place to keep MRU in line with

public health directives and the collection of pandemic surveys from students to gauge their views on the ongoing procedures.

But even with these plans in place, the return to campus can shift at any time depending on the state of Alberta's pandemic recovery in the coming months.

In preparation for this, Evans recommends that students register ahead of time for the upcoming academic year to ensure an optimal selection of courses and schedules, while still keeping in mind that the mode of delivery can change if needed.

"When final decisions about mode of delivery have been reached, all students will be notified. Wherever possible, the days and times of course sections listed in the current schedule will remain the same, regardless of the final decision that is

reached," Evans said.

Alex Luong, a second-year broadcasting student says that having face-to-face classes implemented soon at MRU is a great idea. He adds that he has missed out on many connections and new experiences by not going to campus.

"If MRU does its best to have in-person classes again, it'll be nice to restart the university experience that the pandemic has stopped," Luong says.

He also thinks that there are many ways in-person classes can motivate students, such that online learning never could, and while he has never appreciated it before, in-person classes affect the way he retains information from his courses.

During a 'Tea with REC' Instagram Live conversation, Shereen Samuels, director of student services for the Students' Association of

Mount Royal University (SAMRU) said that they are preparing their services to meet the potential needs of students who will be on campus in the fall.

She added that SAMRU is now looking at a combination of the current accessible remote services that they currently offer and the ones they can offer once students return.

"There's nothing that replaces that face-to-face [interaction]. That feeling of being physically present with one another is so powerful and there's a kind of community and support that comes from that that no amount of online [interaction] can necessarily replace, and yet we need to be able to capture the ways in which we've grown and gotten better in what we do in the past year and keep that accessibility wherever possible," Samuels said.

Suicide prevention framework ready for feedback from community

Noel Harper
News Editor

Following research, deliberations and consultations with community members throughout the 2020-21 academic year, Mount Royal University (MRU)'s Suicide Prevention Framework Steering Committee has released a draft of their work for the community to respond to.

The 14-member committee included representatives from various faculties, campus services, the Student's Association and two students-at-large, and they had been meeting since October 2020.

"Implementation of this framework will reach the entire MRU community, focusing on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention from individual to organizational levels," the draft reads.

The framework's guiding principles include shared responsibility, inclusivity by design, a proactive approach, being informed by knowledge and expertise, and support from senior leadership.

A total of 10 consultation sessions were held between October 2020 and March 2021. Seven for the campus as a whole, two with members of the University Leadership Group (ULG), and one private session involving those "who had direct experience(s) with critical incidents at MRU which include community members engaging in suicide behaviour or the experience of a death."

"We heard strongly and consistently that buy-in from campus community members and departments will be necessary in order to fully integrate the framework as a core component of MRU's operations," the report says of these consultations.

Students, staff, faculty and managers were asked to reply to a series of questions. These questions include how to ensure said buy-in, the barriers to getting support that exist, and ways to raise awareness of mental health resources that are already in place. Meanwhile, the



The yellow ribbon is a symbol of suicide prevention. This is the aim of a new MRU framework that is currently accessible for feedback from students, faculty and staff members. Photo courtesy of Flickr

ULG recommended that the framework focus on resource familiarity and responding to suicides within the campus community.

The third, closed group focused on postvention — the ways in which those affected by a suicide loss are supported in the aftermath, as defined by Canada's Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention — and highlighted the need to consider the mental health of employees and first responders who are placed into postvention situations. Between all these sessions, 161 people were consulted.

Data collected through the National College Health Assessment — operated through a non-profit organization based in Maryland, U.S. — from 2019 shows that on three key metrics relating to suicide, MRU students differed greatly from the previous survey three years prior.

Per a sample size of 1,319 students, 19 per cent "seriously considered suicide" during the preceding 12 months — a higher percentage than both the provincial and national averages — 9.7 per cent intentionally self-harmed and 2.9 per cent attempted suicide. Furthermore, 84 per

cent of students would seek help from a professional to help with personal problems.

All told, the committee made 47 recommendations directed to various campus groups — including Wellness Services, Human Resources, the ULG and the Iniskim Centre — within the framework's four main goals: strengthening and expanding supports and policy, fostering a thriving campus environment, increasing community awareness and developing a sustainable implementation for the framework.

The 'Death of a Student' and 'Death of an Employee' policies are to be reviewed, as well as guidance on memorials and identifying close connections. The framework also plans to explore the use of live chat support for the MRU Mental Health Services webpage, increase the suicide prevention training of students and employees, and "research and implement mechanisms for restricting access to means of suicide on campus." Progress on these recommendations will be reviewed annually.

Students and employees can offer feedback on the draft until April 16.

MRU FILES

Noel Harper
News Editor

Music Therapy course offered through MRU

"Music Therapy: Approaches and Techniques" was first introduced in February 2021 as a weekly, six-course overview of the practice. The upcoming session of the course will run Thursdays from April 15 to May 20.

The sessions are meant to supplement the education of those in social work, education, nursing and mental health, demonstrating case studies and examples of the success of music therapy.

"Students are learning about how music can be used for physical and emotional benefit in a safe space. I also feel it is important to educate people what constitutes music therapy and what does not," said instructor Fleur Hughes.

Musical skills and/or ability are not prior requirements of the course.

Rainbow Elders Calgary collaborate with SAMRU on letter-writing initiative

The local group of LGBTQ2S+ senior citizens teamed up with the Student's Association's Pride Centre to bring back "the lost art of penpalling," which is to write a letter to someone you would like to get to know more.

Through the program, members of the university's LGBTQ2S+ community are partnered with a senior or ally who may share their experiences, having them write letters back and forth to foster generational connection.

These letters can include a list of questions, personal favourites of various mediums, or unique works such as poetry, or recipes.

THE REFLECTOR

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EDITORIAL STAFF:

Publishing Editor: Riggs Zyrille Vergara

Managing Editor: Ivar Bergs

News Editor: Noel Harper

Features Editor: Cassie Weiss

Arts Editor: Mackenzie Mason

Sports Editor: Zach Worden

Photo Editor: Jill Meagher

Layout Editor: Christian Kindrachuk

Web Editor: Mikaela Delos Santos

CONTRIBUTORS: Astrid Cunanan, Emily Marsten

STAFF WRITERS: Ed Ghost, Keoputhy Bunny, Gage Smith, George Potter

COVER: Photo by Jill Meagher

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Wyckham House
Mount Royal University
4825 Mount Royal Gate SW
Calgary, AB T3E 6K6

All depts.: 403.440.6268

Fax: 403.440.6762

TheReflector@TheReflector.ca

What it feels like to graduate during a pandemic

Cassie Weiss

Features Editor



It's a little disappointing to know that all the hard work accomplished by graduates this year will have to be celebrated quietly alone in houses, but that doesn't change the fact that they made it. Here's to the graduates of 2021. Photo courtesy of Pexels

Here's a little (not so) secret thing about me — I skipped my last college graduation. I went into college fresh out of high school. And although I loved writing and photography, the photojournalism program at the school I was attending just wasn't for me. I disliked the professors, I disliked the content I was learning, and most of all, I really disliked my classmates.

There were only 16 of us in the program so it wasn't all that easy to avoid the people I didn't agree with and only hang out with the people I did.

So, when I was given the opportunity to sit in a full auditorium with these classmates, waiting hours on end for name after name to be called, I decided that was absolutely the last thing I wanted to do. I skipped graduation and went straight to the afterparty — a celebration I also didn't stay very late at. Honestly, I just went because it was held at the Calgary Zoo.

Fast forward to 2019, when I finally decided I wanted to go back to university. I was entering a program I loved and one that mattered to me — not that reporting didn't matter to me, I was just over it. You know, been there, done that. I wanted something new, where I could use the background and experience I had in writing to make a difference in a different type of way.

I was so excited to be attending an accredited university, where I could pick my own classes, push myself to the extreme and develop friendships along the way with the people in my classes, of which there were more than 16. Not all of our classes were the same and our like-mindedness showed up in the topics we chose to work through.

Needless to say, I couldn't wait to actually walk across that stage — proud of the hard work that I had gone through to get out on the

other side. I had broken out of my comfort zone and had truly learned, not only about myself, but also about many important things. I learned about humans and addiction and mental health, in ways that broke it down and tore it apart more than anything else I had ever experienced.

I knew this time, surrounded by close friends with similar passions to mine, that I would be cheered on, just as I would have people to also cheer on.

Enter the COVID-19 pandemic. Who knew that two years ago when I entered school that I would be sitting here by myself, only a few assignments away from the end of my program, wondering if graduations would ever happen again.

This drive-through graduation I had heard rumours of — what even was that? That wasn't what I had envisioned. But then, I also hadn't envisioned the entire world being shut down either.

I guess my crystal ball is just slightly broken.

I had imagined a cap and gown, being handed a piece of paper and having my hand shook by the dean of my program. I had imagined going out for drinks with friends after, or celebrating in the park. I had not imagined being stuck in my house, knowing that if we went out we would have to pretend we were all from the same household — yes, I know, we've all done it, and if you haven't done it, you are a much better person than I am.

To be fair, this program isn't the end of my educational journey. I'm hopping right back in to get my bachelor's degree, and I sincerely hope the pandemic is over in two years when I finish that degree. But at this point, it really is what it is.

It's just an interesting concept — the idea that this last semester has flown by and soon I will be an MRU alumni. Regardless of the

gymnasium stage or the drive-thru tent, that fact doesn't change. The fact that I worked my butt off to finish a diploma program in two years also doesn't change, and the skills I've learned and the people I've met will remain with or without a stage to walk across.

I find it funny that no matter how ready you finally are for something, the universe loves to just throw a wrench in your plans. It is honestly just one more learning experience for us all to take away.

So, if you are anything like me and are slightly disappointed you don't get to be honoured on your special day, honour yourself anyway. Celebrate yourself, because you still did it. You still graduated, and you still worked hard to get where you are today. That fact doesn't change just because there's a pandemic outside your front door — and you should be proud.

Life's a climb but the view is great

Five stunning hikes for the beginner adventurer

Cassie Weiss

Features Editor



Although it can be quite busy in the summer, Chester Lake features gorgeous views and mountain meadows. Photo by Cassie Weiss

Lockdown or no lockdown, warm weather is fast approaching, and that brings with it the incessant need to be outdoors. Who wants to be cooped up inside with no sunshine and no mountain air to breathe deep into stressed and worn-out lungs? I know I sure don't.

Sometimes there is nothing better than jumping in your vehicle, alone or with a pal, and taking off toward the mountains in the west. I find myself gravitating toward them over and over, itching for less of the city and more of the wild, especially in a time when we're urged to stay away from other humans.

I always hear excuses about why those around me don't take the time to take a small road trip out of town, and most often it is due to the amount of money it costs to spend the day in Banff or Lake Louise. Little do they know that when I ditch the city lights the only cost I have to factor in is how much gas it takes to get me where I want to go. The places I want to go are usually not anywhere close to Banff or Lake Louise, both places packed with travellers aplenty.

Now, you're probably curious about how it is that I don't spend any money and don't head immediately into the mountain towns dotting the TransCanada highway. See, I'm a hiker and climbing to the top of a mountain honestly doesn't cost me a thing.

Hiking isn't for everybody and that is 100 per cent okay — we all choose what types of exercise we love and we make the most of it. But, if you've ever used the excuse that you are not in shape enough to hike a couple of kilometres (km)

into the untouched wilderness, you, my friend, are sadly mistaken.

I got into hiking approximately four years ago and was almost 80 pounds heavier than I am today. I was extremely out of shape and had absolutely no idea how I was supposed to walk in a steady incline for hours on end and not collapse. The secret was simpler than I thought — I just had to put one foot after the other, regardless of how long the climb took. And the more times I took that risk and put myself out there, the better I got, the more I learned and the better I felt.

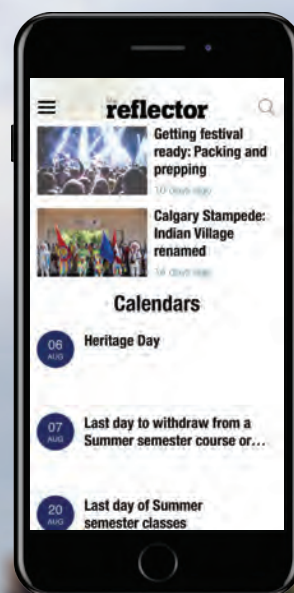
Of course, there are a couple of other secrets to hiking — like always carrying bear spray (and knowing how to use it), learning breathing exercises to help with the incline and hiking with friends who aren't impatient and don't rush you — but those will all come in time. As will the creation of a hike bucket list as you slowly develop a want to push further and higher and faster.

But until then, here is a list of five of my favourite beginner hikes. These bad boys will ease you into the activity and show you some of the most beautiful scenery around that you could never even come close to by car.

Rawson Lake

Just under eight km, Rawson Lake starts in the Upper Kananaskis Lake parking lot. The trail has little incline for about 1.5 km until it veers up the mountain and remains a steady climb for another hour or so. But remember, one foot

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in front of the other — you’ve got this. The best part about this hike is it features a rushing waterfall, gorgeous views of Upper Kananaskis Lake, some friendly Pika at Rawson Lake itself, and crystal-clear turquoise water that is perfect for a quick dip on a hot sunny day. I like this trail so much I’ve done it twice already this year. The hike takes about three to four hours on a round trip, depending on how many stops you make and how long you hang out at the top.

Chester Lake

With two separate trails, both approximately five km long, leading to the same place, Chester Lake is one of my all-time favourites. I’ve also done this hike twice this year. Pick your path of choice and head on up. I personally have only ever hiked the trail to the left, but I’ve heard that both have incredible views of the mountain peaks around. The hike has one or two steeper spots, but it evens out after about an hour into a mountain

meadow crisscrossed with streams and mountain larches. The lake is small but backed by a mighty peak, and if you hike the trail about 10 minutes past the lake, you’ll find the famous elephant rocks. I personally don’t see the elephants, but I was never good at Rorschach tests either. This hike takes approximately four to five hours depending on dawdling time.

Kings Creek Ridge

Okay, this hike isn’t easy at all, but it’s short and it gives off the most wonderful views I have experienced in my life. Approximately four km takes you almost directly straight up the side of a mountain and leaves you at the very top. But remember, there’s four more to go as you head carefully back down. It’s quite windy, so I challenge you to stay up there for more than 20 minutes. But, I can promise you the hard work is worth the reward. Walk along the ridge, dangle your feet off the side of the mountain, and check out the panoramic views of Upper and Lower Kananaskis Lakes,

as well as the mountain valley that pieces together Mount Blaine and Mount Cornwall.

I haven’t done this hike in a few years and did it very slowly at the time, but depending on how fast you hike, it could take anywhere from three to five hours.

Ford Knoll Trail

Hidden just meters from the parking lot of Forgetmenot Pond, this small loop is a pleasure full of orchids and other beautiful mountain flowers. Approximately a five km round trip, this hike only took us 1.5 hours and left us with plenty of time to explore the surrounding area around Bragg Creek.

See if you can count all the cairns scattered throughout, and rest for a quick snack when the trail opens at its apex to display views of the adjacent mountain range.

Upper Kananaskis Lake

Boy, she’s a long one but a good one. This 16 km hike takes you in a giant loop around the lake and features



The perfect beginner hike in any season, Rawson Lake trail takes you through mountain terrain featuring waterfalls, lakes, and rock slides. But be careful of a Pika or two, they like to bite. Photo by Cassie Weiss

an uncountable amount of beautiful scenery — including waterfalls, rock slides, alpine meadows, rushing rivers, and maybe even a bear or two. I’ve done this hike a few times over the past few years, and every time it absolutely blows me away — the idea that there are parts of this amazing country that no one will ever see unless they move on foot or by air.

Although this hike is on the longer side, it is relatively flat and you are following the

lakeshore in a giant circle. Honestly, if you’ve got a full day, I suggest you explore this lake.

Whether you do one or all the hikes on this list, I can promise you won’t be disappointed. You’ll get out of the city, you’ll avoid the rush of the touristy locations in and around Banff, and you’ll have Instagram-worthy photos for days.

In the words of the infamous Miley Cyrus, “Life’s a climb, but the view is great.”

Summer decor ideas for your inner goth

Ed Ghost

Staff Writer

I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: every day can be Halloween. Unfortunately, not everyone seems to agree — worth mentioning are the big box retail stores and their paltry month-and-a-half of spooky season wares. So, what’s a ghoul to do when we’re still in a pandemic, but summer is fast approaching and it’s prime do-stuff-outside weather?

Well, why not take the party inside this year and completely re-decorate your house in a way that would make Lily Munster blush and Morticia Addams go green with envy? We all know spring cleaning is a topic looming on social media everywhere. With the ever-popular decorating hacks on TikTok and Pinterest, it’s virtually impossible to not have the “throw out everything I own that does not spark joy and start completely from scratch” itch.

Anyone who knows me knows that from the moment I bought my own house, I began turning it into a spooky spectacle. I have a giant Creature from the Black Lagoon statue leering over

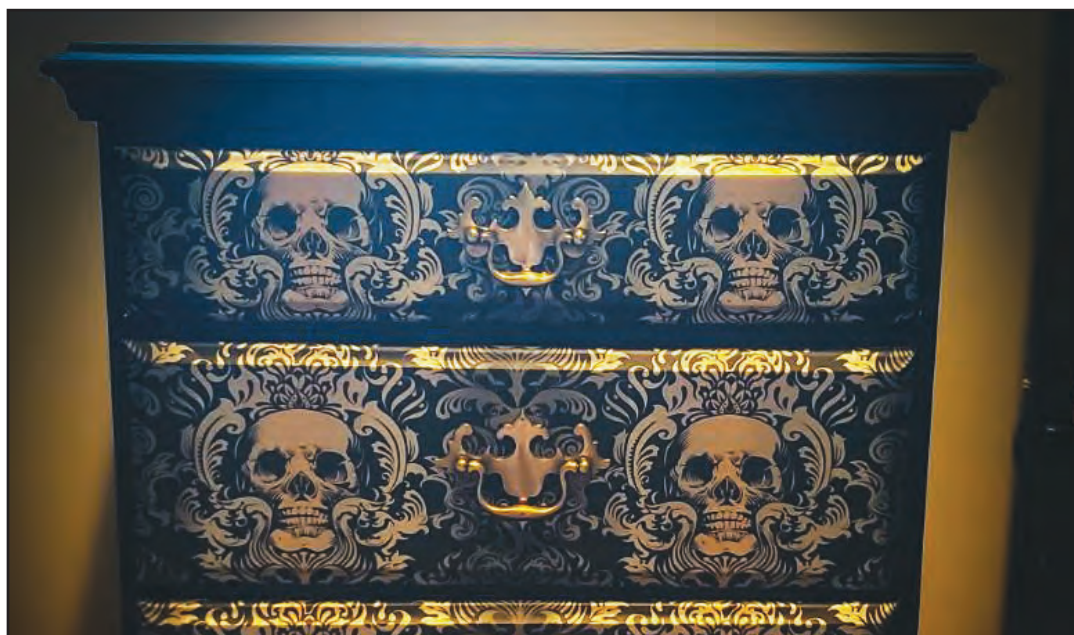
one of my toilets and my hand-towel holder is a literal witch-hand — get it ... hand-towel?

One of my spare rooms is filled with real skeletons and antique funeral ephemera. I’ve also got a black and white striped bathroom affectionately known as “the beetle-bathroom” after the Ghost-with-the-Most himself, Beetlejuice.

Now, my darklings, I am ready to become the goth Marie Kondo I was always meant to be. Let the darkness inspire you and let me share some cheap tips and tricks to make your house more spooky at any time of year.

Revamping old furniture

Have an old piece of furniture you want to spruce up? Paint it! This one’s a given, but there are some really cool spooky options to consider when customizing old furniture. My first recommendation is to sand everything down, and then to use spray paint — not acrylic. Try not to use anything you might need a brush for. Hardware stores usually have



Pair some old creepy wallpaper scraps with a unique piece of furniture and you’ve got a unique, one of a kind, goth-looking dresser. Photo by Ed Ghost

wood-friendly spray paint, and the furniture would only need to be topped up with a finisher.

This is where the fun really begins. I gave my best friend some of my old skull-patterned wallpaper scraps, and she put them on the drawers of her side table. Now, she has a one-of-a-kind dresser that totally stops everyone in their tracks.

Add some custom skull or bat dresser knobs that you can get on Etsy, and you’ve got a totally unique piece of furniture that costs you mere pennies compared to something new.

There’s also no need to break the bank on full rolls of wallpaper if you’re only covering a small surface area. Most shops will give scraps for

free, or charge a small amount for samples. If you do want a full roll of wallpaper and you don’t want it to be permanent, some shops make temporary adhesive wallpaper that’s easy to remove, just make sure you know what you’re doing!

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Print out cool photos

Want a house full of spooky portraits and spectacular art? Print them! But remember, don't steal from artists. They deserve to make a living.

There are plenty of cool pictures of x-rays, zombies and movie monsters just waiting to adorn your walls. You can easily check out the resolution on your computer to get the size you want, and stores like London Drugs and Staples can print professional photos for an affordable price. If you need a frame, every dollar store has cheap frames in almost every size — and the best news? Most of them come in black.

Tie-dyeing old clothes and fabrics

Speaking of black, if you have some cool clothes that you don't want to part with but they're just not goth enough, then that's good news. It's very cheap and incredibly easy to dye clothing at home. All you need is a big pot, boiling water, some fabric dye, a place to

wash your articles of clothing, the clothing itself and around 25 minutes to spare for the process. Be mindful of the fibre content and what the fabric is made of. It's dependent on what dye you need to get and how the colour will turn out.

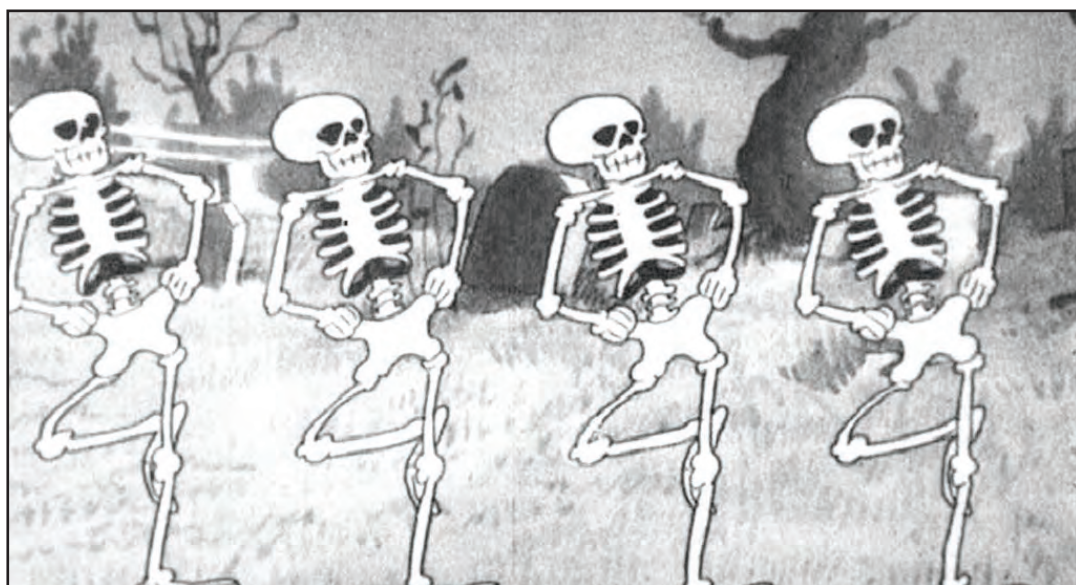
If you have black clothes that aren't just creepy crawly enough for you, don't fret! If you're like me and patches are your jam, then just go patch crazy on whatever you want!

If you're not keen on sewing, fabric paint is your new best friend — especially on denim. Just doodle a few spider webs here and there, and maybe a cool design on the back and you're good to go!

Spider webs also look good on shoes. There are plenty of tutorials online on how to properly paint and spruce up an old pair of shoes to better fit your current aesthetic.

Antiques, antiques, antiques!

There's no one way to be goth. There are witchy goths, pastel goths, cyber-goths, trad-goths, kawaii goths, deathrockers and more. One thing I'm sure most of them



When designing the haunted abode you've always dreamed of, skeletons perched on every window is just one idea to play with, but there are so many more for you to dip your talons into. Photo courtesy of Wallpaper Cave

can agree on though, is that thrift stores and antiques are your friends.

You can find almost anything if you look hard enough. It's not uncommon to find beautiful pieces of baroque or rococo furniture for under \$100 on Facebook Marketplace or Kijiji.

Old Halloween decorations are practically being given away during every month that isn't October. At antique stores, it's easy to find old pieces of

reasonably priced taxidermy. A hidden gem in Calgary is The Iron Crow. You can usually find vintage Victorian photos in most of these shops. They give a really haunting vibe to your abode.

Other items you can find are old candelabras that look like they're straight out of a vampire movie, universal monster memorabilia, strange clothes from bygone decades, parasols and hats that Lydia

Deetz, the Beetlejuice queen herself, would scream over. You name it, they sell it — and it's usually for a steal.

There are a million and one ways to live your best spooky life — all you need is to get a little creative, start keeping an eye out, and don't listen to anyone who says "Halloween is over". You don't need that kind of negativity in your life, and whatever your aesthetic is, happy haunting!



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Crafts and snacks – Easter edition

Emily Marsten

Contributor



Easter might look a little different this year, but that isn't an excuse to not get creative and enjoy the festivities this holiday brings. Photo courtesy of Pexels

I have always loved Easter. I get to spend time with family and friends, wear a brightly coloured spring dress to the Easter church service and spend time outside hearing the birds chirping and feel the sunshine on my face.

It always seems to me that Easter is actually the start of spring and the end of the dreaded winter. This year, things will probably look a little different, but that can also create an opportunity to be more creative.

Follow along and find some inspiration to create your own

projects with these Easter-themed craft and snack ideas.

Pallet painting: creating your own Easter sign

I love a cute wooden pallet sign, but it's so hard to find one that is both cost-effective and exactly what I am looking for. Not being able to gather together for Easter dinner with friends and family, and maybe attending an Easter church service online instead of in person, can feel disappointing.

But creating a fun Easter-themed pallet sign can add a little colour to your house and help celebrate the joyful holiday of Easter!

The first step is deciding how big you want your sign to be. A good place to start is by actually scouting out a place where you want the sign to go and then judging how big you want it based on that. You might want to put it on your front door, in the kitchen, hanging in a bathroom or above your bed.

The next step is to find your pallet. Michael's has some

great ready-made pallets in lots of shapes and sizes, plus if you grab a coupon online, it can really help bring your cost down.

Now that you have the pallet, you need to decide how you will add the words. You can easily make your own stencil by typing your quote on your laptop and printing it out. Try testing out some new fonts and mix it up! Cut each letter out and trace the shapes lightly with a pencil, then you can colour it in. You could write something like "He is risen," "Happy Easter." I also saw an

adorable sign that said, "Bunny Kisses & Easter Wishes." The great thing about making your own sign is you can write whatever you want!

Don't forget to add some details too! Using a ruler, you can trace and paint a simple cross or you can even grab some stick-on bunny ears or easter eggs and splash in some colour.

If you decide to paint the words and details, I would recommend using acrylic

Continues on Pg. 10

OUT'N ABOUT

The Calgary Stampede

Grab your boots and hats from July 9 to 18 because Stampede 2021 is happening. Communications manager Kristina Barnes said it's going to be different but that Stampede feeling will still be there.

GlobalFest

GlobalFest was in the same boat as many businesses last year, cancelling their event for the summer of 2020. But from Aug. 13 to Aug. 28, the cultural festival looks forward to bringing arts and culture back to the city in a safe manner for an explosive and delicious time!

Grey Eagle Event Centre Drive-in

The Grey Eagle Event Centre experienced the cancellation and postponement of most if not all of their shows for over a year now. But the venue is excited to bring live entertainment back for Calgarians starting May 1 in an old-fashioned drive-in style.

Music Festivals

Both Country Thunder and Chasing Summer are optimistic their festivals will continue as planned for the summer of 2021. Calgarians can hopefully attend Country Thunder in person from Aug. 20 to Aug. 22 and Chasing Summer from July 31 to Aug. 1.

Continued from Pg. 9

paint. Grab a few pastel colours like pinks, yellows, and blues and hop to it! Before you know it, you will have an adorable custom-made sign that you can hang up for years.

Detailed Easter eggs

At some point, I hope you have all had the opportunity to paint Easter eggs. As kids, we would often take eggs and dip them in some sloppy, half-dyed, water-concoction and create messy-masterpieces.

But painting Easter eggs can actually be a very detailed and complex creative process. Have you ever seen Ukrainian Easter eggs? Beautifully intricate and full of bright colours, these eggs aren't your typical dye job.

Criss-cross patterns, tiny white dots, and tons of different colours can all be part of just one egg. Making these eggs is a process, so I would recommend following along with a step-by-step video. Don't be afraid to give it a try; it might become your new favourite pastime!

But if that sounds too complicated, you can also up your Easter egg dye job by using acrylic paint. Grab a few white eggs from your fridge and bright pastel paints, and get to work!

You can even try looking at some of the Ukrainian Easter egg designs and seeing if you can copy-cat it with your artistic acrylic skills — or go rogue and just do your own thing!

In order to get less paint on your fingers, try painting half the egg and then letting it dry on some paper towel. When you're finished, you can place them in a fun wicker basket on your coffee table.

If you decide to use these eggs as a decoration, they can typically last for up to two weeks. Make sure to throw them out when you're done or you might have an egg-cident!

Egg-cellent desserts

Cadbury Mini Eggs are among my favourite Easter-time treats! These brightly coloured chocolate delights don't last long in my household, and I never tire of tearing open that violet package and popping them in my mouth.

If you're like me and can't get enough of these colourful treats, maybe it's time to create an egg-cellent dessert. There are tons of options to choose from. I have always liked the

idea of adding Mini Eggs to your favourite brownie recipe. After all, you can't go wrong with adding more chocolate to brownies, right?

How about Mini Egg-decorated rice crispy squares? Or a creamy vanilla cake topped with a fluffy mass of Mini Egg icing? If it's a hot spring day, try pouring a liberal amount of Mini Eggs into a bowl of ice cream and stir it up.

You could also use Mini Eggs as a decorating tool. Whip up a simple batch of your favourite kind of cupcakes and you can create an adorable Easter-themed scene. Try out your icing piping skills by putting icing in a ziplock bag and cutting a small hole in one corner, now you have a DIY piping bag.

Pipe on some fuzzy green grass with a twisted brown bird's nest on top — then pop on some Mini Eggs and ta-da! Inspiration can be found all around us, or on Pinterest, so see what you can come up with and don't forget to save some Mini Eggs for your dessert!

Shapely Snacks

I love coming across themed foods. Scrolling through Pinterest or Instagram and eventually finding hilarious and clever foods like someone's fantastic idea to create bunny-butt pancakes — it's a thing! This Easter season, why not take up the challenge of designing your own themed snack?

In order to create the bunny-butt pancake example, you need three sizes of pancakes, two pieces of bacon and a dollop of whipped cream or coconut flakes.

To create the body shape, start by making one large pancake, one medium pancake and two small pancakes. Place them on a plate in this order, one on top of the other: medium 'head', large 'body', and the two small ones go on either side to create the 'feet'.

Fry up some crispy strips of bacon and place them on the top of the bunny's 'head.' This will be the two floppy ears. Then place a substantial circle of frosty whipped cream on the 'body' to act as the bunny's fluffy tail. There you have it, your very own bunny-butt pancakes!

Find some inspiration and run with it. Choose a theme and challenge your friends to see who can create the best masterpiece. This can be a great way to do something virtually with your friends all from the comfort of your own kitchen.



If you love a little bit of rustic decor in your home, then this is the Easter craft for you. Photo courtesy of Pxhere



Painting Easter eggs can be a fun and relaxing way to enjoy the spring holiday season safely with family or friends. Photo courtesy of Pexels



This is a cute and yummy way to get festive (and full) this Easter. Photo by Emily Marsten

Virtual artist talk with Farzaneh Azizpour

Astrid Cunanan

Contributor



A zoom call with members from the Stride Gallery and Immigrant Council for Arts Innovation to chat with artist Farzaneh Azizpour. Photo by Astrid Cunanan

For the past year, most of my time has been spent indoors due to COVID-19. As a result of this, I filled the extra hours in my days with hobbies I used to push aside to focus on university. I rediscovered my love for art in different mediums, whether it's through digital drawings, water colouring or creating collages.

In addition to creating art, I've grown an insatiable appetite for consuming artworks of all kinds. As much as I would enjoy walking through an art gallery with a curated Spotify playlist specifically made for that moment — that has to wait until phase three of Alberta's reopening plan. Fortunately, Stride Gallery has continued to update its space with new virtual exhibits to present on their social media channels.

As a part of moving things online, Stride Gallery continues to execute artist talks over Zoom, free for any individual to join. An artist talk gives the artist a chance to talk about themselves and inform their viewers about the inspiration, story and meaning behind their work.

On March 26, 2021, Stride Gallery held an artist talk for Farzaneh Azizpour, who specializes in figurative expressive oil paintings. She was born in Iran and recently immigrated to Canada in July 2020 to further her artistic endeavours. For this artist talk, Azizpour focused on her series titled *Gap Generation* which is composed of seven different oil paintings.

Stride Gallery's curatorial resident Eva Birhanu stated this artist talk "is in conjunction with our current group exhibition *Shroud, Crown, Grey Area and Generations*."

As further explained by art director Areum Kim, this group exhibition was assembled in collaboration with the Immigrant Council for Arts Innovation (ICAI).

"ICAI works to connect immigrant and newcomer artists to resources, opportunities and people based in Calgary," said Kim.

"The art world has so many invisible barriers and walls of relations that seem impeachable, so we are honoured to share a space with ICAI."

Azizpour recalls creating handcrafts at the age of 10, but her 20s was the turning point in her life. It was during this time she was studying for her radiology degree at Iran Medical Science University when she spotted a magazine in the library with Claude Monet's painting, *Water Lilies*.

"After that point, I could never forget painting, it sparked something in my life," Azizpour said.

Having been in the medical field prior to her newfound journey of becoming an artist, Azizpour's interest in psychology found a way into her paintings. She stated that each individual is incredibly unique and that was vital to her work.

One of my favourites and the first painting she explained was her perspective of her two

kids sitting on the couch. The boy was wearing a white mask while the girl was wearing a black mask. The inspiration behind this painting stemmed from Azizpour's realization of the gap of understanding between her kids and herself.

"It made me worried and upset because each parent wants the best for their kids," said Azizpour. "At that time, I thought they were really strange, I could not recognize them — like they were wearing masks."

She noted that her works may include her children but that was not done purposely, she only uses them as a source of inspiration for these paintings. This is demonstrated through her lack of use of a realistic style, "I create something and finish at the moment I like my creation, just that — I don't want to paint someone exactly how they are as a person."

In addition to Azizpour's love for painting, her ultimate goal is to become a fashion designer. During her spare time from the COVID-19 lockdown, she created a collection and has even worked on a project "about fashion design and the relationship between femininity and historical monuments in Iran."

Azizpour's artist talk wrapped up the group exhibition of *Shroud, Crown, Grey Area and Generations* and will be up for another month. While we wait for phase three of reopening, the exhibition can be viewed on Stride Gallery's website.



Spaceman

Nick Jonas

Island Records

Score: C -

Nick Jonas' *Spaceman* was supposed to take his audience on a space odyssey but it barely achieves liftoff. The soundscapes of this album may be taken as euphoric but ultimately, they're almost too similar to one another to fully let Jonas' listeners enjoy his vocal potential.

Spaceman's energy feels misplaced. By trying to make the album feel both euphoric and upbeat, both elements clash with each other. It results in a weird amalgamation that doesn't lean to either side enough to be good — it just comes off as generic and purposeless.

In "2Drunk", Jonas sings, "Oh my God, it's five, once again / Pour another drink /

Pour another drink and take it down / All my friends are home, so am I," reflecting on the monotonous nature of isolation, a feeling that is as present as ever because of COVID-19. These are about as impactful as the lyrics get in this album, everything else sounds plain in terms of the pop genre.

Overall, *Spaceman* felt like it didn't know its own identity and it shows in the music. This was not a good outing for Jonas but perhaps he was just shaking off the pandemic jitters. If he keeps popping out albums like this, he'll be quickly replaced by a relevant name in pop music.

— Keoputhy Bunny



Justice

Justin Bieber

Def Jam

Recordings

Score: B+

Canadian pop sensation Justin Bieber's latest album, *Justice*, has raised eyebrows in both good and bad ways. The music itself is well-done, but it also brings baggage that feels ill-advised, to say the least.

Justice starts off with "2 Much"; the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King rings out: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". Later in the album, an interlude also uses the activist's voice. A powerful segment that ends with, "You died when you refused to stand up for truth / You died when you refused to stand for justice".

If you're wondering why this is in the middle of a pop album, don't worry, so is everyone else. Aside from these mentions and the title, the album doesn't explain the idea of 'justice' at all. It feels like either a misguided

attempt to liken Bieber's struggle to Dr. King's, or a shot at activism that falls flat.

Aside from the shaky activism, the album itself is decent. "Die For You" is reminiscent of Michael Jackson but revolutionized for the modern audience and the last single, "Lonely", tugs at the audience's heartstrings with JB's vocals cutting through soft, quiet beats.

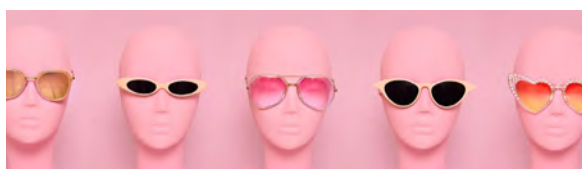
Overall, the album is definitely a step in the right direction, but the messaging needs more tweaking. It felt performative and similar to insincerely reposting a #BlackLivesMatter post. Excluding the baggage, *Justice* is full of fresh tunes for your ears and is definitely a staple for the rest of pop going forward.

— Keoputhy Bunny

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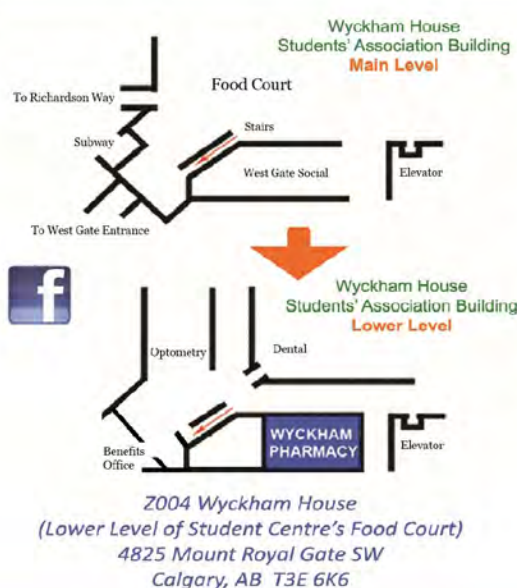
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A look ahead to the Cougars 2021/22 season

Zach Worden
Sports Editor

After coming off of a breakout year for the Mount Royal University (MRU) Cougars, the COVID-19-impacted 2020-21 season couldn't have come at a worse time. Three teams won Canada West medals in 2019-20 and two had punched tickets to the 2020 U SPORTS national championships before they were cancelled.

In the upcoming 2021-22 season, the Cougars will be looking to pick up right where they left off and continue to make noise in both the Canada West conference and across the country. Here is a look at where each team was when we last saw them and where they'll look to be upon returning to the court, ice or field.

Men's Soccer

After a Canada West bronze medal win in 2019, the Cougars men's soccer team became the first team in Mount Royal history to do so. Not only did the Cougars see the return of U SPORTS Rookie of the Year Dane Domic, but their roster will feature three players who have been selected in the Canadian Premier League (CPL) U SPORTS draft. Moe El Gandour, Victor Loturi and Ethan Keen will all bring professional experience to the team in 2021.

Look for the Cougars to improve upon their successful 2019 and push for a conference championship in the fall.



The Cougars women's volleyball team after winning the 2020 Canada West bronze medal. The team defeated the Thompson Rivers University WolfPack on Kenyon Court. Photo by Dan Khavkin

Women's Soccer

Despite a tough 2019 season, the Cougars women's soccer team finished the season on a high note. They won two of their final five games to finish with a 2-10-2 record.

For head coach Tino Fusco and the Cougars, they will see 10 first-year athletes who lost their freshman seasons to COVID-19 take the field for the first time. With a new class of recruits set to come in, the Cougars may lean on some of their young newcomers to turn the program around and turn some heads in 2021.

Men's Volleyball

After becoming the first Mount Royal team to attend a U SPORTS national championship in 2019, the

men's volleyball team lost some key contributors, including all-time leading Canada West point-getter Tyler Schmidt. This led to the program taking a step back in 2019-20.

Since then, the team has only graduated three seniors, which will lead to an experienced group taking the court in 2021-22. They will look to former Canada West all-rookie team members Chris Byam and Luis Lange to lead the way. Lange spent the fall of 2020 training with the Canadian national team.

With a small group of freshmen playing in 2021, the Cougars will be in prime position to make a run at a Canada West medal and a return trip to the national championship.

Women's Volleyball

They are one of the two teams that lost out on their U SPORTS national championship experience thanks to the pandemic. The women's volleyball team at MRU will look a little different than the team that won a Canada West bronze medal, but they will still feature a group of veterans more than capable of getting back to being one of the best teams in the country.

Dholi Thokbuom and Quinn Pelland will be the two names to watch. The duo was invited to Volleyball Canada's Women's Full-time Training Centre in Richmond, B.C.

Continues on Pg. 14



Despite not getting any games in the 2020-21 season due to COVID-19, the Mount Royal Cougars will look to continue making strides after winning three Canada West medals in 2019-20. Photo courtesy of Cougars Athletics

#s

46, players traded
at the 2021
NBA trade deadline

0, perfect brackets
remaining after
the round of 64 in
the 2020 NCAA
men's basketball
championship.

100, per cent
capacity at
Texas Rangers games
during the 2021 MLB
season

14.3, per cent
chance for
the Calgary Flames to
make the playoffs on
March 28 according to
moneypuck.com.

Continued from Pg. 13

Pelland was named a Canada West second-team all-star in 2019-20 and Thokbuom earned the conference's first-team all-star honours and was recognized among the best players in the country as a U SPORTS second-team all-Canadian.

With an experienced group that will be motivated to get back to the national tournament, the Cougars will be a group to watch in 2021.

Men's Basketball

A 3-0 start to the 2019-20 season resulted in a disappointing end for the Cougars as they lost their remaining 17 games.

With multiple fifth-year players, the Cougars may be looking at a youth movement in 2021. Fortunately, many of

the Mount Royal freshmen were able to get lots of playing time throughout the 2019-20 season as the team battled injuries to key players.

Nate Petrone ended up on the Canada West all-rookie team and could end up being the focal point of the Cougars' offence next year. In what is bound to be a different-looking conference than last year, the Cougars may feature some of the newest faces from when we last saw them on the court.

Women's Basketball

In 2019-20, Cougars head coach Robyn Fleckenstein led the team to its most wins since the 2014-15 season. The team finished just two games out of a playoff spot and made major improvements from the

season before.

With a large number of recruits, the Cougars will be on the hunt for their first Canada West playoff appearance. Tanis Metcalfe is transferring to the Cougars from the University of British Columbia, where she played a key role in the Thunderbirds' run to the Canada West semi-finals.

Men's Hockey

A successful 2019-20 regular season saw the Cougars finish as the fourth seed in the Canada West. This allowed them to host the first round of the playoffs as they welcomed the fifth seed UBC Thunderbirds to Flames Community Arenas. After a heartbreaking game, the Cougars were set to come back even better for 2020-21.

Now a year later, the men's

hockey team will be losing some of its veteran players, but will still feature a large group from the playoff loss. Throwing in a strong batch of recruits, the Cougars will have a chance to avenge their loss in 2020 and contend for a Canada West medal in 2021-22.

Women's Hockey

The women's hockey team at MRU won the school's first-ever Canada West silver medal. Also finishing as the fourth seed in the conference, the Cougars turned in a magical playoff run that ended in the U SPORTS national championship.

The Cougars knocked off the University of Regina on home ice in the first round, then proceeded to upset the University of Calgary Dinos in a dramatic three-game series

that needed two overtimes to determine a winner in game three.

The team ultimately lost to the University of Alberta in the finals, but earned themselves a spot in the national championship. There, the team was one of four to get in a game before the tournament was cancelled. In that one game, they once again played the role of underdogs and knocked off the number two seed University of Toronto in overtime, earning a spot in the national semi-finals.

The team was a veteran squad and will be losing some of their senior players, but luckily will have a talented group of youngsters that can carry over the experience from the national tournament to the 2021-22 edition of the Cougars.

Calgary Hitmen adapt to WHL bubble

George Potter

Staff Writer



Peters celebrates with teammates after a March 1, 2020 game against the Lethbridge Hurricanes at the Scotiabank Saddledome. Photo by George Potter

The Calgary Hitmen have started this WHL season in a bubble. There have been many changes to the team's roster as some players left during the offseason and new faces are filling leadership roles for the team.

The WHL had to keep pushing back its opening date due to the ever-changing COVID-19 restrictions. With the league finally settling on a return to play, the Hitmen won't get to skate their home stadium all year. Instead of the Scotiabank Saddledome, the team is calling the Seven Chiefs Sportsplex in the Tsuut'ina Nation home for 2021.

The Calgary Hitmen have started the year fairly impressively. With a mix of veterans and newcomers, the team is working on gelling

and finding chemistry on the ice. Through their first eight games, the Hitmen sat in second place in the central division with a 4-3-1 record, just below the first-place Edmonton Oil Kings who have yet to lose through their first seven games.

One thing the Hitmen will miss this year is their annual teddy bear toss. However, they were able to keep the spirit alive by getting fans to bring the teddy bears to the Saddledome in a drive-thru format around the holidays.

Defenseman Luke Prokop, one of the Hitmen's star players, was selected in the third round of the 2020 NHL draft. He was the 73rd selection for the Nashville Predators. Prokop officially signed his entry-level contract with the Predators after

he was drafted, but is still assigned to the Hitmen for this season after being named captain for the team.

Some of the players who left the team moved on to pursue professional careers or join a team in U SPORTS. Former captain Mark Kastelic and defenseman Jett Woo both moved on to play in the American Hockey League (AHL). Dakota Krebs now plays for the University of Calgary Dinos, while Kyle Olsen joined the Mount Royal Cougars.

Josh Prokop, the 27th captain in franchise history, following his brother Luke, was unveiled the team's new leaders. Luke, defenseman Jackson Van de Leest, Cael Zimmerman and Riley Stotts became the new alternate captains.

In the team's first game of the season, they beat the Red Deer Rebels 2-0. Two of the Hitmen's players achieved career firsts in the game — goaltender Brayden Peters got the first shutout of his WHL career and defenseman Tyson Galloway scored the first goal of his career.

Since the 2-0 win over the Rebels, the team has been up and down. The Rebels beat the Hitmen 3-2 in overtime. The Hitmen then struggled in back-to-back games against the Medicine Hat Tigers losing 6-2 and 4-2 respectively. However, they were able to bounce back in the third game of their series against the Tigers, winning 5-4.

The Calgary Hitmen followed up their series with the Tigers with a three-

game set against their rival Lethbridge Hurricanes. They fell in the first game 3-1, on a short-handed goal that was assisted by now Buffalo Sabres forward Dylan Cozens. Defenseman Luke Prokop scored the only goal for the Hitmen. They won the second game with a 4-3 victory in overtime. The Hitmen blew out the Hurricanes 7-4 in the third game with forward Adam Kydd scoring two goals.

The rest of the Hitmen's schedule consists of three-game series' against the Tigers, Rebels, Oil Kings and Hurricanes. Their regular-season runs up to May 5. There has been no formal announcement of a playoff schedule or format, as the WHL awaits updates to COVID-19 guidelines.

Contenders, Pretenders, and Dark Horses: Taking a Look at the NBA Landscape

Gage Smith
Staff Writer

We're still months away from tipping off the NBA playoffs, but with the all-star break and trade deadline in the rearview mirror, the rosters are looking almost exactly like they will when the games really start to count. Now is as good a time as ever to make our bets — what are we expecting of playoff teams? Who's going to be sent packing and who actually has a shot to win it all?

Close but No Cigar

These are the teams that will fight for a playoff berth and make the play-in tournament but ultimately fall just short.

Toronto Raptors

Despite hanging onto Kyle Lowry and being only one game away from the Eastern Conference Finals with mostly this same core only a year ago, the Raps won't be playing beyond the guaranteed 72 games this season. At the time of writing, they've gone 1-9 in their last ten games. They also just unloaded one of their highest scorers, Norman Powell, in a trade that made them worse. Lowry may not have played his final game for the Raptors yet, but the sun is setting on this era for the franchise — at least they got a ring out of it!

Chicago Bulls

Though they have a shiny new all-star to pair with Zach LaVine, the trade for Nikola Vucevic won't be quite enough to push the Bulls into the East's elite eight. They'll be able to put points on the board, but it's tough to even sniff the playoffs as a bottom-ten defence in the league. Getting their hands on Daniel Theis will help in that area, but it won't quite be enough.

Golden State Warriors

Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Steph Curry continues to be easily the greatest shooter of all time and arguably the greatest point guard of all time, but basketball is a team sport. Even with Curry, it's been a struggle for Golden State to stay above .500 this year, and they made no changes at the

trade deadline. They're one Curry injury away from being back at the very bottom.

Easy Outs

These are the teams that'll make the playoffs, but don't have much hope to even see the second round.

Memphis Grizzlies, San Antonio Spurs

Aside from the theatrics of Ja Morant and DeMar DeRozan — which will be enough to earn them a seat in the playoffs — the Grizzlies and Spurs simply don't have the talent to make the well-oiled machines in Utah, Phoenix, and L.A. sweat, and they won't win more than one playoff game this year.

Indiana Pacers

Indiana is a regular-season team that lacks the star power to push them over the edge in more than one or two playoff games.

Charlotte Hornets

One of the most unfortunate turns of events this year has been a wrist injury to LaMelo Ball. He was playing at a shockingly high level for his age, and his ability to elevate his team put him head and shoulders above the field in the Rookie of the Year race. If he is indeed out for an extended period, the pleasantly surprising Hornets will probably face a losing streak that'll cost them their current high seeding, and will be slaughtered by one of the east's powerhouses. Keep your chin up if you're a Hornets fan though — the future is bright.

Dark Horses

Slept-on teams that could actually pull off a very deep playoff run and take down some giants, but aren't the favourites to do so.

New York Knicks

I never thought I'd be saying this about what has been one of the worst franchises in recent sports history, but the Knicks finally seem to have a decent culture. Julius Randle and Immanuel Quickley are leading an exciting, scrappy young core



The Los Angeles Lakers in action at the Staples Center. The Lakers will look to repeat as NBA champions in 2021. Photo courtesy of Unsplash

into the great unknown, and they could absolutely put a scare into a contender.

Atlanta Hawks

Trae Young can score at will, John Collins is as efficient as it gets down low and the Hawks have righted the ship after their slow start. Sleep on them at your own risk.

Miami Heat

Don't let the fact that Miami is currently on the outside looking into the playoff picture distract you from the fact that they're fresh off a finals run and just added a lethal scorer in Victor Oladipo. If they're healthy, they can hang with anyone.

Boston Celtics

After entering this season with high expectations, Boston has been one of the league's biggest underachievers. With superstars Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown on the roster, as well as the fresh face of Evan Fournier, Boston is still a nightmare early matchup for a top seed in the east.

Dallas Mavericks

Injuries have held them back all year, but with Porzingis back in the lineup and a bit of Luka magic, don't be shocked to see Dallas pull off an upset this year.

Pretenders

Great teams that just

can't quite hang with the favourites.

LA Clippers

No team has more to prove than the Clippers after last year's historic playoff meltdown. Unless the veteran leadership of Rajon Rondo pays off in a bigger-than-expected way, this team's ceiling is the Western Conference Finals.

Milwaukee Bucks

Speaking of a contender having a playoff meltdown, Milwaukee has their work cut out for them this year as well, but is still too one-dimensional in its game planning. I can't see them surviving a matchup with Philly or Brooklyn, but they could very well make it to the conference finals.

Contenders

Teams with a very good chance of playing in the Finals or winning a title.

Utah Jazz/Philadelphia 76ers

The best defences in the league are led by offensive superstars and feature defensive player of the year candidates. Both of these well-rounded squads have a chance to make the finals for the first time in over a decade.

Phoenix Suns

Wherever Chris Paul goes, winning follows. His playoff

performances never fail to be amazing — even more so now that he's flanked by Devin Booker, one of the most gifted scorers in the world. Look out for the Suns come playoff time.

Denver Nuggets

Last year's second-place finisher in the west just got even more stacked with the addition of Aaron Gordon's inhuman athleticism and much-needed perimeter defence. They also have Nikola "The Joker" Jokic, an MVP frontrunner. Denver has some mile-high expectations.

LA Lakers

With a healthy Anthony Davis and LeBron James, the Lakers will be my pick to make it out of the west once again. Davis has struggled all year, but betting against LeBron is a fool's game, especially when he has a better supporting cast than the one he just won a title with.

Brooklyn Nets

My pick to win it all, and it's not very close. This team has three separate players that no man who has ever walked this earth could guard one-on-one. They're absolutely stacked and they just picked up Blake Griffin and LaMarcus Aldridge. When the whole team is on the court, expect them to steamroll the opposition with style. Scary hours indeed.

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