

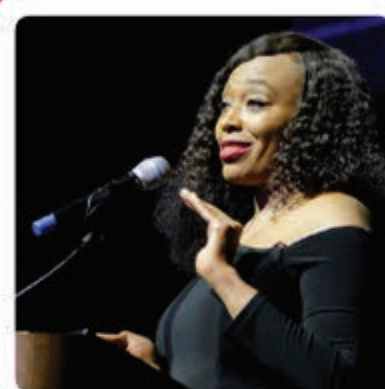
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BLACK HISTORY MONTH



Graphic by Isabella Viteri

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Remembering MLK’s visit

By Kiera Ginn
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

There is a historical marker outside of Rec Hall signifying that Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in front of about 8,000 Penn State students and community members on Jan. 21, 1965.

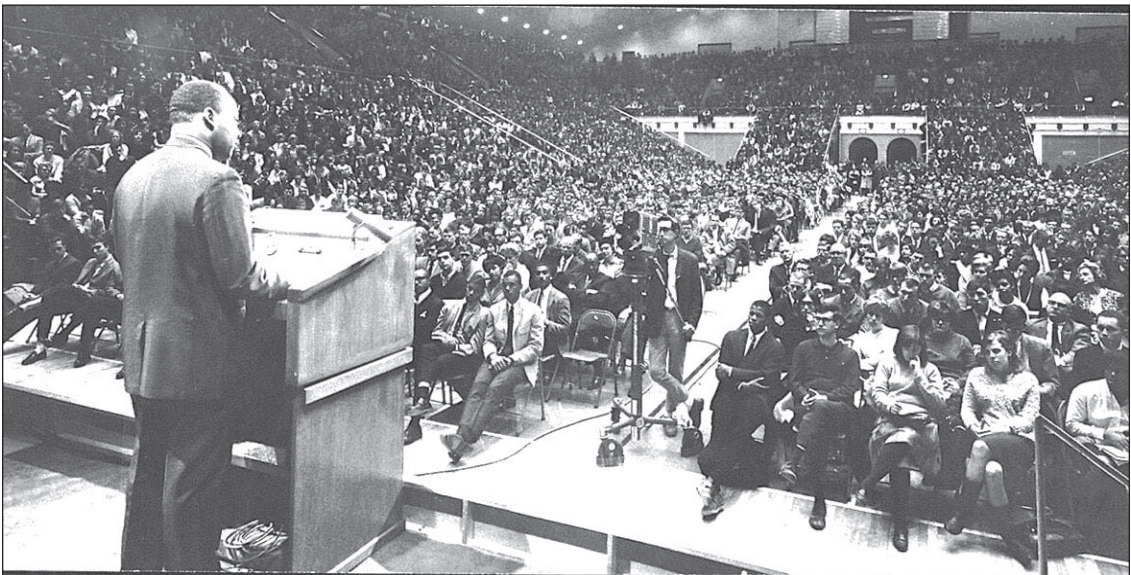
According to The Daily Collegian archives, King was originally slated to speak in November 1964 at Schwab Auditorium as a part of a lecture series hosted by the university. However, an illness led King to reschedule.

Penn State’s 1965 Senior Class President Bruce Trotman said he was given the opportunity as class president to bring in speakers, and wrote a letter to King inviting him to speak at Penn State.

David Savitz, the 1965 Interfraternity Council president, recalled that the national attention King received and his appeal to students grew throughout the 1960s. “He was not as much of a national figure as he eventually did become, but he was enough of a national figure that many of us in college wanted to hear from because he was one of the first people who talked about addressing the issue of civil rights,” Savitz said.

Trotman said King’s speech had central themes of desegregation and voting rights for Black Americans, in addition to Black history in colonial America.

“We’ve had a long history of oppression and taken from our own land, not allowed to speak our languages,” Trotman said. “So we’ve survived here for a



Courtesy of David Savitz

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers a speech to around 8,000 Penn State students and community members at Rec Hall on Jan. 21 1965.

number of years, and despite the Civil War, et cetera, there was always concern that Black people never received equal opportunity under the law. So that was being corrected...”

These ideas Trotman recounts are found in quotes from King’s speech, including establishing the need for voting rights for Black Americans as a part of healthy democracy.

“If local registrars refuse to register Negroes, then some system must be set up where they can go directly to the post office and register,” King said in his speech, according to Penn State’s transcript. “This falls under the domain of the president and of the federal government. Every

obstacle must be removed if we are to have a healthy and mature democracy.”

King’s background as a Baptist minister provided a message to all Christians, in addition to a call to action for civil rights, said Trotman.

“The doctor came to reflect on his messages of faith within that speech, as well as civil rights,” Trotman said. “He felt that God in your life was important, as a Christian or through the Christians (of today’s) activities.”

King merged the ideas of civil rights and Christianity through his understandings of faith.

“The Negro masses all over began to reevaluate themselves, and the Negro came to feel that

he was somebody,” King said in his speech. “His religion revealed him that God loves all of his children, and that all men are made in His image.”

Savitz remembers being in awe at King’s speaking ability and passion for the topics he was speaking on, as well as King’s ability to speak from memory.

“I don’t recall him ever having to refer to a note, and I remember how awestruck we were about his ability to talk so articulately and so passionately about the issue of civil rights and what young people should be doing to make life better for everyone in America,” Savitz said.

Along with combining religion with racial themes, King

focused on speaking about the segregation during that time.

“Segregation is still with us,” King said in his speech. “It is still confronted in certain places in the South in its glaring and conspicuous forms. And we still confront it all over the North in its hidden and subtle forms. The battle in the days ahead will be to remove these subtle forms.”

King’s presence and speech was an eye-opener for many, according to Trotman, and that the message of racial equality he spoke of would instill hope in Americans who happened to be Black.

“Until the job problem is solved until the problem of housing discrimination is solved, until the problem of de facto segregation in the public schools is solved, we will still have a long, long way to go before the American dream becomes a reality,” King said in his speech.

According to the Collegian archives, King found the audience of Penn State students “very responsive” when talking to Nina Brown, the administrative assistant running the lecture series.

60 years later, Trotman said he remembers the message shared by King that America still has a long way to go in the direction of racial equality.

“(King said) we’ve made progress,” Trotman said. Some people say too much, and others said not enough. So we said, ‘We need to go forward.’”

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Students fight for reproductive justice

By Annelise Hanson
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The fight for reproductive justice at Penn State is taking place not just in classrooms and student organization meetings, but also in the university’s health resources.

When students at Penn State think about reproductive justice, many focus on abortion. For student advocates, the issue extends beyond that — it’s about access to health care, education and the ability to make informed choices about one’s body and future.

However, many students remain unaware of the resources available to them.

Activists are working to change that, bringing reproductive justice to the forefront of campus conversations through student-led initiatives.

For Emma Martinson, the road to reproductive justice activism wasn’t planned — it was stumbled into.

“I started taking women’s studies classes and made a lot of friends who were very active in the community,” Martinson, a fourth-year studying women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, said. “I’d always been interested in these issues, but I never really wanted to go out and protest or be super active in the community.”

She said her background also shaped her perspective.

“Before I came to Penn State during COVID in 2020, I was in Minnesota, so I was very aware of everything going on in Minneapolis with the Minneapolis Police Department and George Floyd,” she said. “That’s when I became more interested in activist work.”

Martinson is the director of education for the Penn State Reproductive Justice Project, which works to ensure that reproductive justice reaches students beyond traditional gender studies spaces.

One of the group’s main goals is to incorporate reproductive justice into broader academic discussions.

“Instead of going to women’s studies classrooms where reproductive justice is already a focus, our hope was to go to other departments like architecture, agriculture or statistics — places where students might not immediately see how reproductive justice relates to their work and everyday lives,” Martinson said.

Reproductive justice has always been a part of Payton Smith’s life.

“I have two moms, so I grew up in an all-female household, and both of them are actually in women’s healthcare. One is an

RN (registered nurse), the other is an OB-GYN (obstetrician-gynecologist),” Smith, a third-year studying political science and global and international studies, said. “So growing up, I was always kind of surrounded by women’s healthcare, the terminology, the hospital drama. It was table talk.”

This exposure shaped her understanding of reproductive healthcare and fueled her passion for advocacy.

“As a woman myself, or a female-identifying individual, it’s something that I feel directly impacts me and something that I want to fight for and protect,” Smith said.

Keya Ahrestani’s activism began with an eye-opening study abroad experience in Cape Town, South Africa, that was focused on reproductive justice.

“Before that, I had never really been introduced to the reproductive justice framework before, so I didn’t have ... the working language to describe something I’d always felt passionate about,” Ahrestani, a fourth-year studying psychology, said.

Upon returning to Penn State, she joined PSRJ and contributed to developing a reproductive justice education curriculum.

“It’s a presentation that we hope to share in classrooms and with other orgs,” Ahrestani said. “So we have our baseline content, and then depending on the audience, we tailor the presentation to their focus.”

For example, the group is working with student organizations focused on sustainability and added slides about how reproductive justice interacts with sustainability and the environment.

PSRJ’s biggest initiative this year is during Reproductive Justice Education Week, when it’ll do a HUB-Robeson Center takeover event that will feature daily programming on reproductive justice topics.

Despite the growing interest in reproductive justice, student activists still face barriers.

“I don’t think that there is a lot of information spread, especially when it comes to access to reproductive health care — on campus, off campus, in the world, in this country, in our state,” Ahrestani said.

She said Penn State does a good job of making resources available, but that the university fails to advertise the resources adequately.

“The most I ever heard about contraception or STI testing was kind of dumped on us in the deluge of information at NSO (New

Student Orientation), and then we don’t really ever hear about it again,” Smith said.

Beyond awareness, political scrutiny creates additional obstacles for reproductive rights.

“Reproductive rights has become a political topic, not just because of this recent change in administration and our new president, but I think that’s been around for a while,” Ahrestani said. “We have to be careful with what we say, how we phrase things, who we talk to.”

The overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 further intensified the urgency of their work.

“I think that recent changes in the political climate, and in general with Roe v. Wade getting overturned, heightened our sense of the need to protect these fundamental rights,” Ahrestani said. “That just sort of catalyzed work that people had already been doing, but then pushed it to the forefront because those rights were in jeopardy all of a sudden.”

While this heightened awareness has led to increased activism, it can also be emotionally taxing for students. Ahrestani said she finds it more difficult to see change or see success.

However, student activists also see this challenge as motivation.

“People are that much more invigorated to keep going knowing what you’re up against, and that if you find more people and educate more people, you can make that force stronger,” Ahrestani said.

Ahrestani also said reproductive justice is “very intricately linked” to children’s rights.

Despite the challenges, student activists remain committed to pushing for reproductive justice at Penn State.

“Making a more visible stance that services are out there for people who need them, and that the Penn State community can support those areas, would be really helpful for students,” Ahrestani said.

As the fight for reproductive justice continues, students are making sure that Penn State remains a place where awareness, access and advocacy can thrive.

“This has come to the forefront a lot in recent years, and people are paying more attention to it now than they used to,” Smith said. “People are now looking past the surface level of issues and into more of the interconnected lines between race, gender and orientation.”

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Courtesy of Andrew Lara

Mitchell Brown III (left) interviews UPUA President Zion Sykes (right) during an episode of Culture Central on Nov. 13, 2024.

Culture Central

By Gianna St. Thomas
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

On Wednesday evenings inside a control room at the Belisario Media Center, students produce a talk show that aims to highlight stories of underrepresented communities at Penn State.

Culture Central, a 14-time award-winning student-led talk show, filmed its 100th episode last week.

The show has different segments, ranging from entertainment to sports to politics, and serves as a space for students to showcase their passions and gain the skills for successful careers in the field.

Gabriella Wong, the executive producer and president of Culture Central, oversees every department, including social media, videography, editing, on-camera talent and the studio group.

Wong, a third-year studying film production, said she tries to cultivate an energy of opportunity and community within the studio.

“We try to cover as many events as possible on campus and in and around the Penn State area, just trying to highlight... minorities on Penn State’s campus,” Wong said. “As Penn State is a PWI (predominantly white institution), we want to make sure that these students are getting the spotlight that they need, as well as the ability to create in a safe space.”

She said one of her favorite memories was creating her very first segment on the show as a first-year.

It was the first “Asian Excellence at Penn State and Beyond” segment for Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

For the segment, five presidents of campus Asian cultural organizations sat together for the first time to talk about representation and their experiences as Asian students on campus.

“(The) mission of highlighting minorities on campus is entirely what I want to do with my life, in my career in the film industry and then in the entertainment industry,” Wong said.

Derrick Stilley is a sports analyst for Culture Central, where he analyzes games out in the field, assists with studio production and conducts interviews with other students in the HUB-Robeson Center on their sports takes and what they’d like to see in the sports world.

“Ever since I stopped growing and realized basketball wasn’t gonna be a pro thing for me, I really transitioned into learning more about the game and feel very safe and fluent while talking about it,” Stilley, a fourth-year studying broadcast journalism, said.

One of his favorite moments was giving awards to his peers at Culture Central while hosting the Penn State Network Television awards for student talk shows.

According to Stilley, the organization is preparing to move on to politics and entertainment after the Super Bowl.

Giselle Jones is a talent producer and co-host of the segment “What’s the Word,” covering pop culture, news and politics.

Jones, a third-year studying broadcast journalism, joined the organization to make friends from similar backgrounds who could relate to her experiences. She said she fell in love with everything the organization had to offer, including the people, the environment and the studio.

“When the camera came on, I felt really at home,” Jones said. “I was on camera with people that had grown to be my friends, and it was a really awesome experience learning about myself and realizing, ‘Wow, this is really what I wanna do.’”

She said her time at Culture Central helped her gain confidence on camera and build the skills necessary for sports reporting, including producing, writing and planning segments.

“From the second I came to the first meeting, I felt welcomed with open arms ... people included me in things,” Jones said. “Having people that know what you’re going through (and) provide different perspectives is super important to me in my college experience.”

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‘He was a father figure’

Penn State School of Music students, faculty remember Dr. Anthony T. Leach

By Claire Huss
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Professor Emeritus of Music and Music Education Dr. Anthony T. Leach died Jan. 8 at age 73.

Leach graduated from Penn State with a master’s of music degree in choral conducting and later pursued a doctorate in music education. In the 2009-10 academic year, Leach served as the Penn State University Laureate and has received numerous awards for his impact on music education across the country.

While still a graduate student, Leach founded the Essence of Joy choir in 1991. Essence of Joy focuses on the “appreciation of sacred and secular music derived from African and African American choral traditions,” according to its website, and has performed both domestically and internationally in European, African and Asian countries.

Austin Norrid is a member of Essence of Joy and was Leach’s teaching assistant, working closely with him in the months prior to his death. Norrid said Leach was immensely kind, amazingly talented and a great loss to the School of Music.

“He was the first person of color and African American to gain tenure in the School of Music,” Norrid, a third-year doctoral student studying music education, said. “What he had, as far as institutional knowledge, what he brought in terms of his cultural knowledge and his immense knowledge of classical music is something that no one else in the School of Music possessed.”

Norrid said Leach’s process of selecting repertoire didn’t solely rely on making music, but on cul-



Jackson Ranger/Collegian file photo

Dr. Anthony T. Leach gives an introductory speech for the Martin Luther King Jr. Choral at the Eisenhower Auditorium on Jan. 21, 2023 in University Park, Pa. Leach was the first person of color and African American to gain tenure in the School of Music.

tivating a community between the performers and the audience.

“He would say to me, ‘the music has to speak to me first, because if I don’t feel it, and I don’t respond to it, then the ensemble is not going to, and if the ensemble doesn’t respond to it, then the audience isn’t going to respond to it,’” Norrid said.

Norrid recalled experiencing this feeling during a performance in Hawaii, during which he said he encountered the feeling Leach strove for.

“The audience was overflowing to the outside. There were people standing outside the door listening to us. The sound of the choir filled this small wooden church, and being right there, up close with the audience just a few feet away from us and seeing the impact that the music had on them created a feedback loop,” Norrid said. “We’re experiencing their emotions as they’re experiencing the music we sing.”

President of Essence of Joy Julie Dzikowski said Leach expanded the borders of traditional

classical performing she was used to.

“For all of these years, music was kind of just a hobby to me. Singing Essence of Joy’s music changes you when you sing it,” Dzikowski, a third-year studying music education, said. “It’s a storytelling style of music. Because of that, you had no choice but to emotionally put yourself out there every time you rehearsed and every time you performed.”

Because of the emotional vulnerability the choir was expected to regularly bring, Leach ensured the group took care of each other and spent time together outside of rehearsal, Dzikowski said.

Since his death, the community has relied on each other to process their grief.

“That first day back at rehearsal (after Leach died), we spent the whole time laughing and crying and sharing memories about him,” Dzikowski said. “It was so nice to know I’m not the only one feeling like this; that we have other people who understand just as deeply and just as grateful for how important he was and will always be to our choir and to the School of Music.”

Dzikowski said Leach leaves a lasting legacy not only on the choir, but the entire School of Music.

“He was a father figure for so many people in the choir. He made everyone a better person — everyone who interacted with him felt like they had changed somehow,” Dzikowski said.

When Dr. Ann Marie Stanley became the director of the

School of Music in July 2023, she said Leach’s reputation preceded him.

“He was a towering figure in the world of choral conducting and music education,” Stanley said. “You could go to any university and find a good conductor, a music education professor, a pianist — but he had this knack for finding people and getting to know the inner core of them and help them figure out what was the next place on their professional journey. That’s what everyone remembers him for.”

Leach retired from teaching in 2018 but remained involved as Essence of Joy’s director. He had planned to retire a second time this year, but students doubted he would actually leave, according to Stanley.

“It came as a shock that this was not only to be his last year, but that this was to be his last time on Earth,” Stanley said. “No one is going to fill his shoes.”

Stanley said Leach’s unique approach to classical music encouraged scholars to broaden their viewpoints beyond traditional practices.

“We’re constantly reminded by him that music doesn’t sound one way; it’s not always western classical. Music is about self expression and about making music your own and about using your music to help other people and befriend them,” Stanley said. “That’s a uniquely special thing about Penn State School of Music, and that is because of him.”

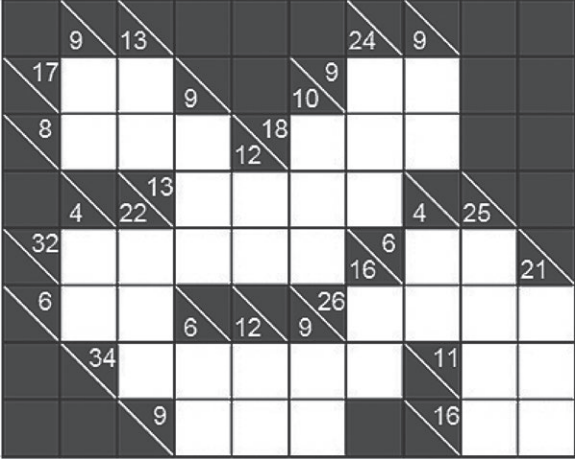
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Kate Hildebrand/Collegian

Dr. T. Anthony Leach smiles after a performance in the Pasquerilla Spiritual Center on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024 in University Park, Pa.

Kakuro

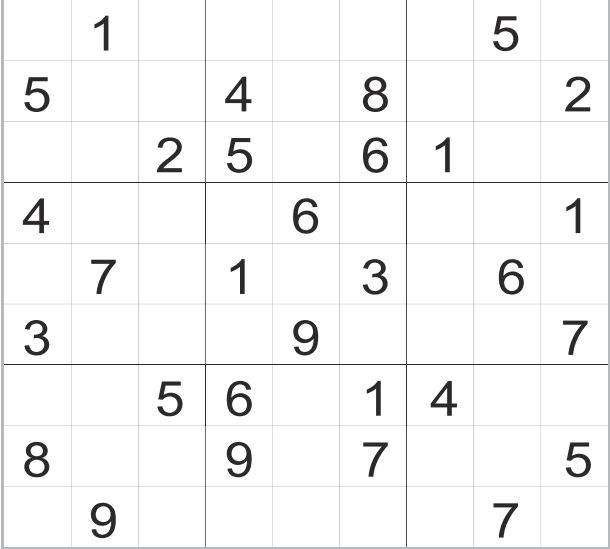


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A number above the diagonal line in a black square is the sum of the white squares to the right of it.
A number below the diagonal line is the sum of the white squares in the sequence below it.
You may only use the digits 1 to 9, and a digit can only be used once in any sequence.

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Sudoku



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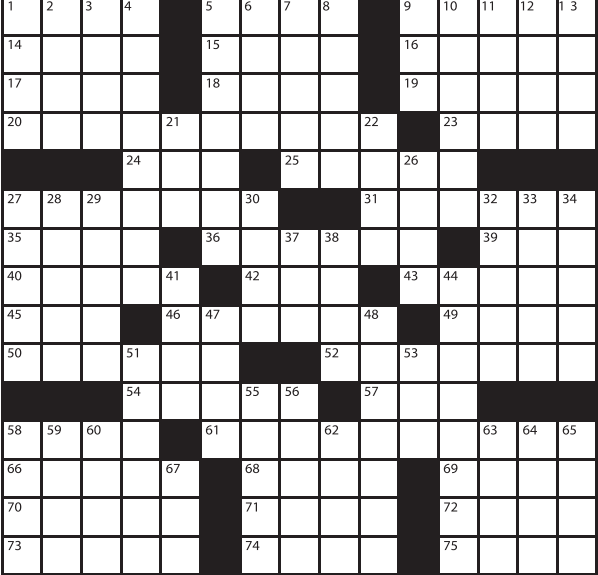
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Mountain
Nature
Path
Plants
Poncho
Rain Gear
Scenery
Snacks
Stream
Sunscreen
Trail
Trek
Vista
Walk
Water
Wildlife

Crossword



Across

1 Like many a cellar
5 Fair share, maybe
9 Microbes
14 Viva-voce
15 Anon's partner
16 "Middlemarch" author
17 Dandy
18 Danish toy company
19 Kind of finish
20 Become a rabid supporter
23 Chick's sound
24 Break bread
25 Circus features
27 Machine gun noise
31 Aspirations
35 "____" Brockovich
36 Corrupt
39 Kind of part
40 Goes after the game
42 Actor Alastair
43 Postpone
45 Presidential nickname
46 Bather's bane?
49 Pine dropping
50 Sews together, loosely
52 Paid the bill
54 Rocket type

Down

1 Remove, as a hat
2 Song for Carmen
3 Educator Horace
4 Enjoyable
5 Chopper's spot
6 With, in Paris
7 On the up and up
8 Got stage fright
9 Jewel
10 Pass, as time
11 Bar mitzvah, e.g.
12 Bit of dust
13 Part of a process
21 Scolding syllable
22 Some football players

Across

26 Waste allowance
27 Post-op time
28 Oranjestad's island
29 Prongs
30 "____" Trueheart of "Dick Tracy"
32 Monastery head
33 Pooh's creator
34 Knight's need
37 High school class, for short
38 Last of a Latin trio
41 Snick and ____
44 Mexican cliff diving port
47 Bone (Prefix)
48 Warm up the oven
51 Swapped
53 Shingle abbr. in the UK
55 Gets ready to play pool
56 Lowest deck
58 Panhandles
59 Race track shape
60 Weak, as an excuse
62 Sandwich fish
63 "____" Lang Syne"
64 On bended ____
65 Inflatable things
67 Twisty turn

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Living as a Black woman abroad

A little Czech boy and I locked eyes on my second day in Brno. I gave him a small smile, and he returned it. As I moved through the aisles of the supermarket,

Wray painfully aware I was the only Black shopper; that interaction tremendously eased my anxiety.

When I first expressed a desire to study in Czechia, much of my family was justifiably concerned about the racial climate. The country is largely ethnically homogeneous and reports suggest about 1% of the migrant population are of African descent.

While this made me hesitant, it didn't deter me. I did my due diligence and sought out first-hand accounts from people of color who participated in the program. I also spent an ungodly amount of time scrolling on social media.

While I had members of several "marginalized communities" sing praises of their experiences, each led with the disclaimer that they weren't Black and couldn't speak to how I'd be treated. The one Black participant I was able to find had a far lighter complexion than mine, and though she did her best to pacify my fears (and in a sense succeeded), the elephant in the room wasn't to be denied.

I'm not racially ambiguous in any sense of the term. I'm Black-ity, Black Black. No one second



Courtesy of Kahlie Wray

An overlook of Brno, Czechia, on Sunday morning. Kahlie is completing her study abroad program in the city this semester.

guesses my racial identity when I walk into a room. The reality for many is that the undeniable tint of my skin is a threat.

I can keep my head down, offer shy smiles and mind my p's and q's all I want, but if racial bias is injected into the veins of the people around me – which it so often is – nothing is going to stop them from forgetting I'm Black. To add to that, I'm not exactly petite.

There's nowhere for me to hide should I need to. I can't hang my skin in the closet, then slip back into it at a later date. There's no way for me to assimilate into whiteness, and this is something I had to grapple with before coming to Czechia.

I'm not saying I have a desire to assimilate into whiteness — I don't — but rather that it'd be a form of self-harm if I, an unambiguously Black woman, blindly jetset abroad without considering this reality.

Thus, I had hard conversations with program coordinators, kind strangers and my loved ones. The general consensus wasn't exactly what I wanted it to be, but I felt reassured enough to take the plunge.

I've been swimming around in Brno for a little under a week, and I'm so pleased to say thus far I've had very pleasant experiences. Many people shared with me that since Brno is a student city, it'll be more diverse and wel-

coming than other parts of the country, and they were right.

For the most part, I'm the only Black person in a room, but I'm never the only person of color. When I visit the city centre, I'll be sure to see a few dark faces like my own, and they always share a small smile that seems to say "I see you and I got you."

In all honesty, sometimes I hyperfixate on being the only Black person in a space. Sometimes I find myself clinging closely to the friends I've made, sandwiching myself between them in search of a cover of whiteness. I'm not proud of these moments, but I show myself grace regardless.

Sometimes I'll catch elderly people staring, and my chest

will tighten. I had an older Black woman who experienced many stares in Prague during her trip years ago tell me to stare back in defiance, but I can't quite find it in myself to do that.

So, for the most part, when I feel the stares, I try to convince myself it's simply curiosity. I tell myself stares cannot physically hurt me. I remind myself of all the kind people who've helped me in stores, willingly given me impromptu Czech lessons and offered their seats on the tram.

I think of all the people who have welcomed me into their homes without a second thought, the ones who compliment my coats and smile when I enter a room.

There's still a chance racism will rear its ugly head in a way that cannot be denied, but I won't allow that reality to keep me caged in my dorm room, though it's far nicer than anything they have at Penn State.

I'm admittedly fearful, but I'm no coward. So, trust the streets of Brno will know the soles of my shoes all too well.

I hope Brno grows to love me and I, her. But if she grows to hate me instead, I desperately hope it isn't because I dared to be born brown-skinned.

Kahlie Wray is an abroad columnist and member of the DEI Committee. Her hometown is Montego Bay, Jamaica, and she's a second-year studying English and digital/print journalism. Email her [@kaw6558@psu.edu](mailto:kaw6558@psu.edu) and follow her on X [@_wrageous](https://twitter.com/_wrageous).

MY VIEW | TERESA PHELAN

Be more than a social media activist

The first of February marks the start of Black History



Phelan come in the form of a city march or a school lesson. There's one form it shouldn't take though: an Instagram story.

We all follow those accounts — the people who post about the latest injustice or social movement with an infographic that'll be on their story for 24 hours.

At first, this may seem harmless, innocently spreading information about what's trending on social media, but this isn't a time to show their followers they care so deeply all of a sudden.

According to Boston Medical Center, performative activism can best be defined as "activism that's done to increase

one's social capital rather than because of one's devotion to a cause."

This was evident during the summer of 2020, following George Floyd and Breonna Taylor's deaths, where people posted black screens to their Instagram feed or changed their profile picture to a fist raised in solidarity to show they were in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.

This is done to show their followers that they aren't racist and that they stand with African American people. But when feeds are cleared or stories expire, the cause is nowhere to be found.

If the movement is one they're passionate about, then social media shouldn't be where they go to show us.

Go out in the community and make a change — volunteer, march, protest, donate resources. Make change that's outside of your social media following.

These movements are often systemic issues that aren't going to be fixed with an infographic; they require genera-

tional dedication to the cause.

The other side of this conversation is the idea that posting on social media brings awareness to the problems, and in return, makes people more cognizant.

Anyone who has read the news or has scrolled their feeds knows that these problems exist; it's not a hidden secret that needs social media to gain recognition.

If people rely on their friend's Instagram stories to expose them to the different movements in the country, that's a direct reflection not only on them, but the way the media is being perceived and consumed.

Injustice regarding reproductive rights, sexism and racism aren't new, and being an advocate means advocating for justice all the time and not just when it's convenient.

For the people who want to share on social media, the resources and information shared must be accurate and do something to help the cause. Don't provide links to untrusted sources or to random organizations that don't contribute to meaningful causes.

Black History Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month and Women's History Month are all intended to recognize the accomplishments of each group,

but that doesn't mean advocating is only a 30-day trend.

Engaging in activism doesn't have to be a chore; it's as simple as educating yourself and making

intentional choices in person and online.

If activism has become making a post on social media, we're contributing to a future that harms those who need justice the most. All groups deserve to have year-round representation.

Supporting causes and movements when there's a cute infographic doesn't mean people truly care about it — it's just a way to look like they do.

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Send us your comments on our coverage, editorial decisions and the Penn State community.

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Letters should be about 400-600 words. Student letters should include class year, major and campus. Letters from alumni should include graduation year. All writers should provide their email address and phone number

for verification. Letters should be signed by no more than two people. Members of organizations must include their titles if the topic they write about is connected with the aim of their groups. The Collegian reserves the right to edit letters. The Collegian cannot guarantee publication of all letters. Letters chosen run on The Daily Collegian website and may be selected for publication in the print edition. All letters become property of Collegian Inc.

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DAILY COLLEGIAN

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Black firsts in Penn State football

By Avery Hill
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Black History Month is here, so here's a look at some of the barriers broken for Penn State football.

Black players make up a large percentage of college football players, but it wasn't always this way. With Penn State first fielding a football team in 1887, there were plenty of barriers broken along the way.

Here's a list of some firsts for Penn State, with a little bit of a history lesson to accompany.

First Black players in program history: Dave and Harry Alston

Though they never earned varsity letters, brothers Dave and Harry Alston are recognized as the first Black players to play for Penn State.

Their tenure started on the freshman team in 1941, with Dave being a star tailback who could run, pass and kick. Then-head coach Bob Higgins said he had traits similar to Jim Thorpe, and described Dave as the "greatest football prospect" he ever coached.

Dave was a preseason All-American headed into 1942 and the highest ranked sophomore. His career was cut short when he died as a result of a blood clot that formed after routine tonsillectomy. Harry left the program a year after.

First Black starter and first Black player drafted:



Sienna Pinney/Collegian file photo

James Franklin smiles at a question during the Orange Bowl press conference on Jan. 9, 2024 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Franklin is the first Black full-time head coach in Penn State football history.

Wally Triplett III

While the Alston brothers were the first to enter the program, Wallace "Wally" Triplett III was the first varsity letterman.

Triplett is credited in the origins of the "We Are" chant after Penn State was asked to leave him and fellow Black athlete Dennie Hoggard home for the 1948 Cotton Bowl. The team refused, saying "We're Penn State." Triplett and Hoggard were the first Black players to play in the Cotton Bowl.

It was one of many incidents through Triplett's career, but he persevered, becoming not just Penn State's, but the NFL's first African American draftee to play a down. He was drafted in 1949 in the 19th round by the Detroit

Lions. Triplett broke the Lions' single-game record with 294 kickoff return yards in a single game.

First Black College Football Hall of Famer: Richard "Dave" Robinson

In 1997, Dave Robinson became Penn State's first Black College Football Hall of Fame inductee.

Robinson was a star for the Nittany Lions, collecting a 1962 All-America team nod after catching 17 passes and helping a Rip Engle-led Penn State squad finish the season 9-1. He's Penn State's first Black NEA First-Team All-American.

He was classified as a "two-way end," but became a linebacker

when he reached the NFL. Robinson was drafted No. 14 overall by the Packers and became a Pro Football Hall of Famer after winning five total championships and collecting three All-Pros.

First Black starting quarterback: Mike Cooper

Mike Cooper made history in 1970 when he started at quarterback. Penn State defeated Navy 55-7 in his first game starting.

The 6-foot, 185-pound Cooper began his Happy Valley journey in 1968, but after throwing four touchdowns in the 1970 Blue-White Game, he made his case to be starter.

He and 6-foot-5 Bob Parsons

Shaping the future

By Rubi Orellana
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

At Penn State, Black student organizations serve as crucial networks for professional and personal development.

These clubs provide mentorship, career opportunities and a sense of belonging, helping students navigate historically white industries. Student leaders within these organizations are dedicated to fostering environments that empower members to succeed.

The National Society of Black Engineers(NSBE) aims to shape the future of Black students in engineering.

"Being a part of NSBE has helped me grow professionally by introducing me to the workspace through workshops, and preparing me to be the best professional I can be," Chapter President Benjamin Ofori-Kuragu said.

NSBE offers many resources, including corporate sponsors who recruit for internships and full-time positions.

This organization also connects students with alumni and professionals through events like the National Convention in March and the Fall Regional Conference, according to Ofori-Kuragu, a fourth-year studying computational data sciences.

With DEI rollbacks from corporate sponsors, Ofori-Kuragu said it's difficult for him, but he believes helping members' with resumes, LinkedIn profiles and academically can help them succeed in the future.

Ofori-Kuragu said Black professional organizations are essential, as they provide a safe space for members of the Black community in historically white fields to come together and recognize that they exist.

"We collaborate with other major-focused groups to introduce our members to the larger Black community," Ofori-Kuragu said. "We try to do one main event per week, switching off between professional development and social events."

Black Women in Tech (BWIT)

focuses on creating a supportive space for Black women pursuing careers in technology.

"Being part of BWIT has connected me with a supportive network of students, faculty and industry professionals who share our mission," Founder and President Vashti Nyarko said.

The organization is working to connect members with industry professionals, as well as to host Black women alumni speakers to share their experiences navigating the industry, according to Nyarko, a fourth-year studying enterprise technology integration.

"Black students, especially Black female students, are a part of two demographics that often experience imposter syndrome in the technology industry," Nyarko said. "Feeling like we have no choice but to prove (ourselves) in spaces where we're underrepresented."

Being at a predominantly white institution, Nyarko said it's easy to feel isolated, but BWIT helps create a sense of belonging, streamlining the process of finding support and building connections.

The organization collaborates with other campus organizations to amplify voices and advocates for Black students' needs.

"We mix career-building workshops with social events like study sessions, game nights and self-care activities," Nyarko said.

BWIT's upcoming "Dress to Impress" event that combines professional development with fun will discuss how to dress professionally while staying true to a personal style.

The event will highlight Penn State's Professional Attire Closet, a free resource for students.

The Multicultural Undergraduate Law Association (MULA) provides Black students at Penn State with mentorship to succeed in the legal field.

The organization aims to bridge the gap that many racial minorities experience when aspiring to enter the law field, and connects members with current

law students, lawyers and judges. The mentorships and one-on-one advising they provide help students succeed in their law school process, according to President Alana Nesmith.

"MULA has allowed me to work on my networking skills through law school conferences, trips and study sessions," Nesmith, a fourth-year studying political science and communication arts and sciences, said.

The organization partners with Kaplan, an exam preparation website, for LSAT prep, mock tests and book giveaways, helping members prepare for law school while providing professional development opportunities.

Nesmith said Black students in the legal field often face challenges, with only about 5% of lawyers in the U.S. being Black, according to a 2020 American Bar Association demographics survey.

"For many of us in the organization, myself included, we're expecting to be the first lawyers of our families," Nesmith said. "You experience a phenomenon called imposter syndrome and have been taught that it is necessary to work 10 times as hard to see a fraction of the results."

With many losing out on opportunities due to their socioeconomic status, Nesmith said the organization prepares tests to give members a helping hand in the hopes of joining that 5% of Black lawyers.

She said she believes these spaces are safe for them to grow in because predominantly white professional organizations have had years of experience and connections that many of MULA members didn't have growing up.

"These spaces are important to bridge that gap of disparity and ensure equity in these spaces, making sure everyone truly has equal access to opportunity," Nesmith said.

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Kate Hildebrand/Collegian

Velvet Brown conducts the Tuba/Euphonium Ensemble at the Common Hour Recital at the African American Music Festival.

Music festival honors tradition

By Hugh Kibera
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The African American Music Festival at Penn State has long celebrated the rich history and cultural impact of Black musicians, composers, and scholars.

Founded by the late Dr. Anthony Leach, a professor at the School of Music, the festival continues to serve as a platform for education, appreciation, and artistic excellence.

Running from Feb. 5-8, this year's festival, held as part of Penn State's Black History Month celebrations, focused on two foundational genres – spirituals and the blues. Organizers aimed to highlight the evolution of these genres and their lasting influence on contemporary music.

"It was Dr. Leach's idea to incorporate both genres, allowing audiences to experience reimagined versions of century-old tunes in a contemporary jazz setting," Russell Bloom, assistant director of the Penn State School of Music, said.

A key moment of the festival was Friday night's concert at The State Theatre, where jazz pianist Cyrus Chestnut and his trio delivered a performance that blended traditional hymns with jazz improvisation. The set honored Dr. Leach's legacy as both a pianist and a church organist, seamlessly incorporating elements of classical composers like Frédéric Chopin and Ludwig van Beethoven.

For many students, the performance was a moving experience.

"I was completely blown away by the way the music told a story," Sydney Platt, a second-year studying criminology, said. "It almost felt like a conversation between the past and the present. The way the jazz was blended made me appreciate the history behind the music even more."

Throughout the festival, a variety of performances showcased the depth of African American music. Thursday night featured instrumental solos and ensembles, while Saturday's closing event brought Penn State choirs together in a mass ensemble. Each group performed works by Black composers before joining together for a powerful finale dedicated to Dr. Leach's memory.

This year's festival carried an added emotional weight following Dr. Leach's passing on Jan 8. His influence on the event – both in its planning and its performances – was deeply felt by organizers and musicians alike.

"With his untimely passing came a whole host of communications that had to be revisited," Bloom said. "He was such an integral part of the festival – not just in planning but also in performing. His absence left a huge gap in each event."

Despite this challenge, the festival remained a fitting tribute to Dr. Leach's vision of bringing African American music to Central Pennsylvania. Faculty and organizers said they hope that its impact will extend beyond a single month of recognition.

"The hope is that this festival inspires a lasting appreciation for Black music in everyday performance practice," Velvet Brown, a professor at the School of Music and former Penn State Laureate, said. "It has become an integral part of music education at Penn State, offering students opportunities to engage with Black composers and their work."

Through its powerful performances and deep cultural significance, the African American Music Festival continues to amplify the contributions of Black musicians while fostering a greater understanding of their lasting impact.

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Courtesy of Vashti Nyarko

The Black Women in Tech executive board poses for a group photo. The organization hosts alumni speakers and connects members with industry professionals.

History of Black Caucus

By Claire Huss
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Editor’s Note: The Daily Collegian acknowledges there are gaps in its coverage of Black Caucus over the years. The Collegian is working to improve this coverage.

The Penn State Student Black Caucus was founded in 1971 in response to dissent over the Equal Opportunity Program, replacing the then mostly inactive Black Student Union.

Today, the organization serves as the umbrella organization for all Black student organizations and minority students at University Park, according to its Instagram. Here are some of Black Caucus’s initiatives over the years, as told through Collegian reporting.

1971

The Black Student Union, formed in 1968 to petition Penn State to admit more Black students, saw struggles with leadership and went inactive in the summer of 1971.

Black students at Penn State still fought for racial equality in admissions and formed the Black Caucus after the BSU dissolved.

According to the Collegian, Black Caucus “pushed the University to establish an Office of Minority Affairs” to oversee organizations and programs benefiting minority students. The university delayed its proposal.

The BSU and Black Caucus officially merged to create a “united front” in October of 1971.

1979

The Daily Collegian interviewed Takesha Dockery, the former president of Black Caucus. In the interview, she explained why Black Caucus was important to have on campus.

When asked if the Caucus is representative of Black students on campus, Dockery said, “I don’t think that’s any of your business or any other person’s. (...) I won’t even answer that question.”

Dockery criticized the university for “providing Black Caucus as a tokenism.” By having one organization represent all Black students, Dockery saw the university as saying, “We’re not racist, we have a Black Caucus.”

“And we’re supposed to represent all the interests of Black students. That’s hard to do,” Dockery said. “It’s hard to do especially when you’re given a ridiculous budget like \$3,000 a year. How are you supposed to function and do a job with that?”

1985

In 1985, the Collegian interviewed the president and vice president candidates for Black Caucus before its election.

Larry Patrick, the presidential candidate, stressed the importance of demonstrating against

President Ronald Reagan’s financial aid budget cuts and fighting against racism at Penn State.

“To become politically active is great, and to be effective is wonderful,” Patrick said.

1990

By 1990, Penn State had 30 African-American student organizations across campus, according to Collegian archives.

Black Caucus petitioned the university for more funding to build a new cultural center and expand their offices. These efforts were successful, with the new Paul Robeson Cultural Center being constructed in the HUB in 1999.

2001

In April 2001, a 10-day sit-in in the HUB known as the Village Protest marked a pivotal moment at Penn State, with students demanding safety and meaningful diversity initiatives, following a series of anonymous anti-Black messages and death threats.

A number of incidents led to this event, including racist emails sent to more than 60 students in 1999 and a misrepresented photo of Black students published by the Collegian in 2000. This prompted then-Black Caucus President LaKeisha Wolf to write a letter to the editor, for which she and other Black students received death threats.

After surveying over 300 students from a range of different backgrounds, Black Caucus compiled incidents into a booklet titled, “Racism at Penn State.” Members presented it to state representatives in Harrisburg and raised concerns about safety to the administration, as well as Black student enrollment and retention. Students pushed the senate to make Penn State acknowledge its failure to foster diversity and to address the issues immediately, but the senate didn’t agree to the conditions.

In response to the growing tension, 40 students ran onto the field in protest during the Blue-White football game, leading to 26 arrests. This finally culminated with the Village Protest, which pressured the administration into agreeing to a university-wide diversity plan and establishing the Africana Research Center.

2005

Black Caucus spoke out against the Collegian’s coverage of the Caucus’s recent protests against the university’s administration.

Then-incoming Black Caucus president Gandarvaka Gray suggested the Collegian call itself “the administrator’s newspaper — not the student’s newspaper” because it allegedly underreported hate crimes and was a “mouthpiece for the administration.”

In a two-hour meeting between the Collegian and Black Caucus, Editor-in-Chief James Young



Lily LaRegina/Collegian file photo

Danielitta Pantoe, former president of the Penn State Student Black Caucus, speaks at the vigil for Osaze Osagie in front of the Allen Street Gates on March 21, 2019.

said the Collegian did its best to “show both sides” and didn’t plan to change how they covered Black Caucus. He also called the accusations made by Black Caucus “absurd” and said, “It seems to me they only want attention for themselves,” according to Collegian archives.

“Maybe if we only give them the information we want (the Collegian) to have, they will start covering us more fairly,” Gray said.

2007

Black Caucus protested Penn State’s administration for fostering a “discriminatory environment,” according to Collegian archives.

Black Caucus protested the senior class gift — a memorial park in front of Rec Hall honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., THON and Penn State Athletics, stating that King’s memory should not be honored alongside two organizations it said has a “racist history.”

Black Caucus released an open letter to the Penn State community encouraging students to mobilize and get involved in making change in their community and protesting the “insensitive” gift.

2010

In response to stabbings over Homecoming Weekend, Black Caucus called for nonviolent initiatives at Penn State, including a town hall meeting, a new campaign against violence called STOP and a discussion with administration.

In a letter drafted by the group, it calls for the Penn State community to “question the moral standards it holds itself to.”

According to Collegian archives, an excerpt of the letter said, “Since when has it become acceptable to compromise our morals and integrity to appease others or handle problems?”

2014

Black Caucus organized a dem-

onstration called “28 Names” in the HUB, honoring the lives and stories of Black people who were killed by police.

Twenty-two students stood in the HUB in black jackets, which they took off to reveal white shirts with stories of individuals. According to the Collegian, the demonstrators screamed the stories of those pictured on their shirts for students to hear.

“Tomorrow you will be married — something old, something new — but the stench of our flesh singes the hairs on the back of their necks,” Khalif Dobson said. “No longer strange fruit, just hung juries carry the burden of weightless legal systems who never did away with the noose.”

The Black Caucus President at the time, Naem Holman, started a website called #28Names to feature an individual’s story for every day of February. Although the initiative took place in February, Holman said the effort “extends beyond one month of the year.”

2019

The Black Caucus, Central PA Showing Up for Racial Justice, Planned Parenthood Generation Action PSU and Standing at the Gates for Justice organized a vigil to grieve and honor the life of Osaze Osagie. Around 100 people attended.

Osagie was a 29-year-old Black man who was shot by a State College police officer serving a mental health warrant on March 20, 2019.

According to the Collegian, protesters passed around candles and held signs that read, “Osagie’s life mattered” and “Being Black is not a crime!”

2020

In 2020, Black Caucus, 3/20 Coalition, the Penn State chapter of NAACP, the Black Graduate Student Association and other students organized a protest in response to the deaths of George

Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Osaze Osagie and other Black people who were killed by police.

“Before (Osagie’s death), there had never been a police-involved shooting in the history of the State College Police, and the first one ever was a Black man, even though State College is 3% Black,” Georganne Rosa, a protester, said.

2025

This year, Black Caucus President Kenisha Brown is concerned that President Donald Trump’s executive orders may impact DEI offices at Penn State, as well as funding for programs and scholarships that Black students may depend on, which could impact enrollment.

“I think we’re kind of in the question mark space. It’s an uncomfortable space to be in,” Brown, a fourth-year studying African American studies and communications arts and sciences, said.

As president, Brown meets with administrators regularly. She said plans to combat oppressive executive orders are still up in the air.

“We have to push a little harder to get administration to tell us what is going on behind the scenes,” Brown said.

Despite looming concerns about the future of DEI initiatives and funding for minority students, Black Caucus has seen membership growth. This year, Brown said the group intends to focus on political conversation and service projects for people of color in Centre County.

“For this year, our goal is to keep the momentum going,” Brown said. “The biggest thing right now is making sure students are feeling seen, celebrated and heard.”

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Students launch fashion brand

By Gabrielle Marston
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

In the transforming world of fashion where artistry blends with entrepreneurship, two friends at Penn State have turned a classroom project into an emerging clothing brand.

Benjamin Ofori-Kuragu and OJ Akanbi founded the clothing line purET as part of a project for their entrepreneurial leadership course.

“I was like, ‘Bro, we might as well make this a real thing,’ and from then on, the rest was history,” Akanbi, a fourth-year studying information sciences and technology, said.

Ofori-Kuragu and Akanbi’s relationship was strengthened by

their shared interests and has been critical to the success of their business.

“It was easy to start the brand off with Benjamin because it’s easy to talk to each other,” Akanbi said. “We’re honest and able to share different ideas.”

The motivation behind purET was to create a name that reflected their cultural and religious practices. Both founders are from Africa and grew up with close relationships in the church.

“Our brand name highlights our cultures — Nigerian, Ghanaian — and also our religious background, emphasizing the word ‘pure,’” Ofori-Kuragu, a fourth-year studying computational data sciences, said.

For these young entrepre-

neurs, the journey was full of inspiration and perfect timing. Mentorship also played a crucial role in their journey.

“It helped reaching out to people that have done this before,” Akanbi said, mentioning the owner of clothing brand TCHAMA, a fellow Penn State connection who provided guidance on how to get started and what resources to use for manufacturing.

Balancing the demands of being a student and an entrepreneur presents its challenges, according to Akanbi.

“It’s hard being a student first and then an entrepreneur, because you don’t want to do something that is just the bare minimum, especially for the brand,” Akanbi said. “I want to put my all into this, but it helps having two people. It can get hard and stressful, but it’s just about time management and dedicating time for different tasks.”

Even with enthusiastic support from friends and people from their hometowns in Philadelphia and Chicago, expanding purET’s reach presented some challenges.

“It was a little bit difficult to reach out to people outside of our main circle,” Ofori-Kuragu said. “Persistent networking and strategic marketing helped overcome that.”

The creative process behind purET is a collaborative effort, revolving around diverse inspirations and the founders’ busy student schedules.

“We always wanted to do hoodies and sweats, but the design

process fits into short times where we are able to work together,” Ofori-Kuragu said. “They make really memorable times because we get to really cook with our craft.”

Akanbi uses platforms like Pinterest to align creative ideas with personal beliefs. He resonates with the fashion styles of Kanye West and Pharrell Williams, pulling the minimalist aesthetic as inspiration.

Ofori-Kuragi said purET plans to collaborate with Eminence Modeling Troupe, the African Students Association and the National Association of Black Accountants for fashion shows.

Graduation is approaching for both founders, and they didn’t initially anticipate expanding beyond college.

“Now that we’re entering that phase, I think it’s still something that we would like to continue as we head into the next chapter,” Ofori-Kuragu said.

Abdul Keita is a friend of Akanbi, and expressed his lack of surprise at the brand’s launch.

“Even when I first met him, I felt like he was very fashionable, and as a friend, I would love to see the brand grow while maintaining good quality and customer service,” Keita, a fourth-year studying computer science, said.

Akanbi emphasized the importance of actively engaging with people and striving for excellence as a means to connect with consumers.

“Not being afraid to talk to people and being proactive helps me make connections,” Akanbi said.

Saada Wing has modeling experience for purET and appreciates the brand’s unique and welcoming atmosphere.

“When I modeled for purET, it was very wholesome,” Wing, a fourth-year studying psychology, said. “OJ and Ben have created a vibe that feels very homey within their brand, even in the way they sell. You don’t feel pressured to buy anything — it feels like family when you purchase from them.”

This sense of community is complemented by the founders’ commitment to quality.

“They take great pride in the materials they source,” Wing said. “My hoodie has never shrunk or diminished. The pride they take in their brand, you can really feel it.”

Ofori-Kuragu offered advice for students considering launching a business in college.

“Definitely just start,” Ofori-Kuragu said. “Half of the decision is making the decision to start. Put your best foot forward, and be consistent with everything you do.”

The founders want pureET to emphasize their customers’ individuality.

“People that wear our brand are supposed to feel like they’re representing themselves through fashion, be true to themselves and don’t really care about outside opinions,” Ofori-Kuragu said. “They can wear what they want to wear and know they look fly doing it.”

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Courtesy of OJ Akanbi

Members of purET model the clothing brand’s “Night State” line. PurET was originally founded as part of a class project.