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Christ College professors and Lead Pastor reflect on the Advent season, student preparation

KIARA AZUMA
ONLINE/MEDIA EDITOR

Sunday, Nov. 30, marked the first day of the Advent season. Advent is a four-week season of waiting, reflection and preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth on Dec. 25. Professors from Christ College and Lead Pastor Quinton Anderson shared what the season of Advent means to them, as well as provided students with advice on how they can reflect and prepare during the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Dr. Scott Stiegemeyer shared that Advent means more to him than just pre-Christmas. “I always think of the Bible’s promise that Jesus is ‘God-with-us.’ That’s what Immanuel means. That’s the comfort and joy of Advent. God is with His people in Word and Sacrament right now,” said Stiegemeyer.

Dr. Joel Oesch highlights how the Advent season means waiting in expectation. He said, “It reminds me of the times my wife was pregnant (4 times!). We knew something wonderful was about to make its appearance and change our world forever. In the case of our Christian faith, this expectation of the Christ child returns every year at Advent, marking the profound realization of the ‘Word made flesh.’”

“I found it to be a season of hope in Christ that brings peace and joy in all circumstances. I find that to be an especially helpful anchor given the frantic nature of life and the month of December in particular,” said Anderson.

The professors also shared their own personal traditions during the Advent season. “My favorite tradition of Advent is singing the traditional Advent hymns. ‘Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending’ is one of the best,” stated Stiegemeyer.

Oesch described his traditions during the season as mixing both the practices of the Christmas season and the Advent season. “In silly ways, Advent means that I’m perpetually playing Christmas music in the house, the puzzles are out, the fireplace is lit and the Grinch is the movie du jour,” he said, “but Advent is certainly not about that, and so in seriousness our family looks forward to the sacred music, the worship complete with Advent wreath, the liturgical colors (blue/purple), and the church community we share life with--all of which have distinctive flavors from November to December.”

Anderson also has Advent traditions with his family. They spend time with nightly devotions. “We pull out our Advent wreath with its candles, lighting an additional candle each week as we make our way closer and closer to Christmas. We also usually have an Advent calendar with family members taking turns opening the next window or box each night, revealing a different little treat, picture or phrase as we count down the days until Christmas,” said Anderson.

“It used to mean midweek Advent services and an Advent calendar counting down the days,” said Dr. Mike Middendorf. He expressed that while

it has become difficult in a busy time period at a university setting to focus and prepare for the season, Thanksgiving and winter break are a great time to refocus on Christ.

For students seeking ways to participate and reflect during this season, the faculty noted that worship and reading are important methods for reviewing the Word.

“I always recommend people read something special for devotion during this season,” stated Stiegemeyer. “This year, my wife and I are going through a little book of Advent devotions based on the book of Isaiah.”

Oesch recommended, “Read the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus in the Gospels. Then, join your local congregation for Wednesday night worship for the season.”

Middendorf acknowledges that the Advent season coincides with a busy time for most students, as it overlaps with the end of the semester and the period leading up to finals and graduation. An accessible way for students to easily participate in this season is to utilize Concordia’s chapel. “We spent all fall in Chapel walking through Ephesians. A lot of the messages are available online under Chapel. View the Chapel Archive. That might be a way to receive and/or review Jesus coming to us in his Word.”

“Our last week of chapel services incorporates Advent themes and texts,” added Anderson. On Dec. 2, the Tues. night, Evening Prayer even had an Advent-themed service.

In addition to personal reflection, the faculty recommends finding community during this season.

“Gather with others and celebrate the real reason for the season of Christmas,” stated Middendorf. “Find another human being to serve...someone with whom you can share Advent joy,” added Oesch.

A perfect opportunity for students to celebrate Advent together on campus with the community is Concordia Candlelight. This event will be held on Tues. Dec. 9 at 6:30 p.m. at Good Shepherd Chapel. It is open to students, faculty, family and children.

“This is a special service intended to be Concordia’s Christmas Eve celebration, singing many favorite Christmas carols and hearing the Christmas story as we get ready to go into the Christmas break,” explained Anderson.

Students looking to spend additional time in worship with fellow Golden Eagles during the final weeks of school are welcome to attend chapel at Good Shepherd every Mon., Tues., Thurs. and in the gym on Fridays at 10:30 a.m. Additional resources and information about worship services can be found on @abbeywest_cui on Instagram or <https://www.cui.edu/studentlife/student-leadership/abbey-west>

Concordia partners with UCI to advance training, research ops for engineering students

BROOKLYN PIETSCH
STAFF WRITER

Ties between the Concordia and UCI engineering departments trace back to the start of the Concordia engineering program in 2021, propelling students into promising careers, including one engineering graduate, Tiffany Carrillo, who completed her master’s at UCI and now works for Boeing.

Julia Foote Najera, junior, was a part of an eight-week summer research program supported by Concordia’s Valerosos y Curiosos program. Her work was in collaboration with UCI, which houses the vibrometry machine that the students used to collect data like vibration measurements. Foote Najera presented her research at the Biomedical Engineering Society conference in October. It “was an amazing experience,” she said. “I met many leaders in the biomedical field, learned about their research, and received advice about my own path and field.”

Her research “focused on improving the reliability of a cartilage testing technique called vibrometry, which uses vibrations to study how cartilage responds to dynamic forces,” Foote Najera said. The team created an automated MATLAB code to process the data, making vibrometry faster and more reliable for future cartilage research.

“My classmate, Wyatt Madison, and I collaborated with Dr. Espinosa,” she added, “to continue her previous research.” Dr. Gabriela Espinosa, Director of Engineering at Concordia, also conducted research at UCI. “The group over at UCI that I was working with looked at trying to bioengineer tissue replacements that are more like the actual tissue that was there to begin with,” Foote Najera said. “Using my mechanics background and knowledge of cells and the proteins they make, we asked ourselves, ‘Are these tissues strong enough?’”

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Sounds of Emmanuel brought to Segerstrom Hall

REBEKAH MICHEL
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Every year, the Music Department diligently produces two nearly sold-out Christmas performances at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. A Concordia Christmas is one of the most anticipated events of the entire year for the School of Arts and Sciences and one of the premier Christmas concerts in Southern California.

This year, “Emmanuel! A Concordia Christmas” will take the stage of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall on Dec. 13, with performances at 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Serving as a cumulation of the Music Department’s numerous ensembles, the concert will include performances by the Concordia

Wind and Symphony Orchestra, The Concordia Choir, Donne Di Canto, Men’s Chorus, The Master Chorale and Concordia’s acclaimed handbell ensembles.

With over 200 student performers, producing “Emmanuel! A Concordia Christmas” is a substantial task for the faculty and staff. The repertoire is organized and directed under the leadership of Dr. Michael Busch, Dr. Jeff Held, Dr. Daniel Wessler and Erik Der.

This year, “Emmanuel! A Concordia Christmas” consists of arrangements of familiar hymns, traditional Christmas carols, selections from holiday movie soundtracks and new compositions by Concordia faculty.

For junior Computer Science major Anthony Reynafarje, his

favorite work in the concert is the choral and orchestral piece “Pat-A-Pan.” “It is the most rhythmically interesting piece that we have. There is a sense of excitement, playfulness and joy that Jesus is born,” said Reynafarje.

Senior Church Music major Olivia Theolke is completing her final Concordia Christmas concert as a cellist and shared her excitement about the orchestral works featured in this concert. “I really like ‘Ring Joyfully, God with Us.’ It is a really cool melding of ‘Carol of the Bells’ and ‘O Come O Come Emmanuel.’ It ties in with the theme of the concert really well,” said Theolke.

Not only do the Concordia Christmas concerts enhance the performance opportunities and skills of music students, but they also create lasting memories for them. “I am going to miss performing for such

a big audience with high spirits. I am a member of the orchestra and choir, and this is one of the few experiences where I get to do both... I will miss preparing for something as big as this and performing it twice,” said Theolke.

When asked what words he would give to a Concordia Christmas audience member, Reynafarje replied, “Be a part of it. You may not be on stage with us, but you are one hundred percent a part of it because this concert is all about Jesus.”

For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit <https://www.scfta.org/events/2025/emmanuel-a-concordia-christmas>. Tickets begin at \$22.60 and are expected to sell out quickly. Please note that there are no Concordia student discounts available for this performance.

EPiCS Club president shares how his Concordia journey landed on engineering

MATT CORDREY
STAFF WRITER

Here at Concordia, there is a wide variety of different clubs and extracurricular activities. One of these is called the EPiCS club. The EPiCS Club is a club centered around engineering, math and computer science, both here on campus and in the broader community. It’s a club that seeks to create a supportive community for undergraduate STEM students to explore and share keen interests in these subjects.

Caden Merrill, President of the EPiCS Club, shared his experience in the club and as an Engineering major. As a senior, Caden went through several different major changes before he settled on Engineering and joined the EPiCS Club. “I originally was a Theology major, then Communications, then History and Political

thought, but I took Core Math with Dr. Melberg, and I fell in love with math and realized I wanted to do something with that for a career, so I became an Engineering major.”

Merrill went on to describe his experience in the EPiCS Club and the Engineering major. “Both the EPiCS community and the Engineering community feel like a family. Due to the fact that we are a smaller group of majors compared to others, we all rely on each other and learn from each other. We take a lot of classes together, and that has helped us form great friendships.” The smaller size of the STEM majors involved in the EPiCS Club leads to a blending of these majors, and mutual support between them all while working together on collaborative service projects, nurturing career development for undergrads, and projects that prepare you for a future in the world of STEM.

The Engineering major, still relatively new to

Concordia, and has steadily grown. “It is crazy to think that we started this major just a couple of years ago. We have made such incredible strides, and our graduating class is getting larger and larger each year,” Merrill said., “The Founding Director of Engineering at CUI, Dr. Espinosa, has done such a phenomenal job growing this major and getting people excited about engineering. She is a big part of why I love Engineering and why others have fallen in love with the field as well.”

If you’re an Engineering, Math, or Computer Science major who wants a community to join you on your journey, the EPiCS Club might be the place for you! If you are interested in joining the club, please reach out to either Caden Merrill or the faculty advisor for the club, Professor Julie Melberg. You can also learn more about the EPiCS Club on the school website under Student Life.

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UCI Engineering

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Tiffany Carrillo, a 2024 alum, also worked closely with Espinosa throughout her time at Concordia. “Dr. Espinosa has always been by my side...even though the program was very, very small, it was actually the beginning of something big,” Carrillo said. She added that the engineering program “is growing so much since when we started. I think it was only eight of us” at its beginning.

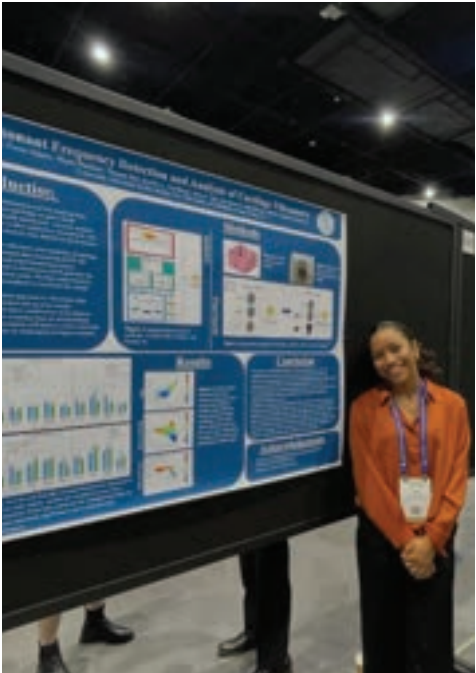
Carrillo’s first interaction with the UCI engineering department was participating in one of their racing car teams. This experience grew her fascination with mechanical engineering and Formula One. She completed her master’s degree in mechanical and aerospace engineering at UCI in 2025. “There were a lot of ups and downs, especially since it was a one-year master’s, which was very tough,” Carrillo said, “but the people I met during the program were now going to be my lifelong friends that I’m so grateful about.”

Carrillo is now employed at Boeing, working on the F-15 jet, she said, “I never thought that I was going to be able to work for my first job with a fighter jet... It’s kind of crazy for me to think

that I’m in charge of making sure that everything is correct, which is a lot, but it’s just the beginning of building up my career.”

Both Carrillo and Foote Najera expressed their gratitude for the engineering professors, especially Espinosa. She “guided me and also continued to push me to not give up,” Carrillo said. “Coming to CUI for engineering has been a rewarding journey. I was drawn to CUI because of the close connection professors have with students,” said Foote Najera. She added, “The sense of community in the engineering department is what truly keeps people engaged. My classmates and I work as a team, supporting each other through every class and building strong friendships.”

Students interested in research can get involved through the Concordia academic showcase or inquire about summer research opportunities. If engineering students are interested in Carrillo’s work at Boeing, they can find her on LinkedIn. She advises aspiring engineers to “always be persistent, resistant and have perseverance.”



PICTURED ABOVE: Julia Foote Najera presents her summer research at the 2025 Biomedical Engineering Society conference. Photo courtesy of: Concordia Engineering Department



PICTURED ABOVE: Inside the Concordia engineering department. Photo courtesy of: Concordia Engineering Department



PICTURED ABOVE: Tiffany Carrillo and her Concordia professors celebrate her graduation in 2024. Photo courtesy of: Concordia Engineering Department

Tis’ the season for Concordia Christmas

KAYLA CIMARUSTI
STAFF WRITER

If you heard joy and jingle bells on campus, you weren’t imagining it. Concordia Christmas came to town on Thurs, Dec. 4, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at the Student Union patio and common lawns.

This event is backed by months of planning. Amanda Norris, Supervisor of Student Activities and Associate Dean of Student Life, helps oversee the process while students lead the way. “I supervise ASCUI. I make sure they stay on budget, approve the vendors, and approve the theme.”

“Staying within the budget gets harder each year,” Norris said. “I keep the budget the same every year, but inflation makes everything more expensive. Finding activities that interest everyone while still keeping things fun and affordable is definitely the most difficult part of Concordia Christmas.”

Norris gave the student team a lot of freedom. “I let the team plan the whole thing. They’re all trained, so I trust them to run with it while keeping them to the budget. We also meet weekly.”

Safety and logistics are a huge part of the event. She explained that past years have included “a sled, ice skating, a wipeout machine,” all of which require “insurance and waivers.” Weather also plays a significant role in planning, especially for an event that brings together “staff, students, families and the community.”

Planning begins early. “[We] start in April with brainstorming, we first come up with the theme, then go from there with the vendors, decorations and marketing plan.”

For Norris, the best part is watching the excitement grow. “I love seeing the attendance, and I especially enjoy that faculty and staff bring their families. And all the students get to become kids again.”

“Some students aren’t able to go home, so we bring Christmas to them on campus.” She also looks forward to expanding in the future. “A Christmas show performance, food trucks, and more vendors, and my goal before I leave is to have a Ferris wheel on campus.”

A huge portion of the event is driven by student leadership, especially through Tessa Ermeling, a senior majoring in Liberal Studies and the Director of Student Activities. She leads the team that turns the theme into a full campus experience.

Ermeling said the biggest job was

spreading the word so the event could grow its usual crowd. “The aspect of Concordia Christmas that took the most time and effort to plan was the advertising,” stated Ermeling. “We started planning in August to ensure we created anticipation.” Her team put together posters, teasers and social media updates to build excitement throughout the semester.

The theme, chosen long before the school year began, helped every creative decision the team made. “We chose the theme ‘How the Grinch Stole Christmas’ before the school year even started, and one tradition we knew we wanted to keep was the Presidential Bake-Off.” They created other activities based on the movie, “making it as on-brand as possible.” For her team, matching the activities to the movie helped keep the event fun, recognizable and cohesive.

One of her hopes is that the night brings comfort to students during finals season. “We hope students feel a sense of nostalgia and that we are able to bring them back to childhood Christmas memories that they hold special... We are excited to see the attendance at Concordia Christmas.”

According to Ermeling, what makes Concordia Christmas stand out is its wide community welcome. “Concordia Christmas is unique because it is an event for everyone, full of new surprises every year.” Unlike other events that target students or families specifically, this tradition includes everyone – students, faculty, alumni, children and community members.

For Ermeling, the event also plays a meaningful role in bringing the campus together. “This event definitely brings the student community closer together, even in such a busy time.” It becomes a shared break before finals, giving students a moment of joy.

And if she could keep planning it year after year, she would. “I wish I could help plan this event every year. I pray everyone who attends wants to be more involved in the Concordia Community.”

PICTURED ABOVE: ASCUI's Concordia Christmas brings joy, snow, and Christmas fun to students, faculty, and the community. Photo courtesy of: Courtesy of ASCUI



Review: “Wicked For Good”

SYDNEY WEAVER
STAFF WRITER

I have been changed for good.

“Wicked For Good”, starring Cynthia Erivo, Ariana Grande, Jonathan Bailey, Jeff Goldblum, and others, has been highly anticipated since the first movie [and theater smash], “Wicked,” came out last November. “Wicked For Good” has officially beaten “Wicked” at the box office, grossing over \$150 million its opening weekend. My takeaway, it deserved every penny.

“Wicked” and “Wicked For Good” have been able to create media buzz and anticipation for over two years now. You could argue it worked quite successfully. From the devoted fans showing up in green paint from head to toe, to the unique merchandise being bought

in tons of different stores, and the social media reviews, reactions and excitement constantly being posted. “Wicked For Good” was set up to be the most anticipated movie in the last few years, and their box office earnings are evidence that it brought everyone out.

Despite the buzz and anticipation, Rotten Tomatoes gave the movie a 68%, while the audience reviews seemed to be nothing short of amazing, earning it a 94%. I have to strongly disagree with the low Rotten Tomatoes rating and side with the audience ratings on this film. While I feel it was not as good as “Wicked,” the film still hit everything you need in a movie musical and paid respect to the original Broadway production in small but meaningful ways.

The movie opens with

the yellow brick road being built, and soon after, Erivo’s character, Elphaba, appears on screen. The completely full theater went wild. Cheers, applause, whistles. This is when I knew I was in for an exciting experience. The rest of the movie continues on with main themes being friendship, loyalty, corruption, identity and sacrifice.

Elphaba is portrayed as the Wicked Witch, and Glinda as Glinda the Good. The friends are pinned against each other publicly, but the movie shows their struggle of friendship, doing what is right, and fighting corruption beyond the eyes of the Ozians. The themes of identity and sacrifice are highlighted through song throughout the film and bring a powerful message to the audience in a captivating way.

The musical element of the film is something that sticks with you well after you finish watching. Songs such as “For Good,” “No Good Deed,” and “As Long As You’re Mine” brought the theater to life. You could feel the visceral reaction of the audience being drawn into the song. At some points, the audience even clapped or cheered in points in the song.

The “Wicked” franchise is one that has captured the cultural zeitgeist across generations and continues to be cherished. “Wicked For Good” is the perfect movie to see to kick off this holiday season and bring families together for a heartwarming movie. Just be warned, it will have you singing like a Broadway star for days to follow.

Commercial Music majors wow crowd at Campus JAX

COLIN WHEELER
STAFF WRITER

Concordia’s annual Commercial Music Concert was held in Newport Beach on Tues., Dec. 2 at Campus JAX. The performance is a one-of-a-kind event held off campus at JAX, a venue that has been called “Orange County’s most intimate performing arts center.”

Campus JAX has been working with Concordia for more than five years and in that time many music students have found their passion in music and their skill in performing through shows like this. “We love to encourage students at Concordia and young artists to play, they are always so professional, very polite, amazing musicians and they get a chance to come in and perform in a live setting, so we’re happy to be able to provide that,” said JAX’s management.

Raquel Nitz, a sophomore Commercial Music major said that she’s now “in Commercial Music two now instead of vocal

pop, so I get to sing with a band, which is nice to have. It’s an experience that is needed for commercial music musicians.” More than the performance has helped these students grow in commercial music, the rehearsals and practices for such performances like Campus JAX are a big part of the learning process as a musician.

Mearna Robinson, a freshman, Commercial Music major said, “It’s more hands on than anything. I come from a small town, so this is a lot more hands on than being around like all the equipment is really amazing. And now seeing everything with the lights and performing, it’s really, it’s crazy.”

The show itself was a hit with a packed house and a great set of music, not only was the crowd excited, but the students too with many of them singing their favorites like Jason Barber, a freshman Contemporary Music major who was “singing lead on a Beach Boys song. Fun, very

fun. I’m so stoked for that since I’m a Big Brian Wilson fan.”

Many people are behind the creation of this performance at campus JAX. Everyone from the musical director to the students themselves they all are involved in the creation of this show. Steve Young, Professor of Music and Director of Commercial Music finds that the students often don’t see how much they grow in their art when they do shows like this “I think they even surprise themselves a little bit in how they grow. And it still surprises me sometimes,” he said.

Young continued, “Every time a student comes to Campus JAX, they always say, ‘I can’t believe that this exists and I didn’t know about it,’ they all are always really excited. I feel like we’re Concordia’s best kept secret around.”

With Campus JAX now complete many music students are now looking forward to the Concordia Christmas performance at Segerstrom this year with many beautiful classical pieces being performed.



PICTURED ABOVE: Music students perform at Campus JAX on Tues., Dec. 2. Photo courtesy of: Colin Wheeler.

Soccer season complete, Barrett named PacWest player of the year

SYDNEY WEAVER
STAFF WRITER

Women’s soccer has officially ended its season with a record of 10 wins, 3 losses and 4 ties. While the team is not going to the conference playoffs or the NCAA tournament, they finished with a winning record and a PacWest player of the year honor.

Junior midfielder and forward Bella Barrett has won PacWest Player of the Year, and her teammates could not be prouder. Brinn Paulson, a sophomore defender, said, “No matter what, Bella always puts in 110% effort and it shows.” She said she was so proud of Barrett for winning this title and that it was her game winning goals that secured her the award. Paulson said, “She was able to put us on the board when we needed it... and made it look easy.”

Barrett played and started in 14 games this season, playing a total of 824 minutes. In these 824 minutes on the field, she led the team with the most scored goals, coming in at a total of eight. Overall, the team scored 25 goals this season, and Barrett was able to assist two of her teammates' goals. Six of Barrett’s goals were game-winning, and she contributed to 18 points this season.

Barrett is feeling proud but humble. She said, the PacWest player of the year title “means

a lot to me because it reflects the hard work, commitment and sacrifices that went into this season, not just from me but especially from my teammates and coaches...I am only able to play this game because of them, and I thank God for giving me the opportunity.”

Junior goalkeeper, Bella Miseroy, said, “It means a lot for someone of my own team to win this award, but especially for the person who won it. She is so special to this program.” Miseroy said, “Barrett’s work ethic is unmatched, and it is obvious to anyone who watches a game that she works the hardest.”

Barrett says that the team was successful by overcoming adversity. “As a whole, I’m extremely proud of how the team stayed unified... It speaks volumes to the character of this group.”

Paulson stated that her biggest takeaway from this season was “realizing that soccer is so much more than a sport.” She said that her teammates are her “second family” and she is so grateful that she gets to play and work alongside these women day in and day out. “Nothing can compare to college soccer,” said Paulson.

Barrett’s biggest takeaway was how they can be successful going forward. She said, “Success comes from the details. Staying disciplined and being

consistent in getting the little things right is what separates good teams from great ones.”

Miseroy shared similar sentiments about how much the team means to her and said that her biggest takeaway from this season is that “We need every single person on this team and we are stronger together.” The players have a strong bond on and off the field that is evident in their winning record. The ladies hope to carry this camaraderie through to next season as they become the senior leaders of the team.

Because of this strong bond and sisterhood felt on the team, the women celebrate each accomplishment as if it were the game-winning move. Paulson shared her fondest memory of celebrating her teammate Reagan Van Horn’s first college goal. She said, “Everyone screamed and jumped.. I still talk about it with her to this day.”

Miseroy said her fondest

memory of the season is also goal celebrations. She stated, “This is when our team is celebrating together, jumping and screaming on the bench or on the field.”

Going forward, Barrett hopes to keep getting better as a team. She said, “My goal is to elevate every part of my game so I can be the best version of myself for the program. I want to raise the standard for myself and for the program in order to help push our team even further next year.”

Miseroy said for the future she hopes to “step up where I am being called to.” The team, which currently includes 11 seniors, will need players like Miseroy, Paulson and Barrett to step up as the new leaders with those seniors graduating. Miseroy said, "Looking up to people like Bella Barrett brings me hope that next season will be a good one.”



PICTURED ABOVE: Madison Hall and Bella Barrett celebrating their PacWest awards of making First Team All PacWest
Photo courtesy of: CUI Golden Eagles Athletics

Noah Plaza at DII Men's Cross Country Championships

JOSEPH PANETTA
SPORTS EDITOR

On November 22nd, senior Noah Plaza became the first student in Concordia history to compete at the NCAA DII Men's Cross Country Championships. Not only did Plaza compete, but he did exceptionally well, scoring a time of 31 minutes and 3.2 seconds. Plaza placed 60th out of 259 of the best runners in the country. Plaza finishes his illustrious college career with a bang, making Concordia ever so proud. Photo via @thedropboxlink on Instagram.



Men's basketball enters PacWest conference with 3-3 record

CHAD HAYES
STAFF WRITER

Dec. 3 marked the first game of the PacWest conference for the men's basketball team. The Golden Eagles played a home game against Westmont, [winning/losing] [score]. Prior to the conference, the team had a record of 3-3. Blake Ballard, a junior who plays forward and guard, and Ben Krystkowiak, a junior who plays guard, discussed their expectations and thoughts after their first few games of the season.

This is Krystkowiak's first year on the team since he is a transfer. He is one of eight transfers on the team. "I think transfers are good. We have a good group of guys, and that's the main point.

Everybody is bought in and like-minded, so yeah, we just want to continue playing together."

Ballard is also a transfer, and he discussed his expectations for this season. "My expectations are that we win our conference and do well, win the conference regular season championship, and hopefully make it to the regional playoffs. That's the goal," he said.

After starting 3-3 in non-conference play, Ballard thinks there can be some improvements before conference play. "We have struggled in various aspects of each game, but it's early in the season, so that's usually the case," he said. Ballard added, "We have shown signs of being a good

team. We haven't put a full 40 minutes together yet, but we will."

Concordia is in a tough conference for basketball, so there are many games that the team is eagerly anticipating. Krystkowiak said, "I'm excited for all games, but I'm very excited to play Point Loma. I'm from San Diego, and it will be good for my family to come out and support, so yeah, can't wait for that."

A game day routine is something that can help athletes prepare for their game, and Krystkowiak has one. "Pre-game shower always and put on some music, baby, doesn't matter what it is, I listen to everything, but mostly put some hype music on before the game."

Reaching the collegiate level in basketball is challenging, but Ballard offered some advice on how to achieve this goal. "Stay consistent and work hard, always control things that you can control, you know, there are a lot of aspects in college basketball that you can't control, and make sure to focus on school and your own life during the offseason and season."

Support the Golden Eagles and defend the nest at their second conference game against Azusa Pacific on Sat. Dec. 6 at 7:15 p.m. For more information on their schedule and their results, visit <https://cuigoldeneagles.com/sports/mens-basketball/schedule>

Celebrate the Holidays on Balboa Island

JORDAN VANDER VEEN
STAFF WRITER

Take a break from studying and enjoy a fun, festive night out with friends. During the holidays, Balboa Island, in Newport Beach, turns into a magical winter wonderland. The homes, docks, and walkways are decorated extravagantly for Christmas. Explore the "Ring of Lights" on Balboa Island to get you out of a study funk and get you into the Christmas spirit.

Newport Beach resident Summer Perry said, "The lights make me smile every single time. I drive through Balboa three to four times a week, and without fail, those lights just fill my heart."

The Christmas lights on Balboa Island bring the community together and create a magical festive atmosphere. "Each year, more and more streets join in, and it's become this sweet way of bringing everyone together—kids, parents, neighbors, all inspired by Balboa," said

Perry.

Junior Dominique Vadeboncoeur, said, "It provides something in the community to gather people together to enjoy and talk about."

Bundle up and enjoy a stroll with friends, picking out your favorite themed homes. Look out for the Bear House, which has over 6,000 bears displayed in the windows and the beach ball Christmas trees, which are decorative Christmas trees made from beach balls.

Vadeboncoeur said, "The best way to enjoy the lights is going on a nice long walk around the island with hot coffee, tea or cocoa in hand."

"We grab hot cocoa or coffees, turn on Michael Bublé Christmas albums, and stroll up and down the streets soaking it all in," said Perry.

The beautiful Balboa lights are about twenty minutes from campus. The lights are prettiest at night,

so plan an evening trip after sunset. Drive down Marine Ave and look for open parking spots on the side streets. Then, grab a hot cocoa and a Balboa bar from Sugar 'N Spice and walk down the streets to take in the sights. The best way to see the lights is by walking along the South Bayfront and doing a full loop around the island, which is about a mile.



PICTURED ABOVE: A festive decorated house on Balboa Island.
Photo courtesy of: Safari



PICTURED ABOVE: The Bear House on Balboa Island.
Photo courtesy of: Safari

Concordia students react to the recent government shutdown

LAURYN SCOON
STAFF WRITER

On Wed., Nov. 12, the United States House of Representatives passed legislation to end a 43-day government shutdown that affected millions of Americans by restoring funding for federal services and air traffic control operations.

Sophomore Olivia Garza Hermosillo, a current Behavioral Science major, expressed that she initially felt a mix of confusion and concern regarding the government shutdown. She said, “I know shutdowns happen when the government can’t agree on a budget, but it still felt surprising that things had reached that point again. I also worried about how it would affect everyday people who rely on government services or federal jobs.”

She added, “While I didn’t experience any major changes in my own daily life, I did see other people dealing with delays in federal services like passport processing. In the community, I noticed increased stress for people who rely on public programs or hold government jobs, since many of them were unsure about their pay or access to certain services.”

Junior Aliya Reeder, a Liberal Arts major, said she was personally impacted by the government shutdown. “I didn’t know much about the shutdown until I was returning to California from a trip to St. Louis. During my layover in Denver with my fiancé, our 10 p.m. flight kept getting pushed back, and we didn’t board until about 1 a.m. We left even later because a drunk passenger

was angry about the delays and had to be removed by police,” she said.

Reeder expressed that experiencing the effects of the stalemate first-hand made her dissatisfied with how the government operates during a shutdown. She said, “This made me frustrated at Congress because of how easily they sacrificed so many facets of everyday life of average people in order to kick the political football to one another.”

About 1.4 million federal employees and 42 million Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients were impacted by Congress as they were unable to agree on a funding bill for the 2026 fiscal year. Because the Antideficiency Act prohibits agencies from spending money without Congressional approval, the standstill prompted a shutdown.

Dr. Bryan Santin, professor of History and Political Thought, explained that governmental shutdowns are intended as budgeting tools, but are often used as political weapons, as in this case. “This looks like the type of situation that James Madison (often called the father of the Constitution) feared: Madison understood Congress to be the most powerful branch, but he also feared that its internal factions would sometimes override the public good in favor of narrow partisan advantage,” he said.

He added, “The shutdown looks like a drift from productive deliberation and disagreement (which

can be good) toward a damaging form of partisan brinkmanship.”

Santin shared that the shutdown resulted from deeper structural disagreements, rather than a single policy dispute. “For members of Congress in both parties, it looks like they believed that their respective voters would reward confrontation, instead of cooperation and compromise, which does not bode well for the future either,” he said.

With Reeder’s first-hand experience from the shutdown, she feels that the government should have preparations in place beforehand, so that it does not cause disruptions in Americans’ lives. “I would appreciate it if the government had enough foresight to provide for the wages of truly essential employees and the federal government. I believe supplies and pay should be provided to essential jobs in

the government that affect the day-to-day lives of Americans more directly than the average bureaucratic agency,” she said.

Echoing Reeder, Garza Hermosillo said, “It would help to have policies ensuring federal workers still receive pay or at least emergency support and to have clearer communication from the government. Better long-term planning might also reduce how often shutdowns occur.”

Santin agreed that the government should have preventions in place for the future, but must be careful not to disrupt the checks and balances of the branches. “Careful reforms would probably need to preserve Congress’s power while reducing the incentives to use the budget as a political hostage and create this type of crisis in the future. But that would only happen if voters hold both parties accountable,” he said.

Courier staff picks best places to study off-campus for finals

STAFF REPORT

Maks DuPont, Campus Editor: I have lived on campus for my four years here, but when I go out and study, I like to go to the park. I have also done some homework and hung out with friends at the local Starbucks here.

Teagan Algarra, Layout Editor: My favorite coffee shop would have to be Lion and Lamb Coffee Roasters in Costa Mesa! They have a ton of seating and a lovely seasonal menu. MoonGoat in Irvine and Costa Mesa is great too. My last recommendation would be Salty Horse in Costa Mesa; it’s another new study location that’s open as late as 8 p.m. Most of their seating is outdoor, though, but the environment is extremely cozy!

Lion and the Lamb: 3186 Pullman St, Costa Mesa, CA 92626

MoonGoat in Irvine: 5171 California Ave, Suite 100, Irvine, California 92617

Salty Horse: 2246 Newport Blvd, Costa Mesa, CA 92627

Caroline Wong, Faculty Advisor: I love Coffee Dose in Irvine. This is my go-to spot for meeting up with girlfriends or casual work meetings. Great drinks, cute pink trailer.

Originally recommended by Concordia alum Alexis Rios, I go there all the time now. Best enjoyed with good outdoor weather. 7 Corporate Park, Irvine. <https://coffeedose.cafe/>. The Lost Bean also serves great hot coffees, blended drinks, breakfast and lunch. Seating options include inside, outside patio (good for dogs) or grab a bench and enjoy your coffee with a view of North Lake. 4632 Barranca Pkwy, Suite 4632, Irvine. <https://thelostbean.com/>

Kiara Azuma, Online/Social Editor: My go-to spot for studying is MoonGoat Coffee Roasters. It is only a 10-minute drive from campus, making it very accessible. Not only do they offer drinks, but also a great selection of food and pastries to enjoy while studying. They have both indoor and outdoor seating, allowing you to choose either the classic coffee shop ambiance or enjoy some sun while studying. Best perk: free Wi-Fi! 5171 California Ave, Irvine.

Rebekah Michel, Editor-in-Chief: I love Philz Coffee for a mid-day caffeine and study break. They have locations throughout Orange County, but the one in Costa Mesa is a quick 10-minute drive and is conveniently located near South Coast Plaza and John Wayne Airport. Their coffee is always delicious, and they have many places to study indoors and outside. 3420 Bristol St, Costa Mesa, CA.



PICTURED ABOVE: The U.S. capital building in Washington, DC. The 43-day shutdown magnified party divisions in Washington. Photo courtesy of: Shutterstock

Eight Concordia students close out semester abroad in England

CHAD HAYES
STAFF WRITER

In just over two weeks, eight Concordia students studying abroad at Westfield House through the Concordia Cambridge program will say goodbye to England and head home to the U.S.

Amidst writing final papers and studying for exams, the students are reflecting on their experiences studying abroad. Anna Roettjer, a sophomore History and Political Thought major, said, “I love just being able to walk 20 minutes and go to a big historical site and being able to see the architecture and experience a whole other culture right in my backyard.”

Troy Randall, a junior Communications major and Music minor said, “My favorite part about studying abroad is being able to travel to new countries every weekend and the people I can travel with.”

Departure day, Dec. 20, is coming quickly, but the students are soaking in the rest of their time in Cambridge. Many of the students have favorite coffee shops and study spots that they are making the most of while finishing their work. Movie nights are frequent, especially as Christmas approaches. The eighteen students from Westfield House have become a family of sorts, celebrating birthdays and Thanksgiving away from home. Many of the students will be leaving with new interests in academic

areas they learned about while abroad. All of the students will be leaving with new friends and good memories.

The Concordia Cambridge program at Westfield House has been a valuable experience for the cohort. The students have learned to live in a new country, adjust to different customs and explore another side of the world, gaining practical life skills along the way. From grocery shopping and cooking to traveling and using public transportation, studying abroad has been an amazing way to take education a step further than the classroom. Not only do the students get to tour incredible historical sites, but they also get to live in one and experience it over the course of three months. Cambridge is a city home to many historic sites, but most notably Cambridge University, one of the oldest universities in the entire world.

The students have explored many of England’s most famous cities (London is only a 45-minute train ride away from Cambridge), but also had the opportunity to take weekend trips to places such as Italy and Scotland. Some have gone to the Louvre Museum in Paris and others have wandered through the Christmas markets in Vienna, Austria. Studying abroad is an amazing opportunity to travel, both around the host country and its neighboring ones!

Roettjer said, “I think my favorite place was Bath, it was just so beautiful. Every place you turned there was something cool to look at, and the Roman Baths were really cool to see...And I love going down to London, it’s so cool to be so close to a big city like that.”

In January, these eight students, part of the Cambridge cohort, will return to Concordia, ready to begin their semester on campus again. They will be happy to talk with any prospective Concordia Cambridge students and share their experiences!

The Concordia Cambridge program has run for years between Concordia University Irvine and Westfield House and is a great option for high-achieving students looking to challenge themselves while exploring more of the world. Concordia sends students to Cambridge every fall semester. The application for fall 2026 is due on March 1. For more information about the Concordia Cambridge program, visit the Moon International Center at Concordia or <https://www.cui.edu/academicprograms/programs-abroad/partner-programs-abroad/concordia-cambridge-england>.

Concordia Cambridge is not the only study abroad option for students, however. In the past, students have studied through Living and Learning International

programs in both Quito, Ecuador and Rome, Italy. Other opportunities are direct exchange programs through ISEP, the International Student Exchange Program. Concordia offers over 50 study abroad programs that students can take advantage of and gain a practical component to their education. Studying abroad takes learning beyond the classroom and textbooks and into the real world.

“Many students start their study abroad journey wanting to step outside of their comfort zone or gain independence — but during and after their time abroad, they discover even more benefits: exposure to different academic expectations, expanded global perspectives and a professional network that can support them throughout their careers,” Dana Peterson, Assistant Director of Moon International Center explained.

For the full list of opportunities to study abroad, email programsabroad@cui.edu or visit <https://www.cui.edu/academicprograms/programs-abroad/partner-programs-abroad>. Studying abroad is open to students of all majors with sophomore standing or above. Set up a meeting today with the study abroad office to discuss your options for a semester abroad!



PICTURED ABOVE: Westfield Students at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: Students in Cambridge
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed



PICTURED ABOVE: Students at the Louvre Museum
L to R- Hollyn Merrick, Anna Roettjer, Kayla Reed
Photo courtesy of: Kayla Reed