

Branch campuses to close

12 campuses to be considered for potential closure, Bendapudi says

By **Pragya Sinha**
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

During a Faculty Senate meeting Tuesday afternoon, Penn State faculty responded to an announcement about branch campus closures prompted by declining enrollments, demographic shifts and financial pressures.

According to a statement released before the meeting, Abington, Altoona, Behrend, Berks, Brandywine, Harrisburg, Lehigh Valley, Great Valley, Dickson Law, the College of Medicine and the Pennsylvania College of Technology will remain open.

That leaves 12 other commonwealth campuses that could be closed as early as the 2027-28 academic year. These include Beaver, DuBois, Fayette, Greater Allegheny, Hazleton, Mont Alto, New Kensington, Schuylkill, Scranton, Shenango, Wilkes-Barre and York.

President Neeli Bendapudi said decisions haven't been made on which campuses will close, but clarified that a number of the 12 remaining campuses will stay open. She also said any student who has began a Penn State degree will have the opportunity to finish it at Penn State.

"Doing nothing is not an option. We need to make informed decisions that prioritize students and ensure financial sustainability," Bendapudi said.

Faculty members expressed

frustration over the administration's lack of transparency at the meeting, arguing that decisions were made without adequate communication and consultation.

Victor Brunsden, an associate professor of mathematics at Penn State Altoona, pointed to a "lack of mutual trust" between faculty and administrators.

Amit Sharma, a professor of hospitality management at University Park, echoed these concerns, arguing that the decision-making process has ignored faculty voices and could jeopardize the university's long-term stability.

Faculty members have also criticized the timing of the announcement, with some claiming it was strategically released ahead of key governance discussions.

"I think it shows the state of shared governance at the institution right now," Faculty Senate Chair Joshua Wede, a teaching professor of psychology at University Park, said.

Faculty, staff and shared governance bodies would be actively engaged in the planning and transition process to support students, employees and communities, the pre-meeting statement said.

Bendapudi also acknowledged the complexity of the situation and suggested that if necessary, the university would adjust its timeline to ensure the best possible

decisions are made.

Terri Vescio, a professor of psychology at University Park, questioned when the administration will be transparent about which campuses are closing.

"Part of the reason (for) rushing and talking about it now, is because we are still admitting students to the campuses that we are closing," Bendapudi said. "What we are trying to do is truly invest in the campuses."

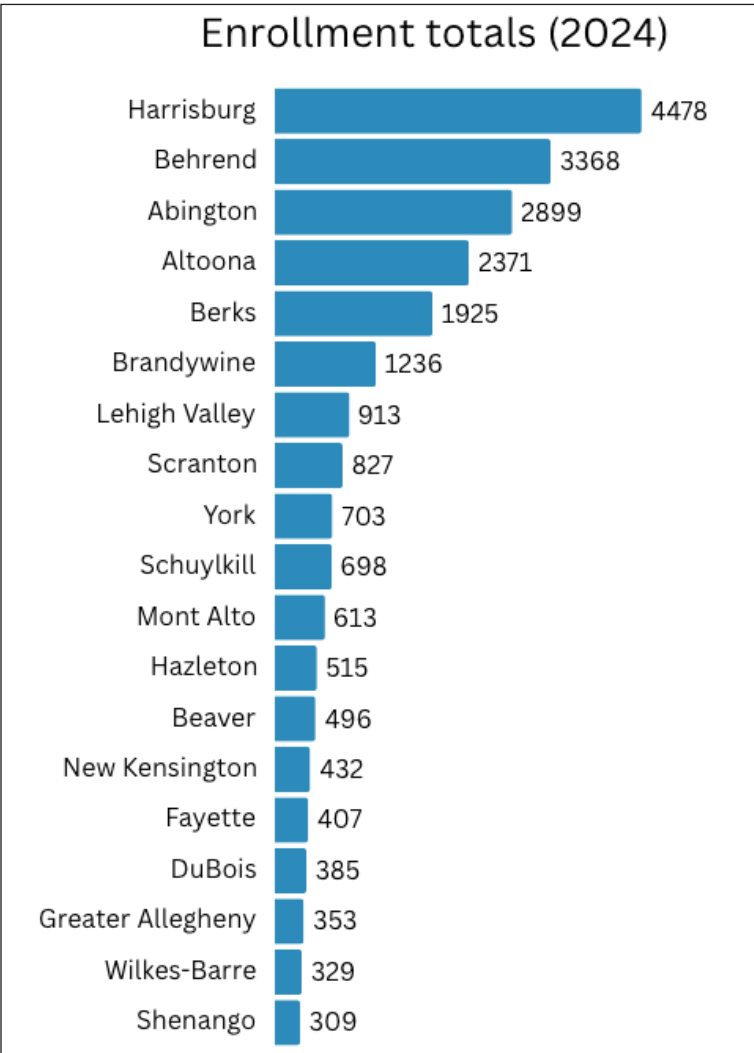
Julio L. Palma, an associate professor of chemistry at Penn State Fayette, mentioned that messages surrounding student experiences at branch campuses differ from "what the Penn State experience is."

"We are spread too thin. I am just trying to make sure we invest in our campuses properly," Bendapudi said in response. "I value, and I've seen the amazing work that we do. I would say everyone has a good understanding of the Penn State experience."

Moving forward, Bendapudi said the administration has pledged to continue discussions on the future of affected campuses and explore ways to maintain Penn State's presence across the state.

She said information regarding the future employment of staff and faculty at closing campuses will be made clear by the end of this semester.

To email reporter: pvs5791@psu.edu.



Graphic by Sam Woloson

Enrollment totals for Penn State's commonwealth campuses in fall 2024, according to the university's annual enrollment snapshot. The 12 campuses under consideration for closure have fewer than 1,000 students.

Grad workers push for union

By **Paloma Munoz & Pragya Sinha**
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State graduate workers are pushing for a union election this semester, citing concerns over wages, workplace protections and job security. However, university objections to include research assistants and trainees may delay the vote.

The unionization effort gained traction with a public rally in November, where graduate workers formally launched their campaign for improved working conditions. A month later, over 3,000 graduate employees signed authorization cards submitted to the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board (PLRB). Despite these steps, the university has yet to agree to an election.

"We have been working on this for years, and we have been consistent in what we want and what we need," Jess Rafalko said. "That's a union."

The university recently informed union organizers that it objects to including research assistants and trainees in the bargaining unit, claiming they are not employees. The decision could force the case into a legal hearing, which could take months before an election is scheduled.

Penn State emphasized the role of graduate students as "students first and foremost," arguing that research assistants are primarily engaged in academic work as part of their degree requirements.

"Activities such as designing and executing their own research, assisting faculty, developing methodologies, working with disciplinary and interdisciplinary research teams and growing and demonstrating mastery and independence in their field are vital

to RAs earning their advanced degrees and for academic and professional development," the university said in a statement. "For these reasons, the university is opposing the petition on the basis that research assistants and trainees are not employees under the meaning of the Public Employee Relations Act."

"This has already been litigated," Rafalko, a doctoral student studying English, said, referring to a 2018 unionization effort in which the PLRB ruled that research assistants could be included. "We strongly don't believe this needs to go to a hearing."

Christine Bowlus expressed urgency in holding a vote before more students graduate or leave. "The majority of grad workers who signed cards last year deserve to have their voices heard through an election," Bowlus, a doctoral student studying exercise physiology, said. "If the university delays, they might not get that chance."

Many graduate workers say their salaries have not kept pace with inflation, making it difficult to afford rent and basic living expenses in State College.

"It's not uncommon for graduate workers to barely make rent," Bowlus said. "Some have even had to couch surf because their wages don't cover basic living expenses."

Tahir Haideri shared his own financial difficulties after his pay grade was unexpectedly lowered without notice.

"There was no official recourse," Haideri, a doctoral student studying biomedical engineering, said. "I didn't know how much money I would have month-to-month, and that's not sustainable."

He emphasized the need for more stability, saying, "It's really just about setting a baseline for

everyone across the university."

Beyond wages, graduate workers are also advocating for stronger protections against workplace harassment and discrimination.

"I've watched so many brilliant scientists and teachers leave because they had no protections," Bowlus said. "A union contract could change that."

Gonca Acaray has also been an advocate for better security and workplace protection.

"Many of us fear that job security is an afterthought for the university, but with a union, we can secure protections that ensure we are not left in the dark," Acaray, a doctoral student studying lifelong learning and adult education, said.

According to Rafalko, organizers have been meeting with deans and lawmakers to build support. She said more than 55 state legislators signed a letter urging Penn State to respect the democratic process; however, direct communication with the university has been limited.

"They've acknowledged that this is happening, but that's about it," Dia Brown said.

"That's why it's really important that we start getting more communication from (the university)," Brown, a doctoral student studying architectural engineering, said.

"That would be the hope — as employees at their university — that they would communicate with us more in this process."

Now, the coalition is calling on Penn State to move forward with an election rather than prolonging the process with legal challenges.

"This is about ensuring that we have a say in our workplace," Rafalko said. "We're ready to vote."

To email reporters: pbm5476@psu.edu, pvs5791@psu.edu. Follow Munoz on X @[palomun24](https://twitter.com/palomun24).



Megan Miller/Collegian

The THON Executive Committee reveals the total amount of money raised at the end of the 53rd THON in the Bryce Jordan Center.

THON raises \$17.7 million

By **Mercedes Hamilton**
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

At the end of THON Weekend 2025, Penn State THON's Executive Committee announced its fourth consecutive record breaking fundraising total and ranked the top fundraisers.

THON's 2025 fundraising total was \$17,737,040.93 — almost \$1 million more than the 2024 total of \$16,955,683.63.

During Penn State's 46-hour no-sitting, no-sleeping IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon this year, 708 dancers took a stand against childhood cancer, and over 16,500 student volunteers and 400 organizations made the weekend possible.

THON has raised over \$236 million since it partnered with Four Diamonds at Penn State Health Children's Hospital in 1977.

Here are this year's top fundraisers.

Top committees

1. Family Relations
2. Entertainment
3. Merchandise
4. Technology
5. Hospitality

Top independent dancer couples

1. Brooke Petrone and Jordan Petrone: \$51,364.21
2. Tej Bhuvra and Graham Pearson: \$28,544.12
3. Andrew Perillo and Michael Risser: \$27,530.48
4. Faith Ann Finch and Lilian

Fierro: \$26,386.67

5. Moira Gulden and Maddie Ryan: \$26,312.79

Top commonwealth campuses

1. Fayette: \$76,046.43
2. Behrend: \$74,155.06
3. Lehigh Valley: \$62,727.08
4. Altoona: \$59,685.64
5. Dubois: \$31,045.50

Top general organizations

1. Phi Gamma Nu: \$269,881.89
2. Phi Chi Theta: \$236,736.77
3. Epsilon Sigma Alpha: \$158,305.52
4. Alpha Kappa Psi: \$129,551.97
5. Phi Beta Lambda: \$123,717.16

Top Greek organizations

1. Zeta Tau Alpha and Alpha Tau Omega: \$529,003.97
2. Acacia and Gamma Phi Beta: \$427,861.13
3. Delta Zeta and Sigma Pi: \$402,858.39
4. Delta Gamma and Delta Upsilon: \$388,036.63
5. Phi Kappa Psi and Alpha Omicron Pi: \$331,427.43

Top special interest organizations

1. Atlas: \$224,275.80
2. Hershey Kisses: \$142,618.72
3. FOTO: \$132,852.99
4. Eclipse: \$84,709.63
5. Pillar: \$76,143.59

To email reporter: mjh7337@psu.edu Follow her on X @[mercedesjsh](https://twitter.com/mercedesjsh).

‘Radiance in manhood’

Zeta Phi Beta crowns Mr. Black 2025 during annual pageant

By Claire Huss
The Daily Collegian

The Mighty Mu Eta chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. held its annual Mr. Black Pageant in Heritage Hall on Sunday. The event has been celebrated since 1987 to increase awareness for lupus, erase negative stereotypes of Black men and promote a new image of Black men on the Penn State campus.

Penn State Zetas holds the pageant annually in February to celebrate Black History Month and “hold space on a PWI campus to celebrate the Black community,” according to Pageant Director Lenneya Murray. This year’s theme was “Radiance in Manhood.”

Four men competed for the title of Mr. Black Penn State, including Nathaniel Cosme-Ortiz, Isaiah Maldonado, Josaih Policard and Wesley Green.

Penn State alumna and Zeta Georjanne Rosa said the value of manhood is often overlooked.

“Radiance in manhood is about understanding your value as a man and what you can contribute to society, but also caring for yourself and being your best self,” Rosa said.

Tasneem Chapman, Zeta’s Finer Womanhood Week chair, said the theme showcases the depth and complexity of manhood.

“There’s a distinct way that people think men should act, feel and present themselves, but it goes against what we as humans should be like,” Chapman, a third-year studying cybersecurity operations and analytics, said.



Samantha DiCamillo/Collegian

The four male contestants dance together during the Mr. Black Pageant at the HUB-Robeson Center on Sunday, Feb. 23, 2025 at University Park, Pa.

“We want to highlight that men are people who have talents and feelings.”

After the contestants were announced, they performed a choreographed dance to “redrum” by 21 Savage. Following the dance, each contestant gave a brief speech about their background and why they wanted to be Mr. Black Penn State 2025.

Contestant No. 1 Cosme-Ortiz, a third-year studying mechanical engineering, spoke about assimilation as a Puerto Rican man in Philadelphia and “not being Latino enough.”

Later in the pageant, he was joined by his family to perform a traditional Bomba dance, during which two drummers try to keep

up with the rhythm of a dancer.

Contestant No. 2 Maldonado, a second-year studying broadcast journalism and psychology, sported formal attire and spoke about his family’s appreciation for challenging the status quo.

Maldonado performed a traditional Latino partner dance.

Contestant No. 3 Policard, a fourth-year studying political science and Arabic, shared an emotional story about his relationship with his parents, independence and making difficult decisions.

Policard performed an original poem about looking for stars through the smog of a Philadelphia sky.

Contestant No. 4 Green, a fourth-year studying architec-

tural engineering, discussed how facing suspension at Penn State refocused his views about his career and education.

Green’s attire matched that of Tyler the Creator’s “Chromakopia” album, and he performed an original choreographed dance to music from the album.

The four contestants came together to present information about lupus, an autoimmune disease that disproportionately affects Black people — specifically Black women. Each of the contestants then outlined their plan to spread awareness about the disease.

After a catered dinner and plenty of dancing, Josaih Policard was crowned Mr. Black Penn

State 2025.

Annika Shastry, Policard’s girlfriend, shared his process of creating an effective campaign for the pageant.

“He’s a very meticulous guy,” Shastry, a fourth-year studying English, said. “I helped him a little bit with looking over things and design, but he worked so hard. He really put himself out there.”

Shastry said Policard represents the year’s theme of “Radiance in Masculinity” by dismantling negative stereotypes about Black men.

“He’s really secure in his emotions, his ideas, his creativity and the way he expresses himself,” Shastry said.

Chapman looks forward to everything that will be done not only by Mr. Black Penn State, but by all of the qualified men in the competition.

“In practice, we didn’t know who was going to win,” Chapman said.

“We’ve formed really close relationships with all the contestants, and they’ve formed good relationships with each other. I’m excited to see what’s going to happen from this.”

Rosa was relieved she didn’t have to pick between the contestants.

“I was glad I was not a judge, because all of those contestants were fabulous,” Rosa said. “But Josaih is incredibly deserving, and I’m very happy for him.”

To email reporter: jh7005@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @[clairehuss13](#).

SJP reacts to executive order

By Rachael Keller
The Daily Collegian

President Donald Trump has signed over 70 executive orders, including Executive Order 13899: “Additional Measures to Combat Antisemitism.”

The executive order was originally issued during Trump’s first term in 2019, but prior administration “effectively nullified” it by “failing to give the terms of the order full force and effect throughout the government,” according to the White House.

In January, Trump re-signed the order to direct “additional measures to advance the policy thereof in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attacks of October 7, 2023, against the people of Israel.”

It allows for exploration into deporting pro-Palestinian activists, highlighting specifically students on visas who are protesting on their college campus.

Federal agencies are instructed to submit a report within 60 days that identifies all civil and criminal authorities or actions within their jurisdiction that “might be used to curb or combat antisemitism.” The attorney general will also include an analysis of all court cases involving higher-education institutions that allege “civil-rights violations related to or arising from post-October 7, 2023, campus antisemitism.”

“I understand this executive order to be a complete stripping of free speech, particularly on issues related to Palestine,” Matthew Parnell, executive board member of Penn State Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), said.

Parnell, a doctoral student studying communications arts and sciences, said much of the real danger regarding the order lies in its vagueness.

He said the order is unclear in the language around how it will

crack down on immigrant students and what further measures will be taken after the official reports are submitted.

“We saw hundreds of thousands of people mobilizing all over the U.S. in support of Palestinians with demands of a cease-fire and an arms embargo,” executive board member of SJP Roua Daas said. “Especially on college campuses, we saw college students — of all backgrounds — say that ‘enough is enough, we don’t want our university invested in the death of people worldwide.’”

Daas, a graduate student studying clinical psychology, said she believes the re-signing of the order is a direct result of the student activism seen on college campuses, and the order aims to silence the speech and protests from students.

Parnell said this order also highlights some of the Trump administration’s anti-immigration beliefs and policies.

He said this order is emblematic of what he believes is Trump’s larger strategy to deport as many immigrants as he can while he’s in office.

“They saw an opportunity to not only silence the Palestine movement, but to also silence and especially put at more risk international students who have been at the forefront of advocating for Palestine,” Daas said.

Sarah Dweik, an executive board member of SJP, said international students are granted the same First Amendment rights as American citizens when they come here on visas, and this order is violating their rights to free speech and assembly. She said it’s unconstitutional and illegal to try to implement an order like this on American citizens and students with visas.

“This executive order is trying to empower ICE to go after international students as part of the

immigrant population that at some point this country used to be proud of,” Dweik, a doctoral student studying communications arts and sciences, said. “To empower ICE in that kind of way gives them a lot of jurisdiction to be able to make decisions on who to deport, who to detain.”

Daas said there is increased rhetoric in the U.S. right now that is attempting to frame topics like the Palestine movement and DEI as “outside” beliefs, and not what many people believe in the U.S.

She said despite this, there has been a large push in the younger generations to understand these topics and realize their importance.

Daas said SJP has been taking orders like this very seriously because it wants to protect its members while also standing up for oppressed people. SJP has specifically taken an emphasis on protecting international students since the order was resigned and is working toward creating “know your rights” resources, according to Daas.

She said she doesn’t want to allow for the exclusion of international students in Palestine activism because of this order, so SJP has been looking into media policies on anonymous sourcing.

“This is not the first or last time that conservative and Zionist forces have attempted to silence the Palestine movement,” Daas said.

“This is just one step in a continued pattern of censorship on Palestine that has been long and very well documented.”

Daas said despite this, the Palestine movement around the world and on college campuses has never been so powerful, and setbacks like this order will not cause the movement to fall.

Dweik said there has already been an abundance of misinformation spread on the movement and orders like this, so it is important to be purposeful with what sources are being consumed, shared and reposted.

Daas said the liberation of Palestine is inevitable no matter what happens now, because history has proven there is no reality where oppressed people do not resist.

“Unfortunately, historical progress isn’t linear. There are road bumps. There are moments we go backwards,” Parnell said. “But, even in those moments we keep doing the work that’s important ... One executive order doesn’t stop the work we do.”



Joe Klein/Collegian

Tyler Wright dances alongside Dr. Eric Silver, a professor of sociology, in the Thomas Building while playing Fetty Wap on his JBL speaker.

Tyler Wright: JBL legend

By Alli Satterfield
The Daily Collegian

He was his high school administration’s worst nightmare, but now Tyler Wright has the opportunity to lean into the table, with his Louis Vuitton bracelet glistening on his right wrist, and share about his content creation success.

“ We just did another one,” Wright, the 19-year old known as @tylerwrightttt on Instagram and TikTok, said. “The professor told people in his class that he wanted to dance when I played the song, so when I walked in, I said, ‘Attention everyone, I am the JBL speaker kid!’”

Last Thursday marked the third time that Wright entered Thomas 100, blasting music on his JBL speaker.

On Valentine’s Day, he famously asked Penn State anthropology professor Dr. Kirk French to be his valentine, equipped with his staple speaker and roses for the professor.

Some students immediately whipped out their phones to record, while others were perplexed by the interruption to their class — including Anthony Desher.

“The class is fairly quiet, and then you hear a very loud speaker go off,” Desher, a fourth-year studying broadcast journalism, said. “I think it was ‘Again’ by Fetty Wap ... it was just a distraction. It threw me off.”

French embraced the situation and hugged Wright twice, but was initially nervous when he heard the disruption.

“It creeped me out for about a second because of the world we live in ... they had something behind their back,” French said.

Wright emphasized that he never intends to cause harm.

“I think we need more positivity in the world because then there will be less of those negative thoughts,” Wright said. “It’s very sad to see that that’s the first thing that would come to someone’s mind.”

Wright’s main goal is to spread joy through his content creation. He’s motivated to do charity work and create uplifting content by his Christian faith and his other inspirations: creators Tabish Hussain, NELK, Ali Lopez and Sabrina Carpenter.

Wright credits Carpenter’s “Short n’ Sweet” Tour, which he attended in Baltimore, for encouraging his “grind.”

“I saw thousands of people standing up, jumping, smiling, laughing, and it made me realize if I could have that effect on people, that would be amazing,” Wright said.

Now he’s going viral, but it started nine years ago with bottle-flipping videos, and then feet pics.

“That’s how I built up some income for myself, from feet, and then I used the money to fund my content creation,” Wright said.

Despite being the face of his social media and content creation brands, Wright wants all of the glory and attention to go to God.

“I’m second,” Wright said, holding the diamond-encrusted cross hanging from his neck.

He conducts charity work by raising money for women with breast cancer every year, and Wright hopes to expand his philanthropic reach in the coming years.

Wright said the amount of Penn State students watching his JBL speaker videos will help him do this.

To email reporter: ams12258@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @[amsatterfield8](#).

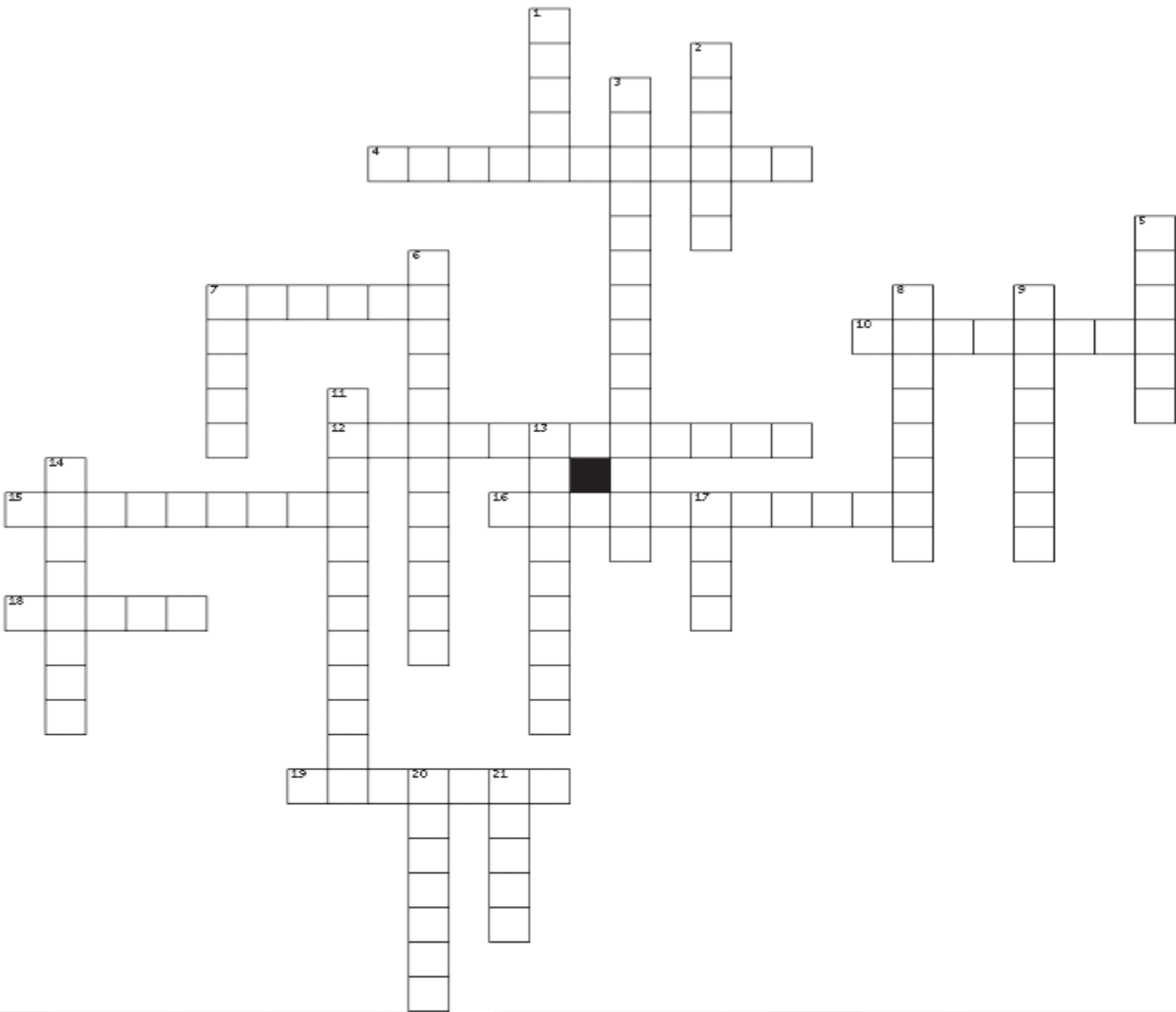


Sienna Pinney/Collegian file photo

Protesters march down College Avenue at the 1 Year of Genocide Protest hosted by Penn State Students for Justice in Palestine.

To email reporter: rmk6131@psu.edu.
Follow her on X @[ra_ch_ael](#).

St. Patty’s Day Games



Across

4. Nickname for State College (2 words)

7. Has 3 leaves, or 4 if lucky

10. How you may feel the day after drinking

12. Irish pub on Beaver Ave. (2 words)

15. Discounted drink time

DOWN

1. Daytime party for short

2. Capital of Ireland

3. Irish for “a hundred thousand welcomes” (3 words)

5. Where many go for 21sts

6. Cocktail made by dropping Irish cream and whiskey into a glass of Irish stout

7. Apple-based drink

8. Most popular Irish beer

9. Where the bars are

11. Kissable Irish rock

13. Oldest city in Ireland

14. All-day bar-hopping event

17. Bars in Ireland

20. Irish cream liqueur

21. One with good fortune

Scan to see crossword answers.



State Patty’s Word Search

- Bars

Dance

Downtown

Friends

Gold

Green

Guinness

Happy Valley

Heritage

Irish
- Kildare

Leprechaun

Local Whiskey

March

Phyrst

Shamrocks

Spring Break

State Pattys

Traditions

Weekend



Cartoons by Nate Campbell



Cartoon by Ethan Capitano

Voice support for student press freedom

The eighth annual Student Press Freedom Day is Thursday, Feb. 27. Student Press Freedom Day is dedicated to recognizing the need for independence without censorship or threat and support in student journalism.

This Student Press Freedom Day, The Daily Collegian's Board of Editors shared what student press freedom means to them and why it's worth defending.

Amy Schafer, Editor-in-Chief

At the Collegian, we pursue stories passionately and without fear. Freedom of the press has been under attack both in our country and at our university this year. In September, Penn State removed 35 of the Collegian's newsstands — an act of press censorship that demonstrates how important it is for those in our community and across the country to stand up for student free press.

Sam Woloson, Managing Editor

Press freedom is important for any student and any journalist. Having a voice and an avenue to publish that voice is not only a privilege, but a tremendous tool we can use to serve our audience. I believe in the public good that journalism can achieve; it influences me in that I want to write and edit to serve.

Alex Osman, Digital Managing Editor

Press freedom is valuable because it's comforting to know that I work for an outlet that has utilized that freedom to develop a reputation of independence. Press freedom gives student reporters real experience working in an independent newsroom out-

OUR VIEW

Freedom of the student press is crucial and must be protected

side of university control, which is simply not possible when doing stories for class or university-affiliated projects.

Mercedes Hamilton, News Editor

To me, press freedom means the ability to tell stories honestly and accurately without fear of censorship or retaliation. Without press freedom, our efforts would be compromised. Press freedom is the foundation of responsible journalism and the only way we can serve our readers.

Daniela White, News Editor

Student press freedom is very valuable in the sense that it allows student journalists to dive deep into their potential and dip their toes into real-world reporting. It's work-supporting because our generation is the future voice of the nation, so developing our craft to support the future is undeniably important.

Ritamarie Montagna, Lifestyle Editor

Having press freedom as a student news outlet allows us to seek and report the truth to further educate the Penn State community through unbiased and uncensored journalism. I can't imagine a world without it; we'd live in an extremely uneducated age.

Kaitlyn Murphy, Lifestyle Editor

Being a student journalist has meant everything to me during my time at Penn State. We have to fight as student journalists to protect our rights because it's our job to tell the stories of those who don't feel like they can speak up for themselves.

Zach Karpf, Sports Editor

It's incredibly important for the reporters to have the full opportunity to report on any topic necessary, as long as it's factual and in good faith. Student press freedom gives students the freedom to report. I think it's as simple as that, student or not.

Greg Finberg, Sports Editor

Press freedom means the ability to write and report on whatever journalists wish, without any fear of repression from higher authorities. The value of student press freedom is the ability for student journalists to check the higher-ups at their university so they can't silence or deceive their constituents.

Joel Haas, Football Editor

Student journalists deserve the same rights as professional reporters, considering they are often held to the same standards. We can defend the freedom of the student press through the continuous dedication to reporting truth and showing the importance of student journalism and

its impact on the community.

Cearra O'Hern, Opinions Editor

Student press freedom protects the contributions of student journalists nationwide. We must continue to produce student press and support other outlets of student press, using our voice to lift other students'.

Katelyn Garcia, Investigations Editor

Student journalists are some of the most hardworking and passionate individuals I've met thus far, and they're extremely important contributors to the world. My time reporting for a student outlet is by far one of the most rewarding and informational experiences of my college career.

Elbia Vidal, Newsletter Editor

Defending student press freedom requires actively sharing our experiences with censorship, whether through articles, social media or other platforms, to raise awareness. By uniting as a community and standing firm against restrictions, we can ensure that student journalism remains a space for truth and diverse perspectives.

Kate Hildebrand, Photo Editor

Being a student journalist is the very center of my educa-

tional experience at Penn State. Student press freedom is worth supporting because we, as student journalists, are the future of reporting.

Chris Eutsler, Photo Editor

Student press freedom means we can make content without any sort of censorship. Continuing to further understand our rights as journalists and what can and cannot be done to us is unbelievably important.

Joe Tuman, Social Media Editor

Without a free press, there isn't any room for me to be a true journalist. Student press is worth supporting because it plays a valuable role in keeping students and others on campus informed and up to date.

Dan Perez, Multimedia Editor

Press freedom means access. Student press freedom gives students the hands-on experience that's required outside of college and has taught me to be confident in who I am as a journalist.

Avery Tortora, Multimedia Editor

Student press freedom is important because it lets me report on any topic that speaks to me or is important without restriction. Supporting the value of student press freedom is supporting free speech.

Avery Hill, DEI Chair

Press freedom means allowing a free expression of ideas and observations without pressure of repercussions. We may be students, but we have a voice, and with confidence and support, we should use it.

MY VIEW | RITAMARIE MONTAGNA

Love letter to THON 2025 as a dancer

Dear THON 2025,

You've come and gone, and I couldn't be simultaneously more exhausted and eternally grateful for the experiences you've given me.

I've been preparing for you for what felt like forever. I cut off caffeine a month before the day of my 46-hour stay at the Bryce Jordan Center.

You don't understand how much I've missed my Dunkin' iced coffees and Coca-Colas. I lessened my alcohol intake weeks in advance. I made a habit of going to the gym daily so my body felt ready and strong, and I completed homework assignments weeks in advance.

However, there's only so much preparation you can do for a weekend like this. Icy Hot, tennis balls, hand-held massagers and athletic tape aside, it's the people you provided me with that kept me going throughout this weekend.

You're about people. From all those on the floor to all those in the stands, we make up the undeterrable, driving force that is THON.

Everywhere you look during the weekend, someone is always there for you, no matter what.

My dance partners, my family members, my best friends,

committee members, organization members, performers, kids, adults, teenagers, families and more.

It's people who make THON the experience it is.

You gave me the most amazing dance partners I could've ever asked for who held me up through everything. Sophie and Erika, I couldn't be more grateful for you and the experiences we've gotten to share together.

To Nicole and Jenson — two of our amazing members who stuck out 46 hours in the stands. Forty-six hours in the stands is crazy work, my friends, and you absolutely crushed it. You two are some of the strongest people I know.

To everyone who visited me on the floor; my family, my friends and my organization members — it may not have seemed like it in those moments, but you helped me so much. Whether you stood with me while I was eating a PB&J, gave me a back massage or just yapped with me, you fueled my fire. You kept me going.

To my amazing Collegian family — your support meant everything to me. The amount of times I looked up at press row to see you all working so hard to cap-

ture the weekend and all its moments is too many to count, but it gave me motivation each time without a doubt.

Special shoutout to Cearra (who may or may not be reading this right now). She texted me photos and selfies from my friends on press row all weekend and checked in with me to make sure I was doing alright.

She also visited me on the floor, which was a nice surprise, because at that point I was going through one of the roughest patches of the whole weekend.

To Kaitlyn, my PR committee queen, thanks

for the Bryce Harper pin. Seeing you on the floor so many times this weekend was a blessing, and I'm so thankful we got to hang out at THON.

To A-7, the most amazing organization — keep on fighting for the cure we all dream of. You have no idea how beyond proud of you I am.

To that OPP committee member I heard drop her water gun in the toilet — I hope you got that back, girl.

To all of the dancers I randomly talked to this weekend — I'm glad we got to talk even though it was only a little while, and I'm

“I could write a million words about you if asked, and yet there aren't enough words out there in any language to fully describe you.”

Ritamarie Montagna



Montagna

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Found her place

Gabby Elliott's roller-coaster career approaches end at Penn State

By Noah Aberegg
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State graduate guard Gabby Elliott has played for several teams throughout her collegiate career, seeing her fair share of highs and lows.

Elliott experienced season-ending injuries during her second season at Clemson and both seasons at Michigan State, but she overcame them by transferring to Penn State for one final collegiate run.

"We expect surgery, you expect being out the first time being harder than the second time," Elliott said. "Both of them sucked, but I felt like it gave me a different type of hunger."

Before any of her basketball successes or struggles, however, Elliott was a cheerleader, rooting for the basketball team. As her brother played basketball, Elliott soon switched to the game she still plays today.

"I honestly felt like I wasn't getting enough attention, so I made a switch," Elliott said. "I started basketball, and the rest was history."

While playing for Detroit Edison Public School Academy, Elliott fought to stand out from her teammates, Rickea Jackson, the No. 4 overall pick in the 2024 WNBA Draft, 2023-24 All-Big Ten Second Teamer DeeDee Hagemann and ACC All-Freshman Teamer Ruby Whitehorn.

By doing so, the Detroit native finished her high school career as the No. 42 athlete in ESPN's Top-100 Recruits List, was named the Michigan Gatorade Player of the Year and garnered Michigan Miss Basketball honors.

From there, Elliott spent two years at Clemson. During her first season, she experienced challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic and a limited fanbase.

"COVID was happening, and it was a little different," Elliott said. "The coaches did a great job, and I had an amazing freshman year coming out of high school."

In her first collegiate game, Elliott started and scored 23 points, putting the team and her coach on notice.

"I think those stats kind of spoke for themselves," Clemson women's basketball coach Amanda Butler said. "We recruited Gabby to be an impact player, and she certainly demonstrated that in that very first game."

At Clemson, Elliott played



Luke Kupstas/Collegian

Guard Gabby Elliott puts up a shot for two against Maryland on Jan. 29, 2024 in Rec Hall. The Terrapins beat the Nittany Lions 82-73.

under assistant coach Daniel Barber, spending two years with him before a reunion in Happy Valley.

"I was actually the lead recruiter for Gabby Elliott," Barber said. "When I recruited her, I talked to her about having the opportunity to play overseas or play in the WNBA."

As Elliott advanced through her successful freshman season, the staff continued to push her to become an all-around player.

"There's not as many people in high school that can guard you the same way people can in college, so we really focused on her handle and decision-making under pressure," Butler said. "Her impact as a rebounder, just trying to encourage her to just get into that part of her game and create opportunities for herself and her team as a rebounder (was important)."

Elliott had her best season at Clemson during her freshman campaign, averaging a career-high 13.6 points while starting all 25 games for the Tigers, which led to ACC All-Freshman team honors.

In addition to her success on the court at Clemson, Elliott was invited to the USA Basketball U19 Team Trials, bringing her name even further onto the national stage.

While she was experiencing the highs of basketball at Clemson, Elliott's next season wasn't all she had hoped for. After scoring just two points in the season opener, her roller-coaster season began as she got hot against

South Carolina, going 3-for-3 from behind the arc.

"One of the inconsistent parts of her game was her 3-point shooting," Butler said. "(But against South Carolina) she was just banging it in from three, and that was in a really tough environment versus arguably the best team in the country."

After just 12 games where she averaged 9.4 points, Elliott's sophomore season ended after suffering her first season-ending injury.

"I feel like I was doing pretty damn good," Elliott said. "Unexpected things happened, and it was a roller coaster. A lot happened that I didn't expect."

While recovering from surgery, Elliott transferred to Michigan State, where she hoped she could kick-start her basketball career after the previous season's injury.

"(As I was recovering, I was like), 'Let's regroup, let's get back to work, let's try to get back as quick as we can,'" Elliott said. "My mindset was to stay the course. It's a long process, but if you stay the course, it makes sure you feel good."

Suiting up for the Spartans didn't go as planned for Elliott, as she suffered two more season-ending injuries, playing just two conference games in her time in East Lansing.

Despite this, she still found success on the court and worked to overcome the hardships each season, eventually coming to Penn State during the 2023-24 offseason.

"It feels good, especially for

a player, being able to play for Coach (Carolyn) Kieger," Elliott said. "She had been recruiting me for a long time, and she's always been locked. I'm just grateful to be in a great conference and play against elite competition and have a coach take a chance on me. It's a great feeling."

At Penn State, Elliott reunited with Barber, who was brought on during the same offseason to be an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator. For Barber, getting to coach Elliott again allowed him to finish what he started at Clemson.

"There's nothing more rewarding than seeing someone when you take them in as a young girl that I recruited when she was in 10th grade to now, she's a woman being 23-years-old and she's a grad student here at Penn State," Barber said. "That growth and seeing her achieve her dreams and the success that she's having on the court, it's coming full circle for me."

After many athletes transfer, they don't have the opportunity to play for any of those coaches or with any of those players again. But Barber and Elliott have made the most of their reunion at Penn State, with it being the biggest reason Elliott transferred to Happy Valley.

"I remember when I got the job here, and she was looking at (Penn State), she told me, 'You know, Coach Barber, one of the reasons why I wanted to come back and I chose Penn State was because you're there,'" Barber said. "It's amazing, and I'm

glad that I get a chance to finish off some of the dreams that we talked about. I promised her that I'll help her get to wherever she wants to go, wherever her aspirations are."

When she arrived in Happy Valley, Elliott was one of three graduate players on a team with five freshmen and two sophomores. Because of the team's youth, Elliott became an instant leader and mentor, helping the Lady Lions start their season strong.

"I'm really just sharing my experience," Elliott said. "While I haven't played as much as I wanted to in recent years, I still got the experience. If I have something to say and it's positive and I feel like it can benefit the team, I share it. I feel that's the biggest piece for me."

Not only has Elliott stepped up as a mentor in her first year donning the blue and white, but she's emerged as a dominant player for the Lady Lions, scoring the second-most points on the team.

"Gabby is someone who is a lead competitor, and she's always been driven by wanting to win," Kieger said.

"She's just always been someone wired to compete, and so she has never been phased, nothing phases her. She's ready for the next challenge."

As Penn State has fallen to a 10-17 record toward the end of the season, Elliott has remained a constant rock, providing a solid 1-2 punch with 6-foot-6 center Gracie Merkle.

"Gabby's done a really good job facilitating to Gracie," Kieger said. "I think Gabby's probably our best low-post passer right now. They have a synergy in between each other working for that, and obviously Gabby is successful in the high post."

With her collegiate career winding down following stints at three different programs, Elliott has made an impact on several people through her work on the floor and her strength as a person.

"I think a lot of people say they hate to lose, and Gabby really embodied that as a young person," Butler said. "She was just really a killer on offense, not afraid of the big moment or the big shot. She represented winning and consistency and had elite performance year in and year out."

To email reporter: nda5168@psu.edu.
Follow him on X @[aberegg_noah](https://twitter.com/aberegg_noah).

Enter the Tigers

By Adam Waxman
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

In fall 2021, Alex Doe arrived at Penn State eager to continue his love for competitive sports. After being cut from the club ice hockey team, he found himself missing a vital part of his college experience: a team.

This realization led to the creation of the Sabretooth Tigers, an intramural sports organization that began as a handful of friends and has since grown into a thriving community of 80 athletes competing in 27 different sports.

"I went from being a multi-sport athlete in high school to not being involved in any team," Doe said.

"I wasn't the only one feeling this way, so I decided to start something of my own."

What started as a casual group of six has expanded into one of Penn State's largest and most dedicated intramural teams. Along the way, they've secured five championships in sports like pickleball, women's basketball, cornhole and ice hockey. But the road to success wasn't without its hurdles, especially when it came to logistics.

"Running an intramural team is like running a small business," Doe said. "From staying organized to keeping track of rosters, it can take up to 10 hours a week just to ensure everything runs smoothly."

Despite these challenges, Doe's leadership style has made the Sabretooth Tigers a team where competition and camaraderie coexist.

He's worked to build a place where everyone feels welcome, whether they're competitive ath-

letes or just there to have fun.

"I wanted this to be a happy place for everyone," Doe said. "It's about being as involved as you want to be, and I'm here to support that."

Kendall Morgan joined the Sabretooth Tigers as a freshman and quickly felt at home within the group.

"Freshman year, I was looking around, didn't have many friends, and I wanted to meet people," Morgan said. "The Tigers took me in right away. It just felt like I belonged."

Morgan described the team's culture as a blend of competitive athletes and people who are there for the fun of it.

"We have some really advanced athletes, but then we also have people who are just here to enjoy themselves," Morgan said. "It's about finding that balance. Everyone has a role, and everyone contributes."

For Richard Allan, the Sabretooth Tigers have provided much more than just a way to compete.

"I'm an introvert, and I wouldn't have met so many people without this team," Allan said. "It's crazy how sports bring people together in ways you wouldn't expect. It's like a big family, we all have each other's backs. It's more than just showing up to play; we support one another through life."

Morgan recalled the team's first big championship win, which came in basketball.

"It was such a cool moment. We had a lot of people supporting us, and even my mom watched the game via a livestream," Morgan said. "It was about more than just the win — it was about sharing the experience with friends and family."

Doe and Morgan both agreed that the team's culture emphasizes fun just as much as competition.

"For sports like basketball, we're all about winning," Morgan said. "But other times, like in women's basketball, it's about getting together with friends, having a good time and just enjoying the moment."

As Doe prepares to graduate, he's passing down the leadership torch, ensuring the Tigers' legacy continues.

"I want to leave behind a community where students can compete in the sports they love, alongside people who share that same passion," Doe said.

For Morgan, the Sabretooth Tigers have been a major factor in her decision to stay at Penn State.

"Honestly, I was thinking about transferring freshman year," Morgan said. "But now, I'm so glad I didn't. I have this amazing group of friends, and they made me feel like I belonged here."

Allan echoed her sentiments, saying, "This team gave me a place where I felt like I was part of something bigger. The friendships and experiences I've gained will stay with me for a long time."

For the Tigers, it's not just about the game — it's about building a lasting community.

The Sabretooth Tigers are always looking for new members to join their growing family. Doe encourages those interested to reach out via Instagram @sabretoothtigers.

To email reporter: acw5735@psu.edu.
Follow him on X @[adamwaxman10](https://twitter.com/adamwaxman10).



Chloe Trieff/Collegian file photo

Penn State football alumni Trace McSorley visits Penn State for the White Out against Minnesota on Oct. 22, 2022.

He's baaaaack

Trace McSorley hired as offensive analyst

By Avery Hill
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

A fan-favorite Nittany Lion is back on the coaching staff.

At THON 2025, athletic director Pat Kraft said former quarterback Trace McSorley is on the staff, saying "nobody knows it yet."

On Tuesday, McSorley was officially added to the team's staff directory as an offensive analyst.

McSorley played for Penn State from 2014-18, accumulating 9,899 passing yards, 77 touchdowns and 25 interceptions. He's the Nittany Lions' single-season passing yards and passing touchdowns record holder.

McSorley was seen frequently at the media's viewing session of practice during the 2024 season working with quarterbacks alongside position coach Danny O'Brien.

During his time in the NFL, he had stints on several teams, including time on the Baltimore Ravens, Arizona Cardinals and New England Patriots.

As an NFL passer, he went 48-for-93 on passing attempts for 502 yards and a touchdown as well as 79 yards on the ground.

Now, he's back in Happy Valley in a new role as a mentor, hoping to have the quarterbacks also throw it on a dime.

To email reporter: amh8304@psu.edu.
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