

DAILY TROJAN

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Art by Molly He

DEBATE | President said he believed the excluded candidates were 'crying foul'

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Material that he canceled the debate when ABC7 was unwilling to increase the number of invited candidates.

Kim also said that when making the decision to cancel the debate, he did not take into account "demands" from excluded candidates or other state legislators.

"The excluded candidates, in my opinion, were crying foul," Kim said during Wednesday's meeting. "[The debate] was to provide a forum for voters to hear from candidates. I ultimately decided that USC was becoming a distraction to that process and it was becoming a debate about the debate."

Kim said he believed that no matter what the University did, it would be criticized. So ultimately, he decided to do what he "thought was right."

Clifford Neuman, an associate professor of computer science practice, asked Kim why the decision fell on the president's office rather than the CPF to cancel the debate.



Henry Kofman / Daily Trojan

President Beong-Soo Kim, pictured in a February campus media briefing, said that no matter what USC did, it would be criticized.

In response, Kim said he made the decision because he was involved in the debate planning and that the letters demanding it be cancelled were addressed to him personally. He also said that Bob Shrum, the director of CPF, likely disagreed with the decision.

Kim said that he is taking this as an opportunity for growth, and hopes USC will stay politically active in the future.

"It would be great if we could host another debate, whether in this cycle or next cycle," Kim said. "Hopefully, there are some lessons learned here."

OLYMPICS | USC will host the track and field events



Talha Rafique / Daily Trojan file photo

A USC operations official said that while LA28 should have no financial impact on USC, the school will have to be reimbursed properly.

[continued from page 3]

faculty] to be a part of the conversation," Cederbaum said.

Prior to the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics, USC installed barbed wire fencing around the University perimeter to manage security and crowd control. In the years that followed, the wire evolved into the permanent brick and wrought-iron fencing that now encloses the campus.

In response to the Spring 2024 pro-Palestinian encampment, the University put in place enhanced security measures at campus entry points, including mandatory ID scans and bag checks. Bag checks and mandatory ID scans during public operating hours were removed in August 2025, soon after President Beong-Soo Kim took over as interim president.

Ewalt also said USC has not yet decided if it will be able to sustain a summer program in 2028 because of the increased security. Earlier this month, University administrators said USC will implement a new scholarship model to improve the affordability of summer enrollment, as well as expand access to popular summer classes and offer more small, in-person classes.

Ewalt said that while the Olympics should have no financial impact on USC, there will be costs involved that the University will have to figure out how to quantify in order to be reimbursed properly.

Less parking will be available at USC during the Olympics and Paralympics, Ewalt said, but USC is committed to finding a "creative solution."



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CORRECTIONS

to articles published in print issues of the *Daily Trojan*

AN ARTICLE RAN March 25 with the headline: "Here's what led to the debate cancellation" stated at multiple points that USC and ABC7 hosted and invited candidates to the debate. The article was updated to reflect that the USC Dornsife School of Letters, Arts and Sciences Center for the Political Future and ABC7 hosted and invited candidates to the debate.

The *Daily Trojan* regrets this error.

DAILY TROJAN

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USC ACCEPTS 11.7% OF APPLICANTS IN FALL 2026 CYCLE

The acceptance rate went up by 0.5 percentage points from last year's admissions.

By FEIYU LONG & ADAM YOUNG

Daily Trojan

USC admitted 11.7% of its applicants for Fall 2026, with 9,251 undergraduate admits, the Office of Admission wrote in a statement to the *Daily Trojan* on Thursday. The University admitted 11.2% of applicants for last year's fall semester.

The University received 79,290 undergraduate applications for the Fall 2026 cycle, a roughly 5% drop from last year's record-breaking 83,500 applicants.

The unweighted grade point average for the class is a record high 3.92, the Office of Admission wrote, up 0.02 from last year.

"The academic strength of this admitted class is truly exceptional," Dean of Admission Timothy Brunold wrote in a statement to the *Daily Trojan*. "Our highly selective admission rate reflects both the depth of interest in USC and how extraordinarily prepared these students are for our rigorous academic environment."

More than half of the applicants in the 2026-27 admissions cycle participated in the early action round, according to January data from the Office of Admission, which constituted about 41% of total acceptances in this admission cycle. If early action applicants are neither admitted nor rejected, they can get deferred to the regular decision pool.

The acceptance rate during the early action round was about 9.5%. Even though the early action acceptance rate this year is the highest it has been since the University implemented the early action option in the 2022-23 admission cycle, it is still lower than the overall Fall 2026 admission rate of 11.7%.

The 2025-26 admission cycle marks the first year that the University implemented an early decision option for admission, albeit only available for undergraduate business and accounting programs in the Marshall School of Business. USC announced in February that it will offer an early decision option for most of the undergraduate programs starting the next admission cycle. Students applying through the early decision option will not be permitted to apply to other institutions through early decision.



Tai Lyn Sandhu / Daily Trojan file photo
USC received a lower number of applicants than last year.



Henry Kofman / Daily Trojan file photo

President Beong-Soo Kim, pictured at the Spring 2025 convocation, said that when making the decision to cancel the debate, he did not take into account "demands" from excluded candidates or other state legislators.

Kim reflects on cancelled debate

President Beong-Soo Kim said ABC7 was not willing to invite more candidates.

By STELLA MUZIN
Assistant News Editor

President Beong-Soo Kim said Wednesday during an Academic Senate meeting he wished he had the time to talk to other University stakeholders, like the debate's planned host, the USC Center for the Political Future, before cancelling the California gubernatorial debate.

"The conversation with [ABC7] went very late into the night and

things moved so fast," Kim said. "In hindsight, I wish there had been more time for me to bring others directly into the conversation; not just CPF but also other faculty."

ABC7 and the Center for the Political Future planned to co-host California's Gubernatorial Debate on March 24. They invited the top six candidates to the debate based on a formula created by USC professor Christian Grose that emphasized polling and fundraising numbers.

When no candidates of color received an invitation due to none making the criteria's top six most viable winners, Democratic candidate

Xavier Becerra, former United States Health and Human Services secretary, wrote a letter accusing USC of purposefully excluding candidates of color from the stage.

On top of Becerra's letter, Kim received a separate letter March 24, signed by California Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas, California Senate President Pro Tempore Monique Limón and seven major legislative caucus leaders. The letter demanded USC "open the March 24 gubernatorial debate to all leading candidates."

Less than 24 hours before the event, Kim canceled the debate and said in an interview with L.A.

| see **DEBATE**, page 2 |

US SECRET SERVICE WILL BE ON CAMPUS DURING OLYMPICS

USC 2028 Summer program may not take place due to heightened LA28 security.

By FEIYU LONG & STELLA MUZIN

Assistant News Editors

Mark Ewalt, USC's executive director of operations and compliance, said during Wednesday's Academic Senate meeting that the United States Secret Service will establish "stop and search zones" in specific parts of campus during the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics.

During Summer 2028 and Fall 2028, people passing through those zones will be searched. It was not immediately clear which parts of campus would include the heightened security.

Ewalt said the security changes that will come to USC are a part of hosting "the highest level security for any event in the world." USC will host the marquee track and field events and the opening ceremony in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, as well as badminton and rhythmic gymnastics at Galen Center. Additionally, University Park Campus is slated to be the home of press and media operations.

"All the details are not worked out, even though we've been working on this for the better part of three years," Ewalt said.

Julie Cederbaum, a professor of social work, said she was concerned about the impact these zones would have on student and faculty experience at USC.

"[I] would just like culture and morale [of USC students and

| see **OLYMPICS**, page 2 |

How students can engage in city politics

Students can get involved in city elections by taking part in campaigns or voting.

By BANI CHAUHAN
Politics Beat Writer

From paved sidewalks to United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement's presence in Los Angeles, Diego Andrades, assistant director of USC's Center for the Political Future, said there are a variety of problems that students face but can only be resolved by engaging with L.A. city politics.

"They live in the city. So whether or not they're tuned in, a lot of the things that [L.A.] deal[s] with every day are affecting them," Andrades said. "It feels like federal politics and state politics sometimes are more impactful, but the truth is that local politics really determine what happens in your day to day."

What is the importance of local elections?

Dan Schnur, adjunct professor at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and Marshall School of Business, said USC students should care

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Kate Henry / Daily Trojan

OPINION

PAGE 4 | FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026 | WWW.DAILYTROJAN.COM/OPINION

The US wouldn't survive another draft

Compulsorily enlisting a politically aware generation is a formula for revolution.

By ALEX GROSS
Staff Writer

If you were assigned male at birth, live in the United States and are between the ages of 18 and 25, you might want to start paying attention to what's happening in Iran. It's voluntary to choose however much or little you're educated on U.S. involvement in the Middle East, but what might soon be involuntary is if you're putting your life on the line for it.

Those eligible for the selective service almost entirely make up the demographic of college men. We all got that letter from the Department of Defense shortly after our 18th birthdays; a reminder that, along with the freedom granted by adulthood, there's also the conscription to serve under the current president, who, with a 36% approval rating according to Reuters, you might not agree with.

A reinstatement of the selective service is hopefully still far from becoming reality, given that there haven't been any boots on the ground in Iran yet and the U.S. already has an active-duty military of over 1.3 million members. But White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said earlier this month that President Donald Trump wants to "keep his options on the table."

Among these options is the non-zero chance of another military draft. Another option left on the table seems to be using U.S. soldiers, including 2,000 paratroopers deployed to the Middle East on Tuesday, even after the president said last week that he was "not putting troops anywhere."

Ryan Leighty, a 19-year-old seaman in the Coast Guard, said in an interview with the *Daily Trojan* on Wednesday that he "wasn't too concerned" before being told by a station leader that there was a "pretty good chance" he would be deployed to the region.

Being apolitical is a privilege allotted only to a select part of society; those financially stable enough not to be affected by inflation or tariffs, those white enough not to be targeted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and those healthy enough not to need government assistance.

The horrifying beauty of the draft is that during a time of military conscription, none of these factors matter. As soon as you're drafted, your simple existence as an American becomes political.

A large reason why the Vietnam War sparked such a widespread countercultural movement was that the draft brought together different corners of American society who previously had no use for solidarity. This effect would be exponentially greater today in a



Sasha Ryu / Daily Trojan file photo

Generation Z is very unlikely to jump at the opportunity to enlist to fight in the US-Israel war in Iran under President Donald Trump's leadership.

society that's even more polarized and has even less reason to form a polypartisan coalition.

"At least in recent years, [this is] probably the most bipartisan issue," said Joshua Marucci, a sophomore majoring in philosophy, politics and law, about the conflict in Iran. "Obviously there's still people that are enthusiastic about it, [but] I think that's

definitely to a lesser degree than a lot of other conflicts."

Foreign conflicts are no longer mythological escapades that take place thousands of miles away and occupy a small space in the back of our heads. Vietnam was the first war broadcast into the homes of Americans on a nightly basis, just as wars in the Middle East are the first to flood short-form algorithms.

If a military draft were to happen today, it would not only birth a cultural revolution, but also a political one.

"You'd probably see very similar sentiments [to Vietnam] among especially the younger generation," Marucci said. "This is an unnecessary war primarily being fought for the ideals of American imperialism.

A poll by *The Economist* showed Trump's approval rating among Generation Z to be only 25%. An NPR survey showed that only 36% of 18 to 29-year-olds supported how President Trump is handling U.S. military action in Iran.

These sentiments are heightened in federal employees working without paychecks in the midst of a partial government shutdown.

"Our government has enough money to start wars in foreign countries, but not to pay [us]," Leighty said.

A deployment to Iran wouldn't even mean protecting American freedoms; U.S. involvement has been baselessly justified so far as an attempt to neutralize the age-old supposed threat of nuclear weapons.

Being forced to risk their lives on foreign soil for a government that has repeatedly failed to ensure its citizens' First Amendment rights at home would be — and should be — Gen Z's last straw. A war fought by dissident soldiers would trigger a fight not against American enemies, but against the American government itself.

What are we really training for?

Soefae Chen

VITAL SIGNS



The other day, a stranger commented under my Strava post, "What are you training for?"

I responded with, "Old age," and was met with laughter from other commenters.

I've been an on-and-off runner since high school. During my off seasons as a boxer, I run merely to stay active and feel alive.

During competition season, when my coaches required that I download Strava to track my cardio, I considered protesting. I enjoyed the extra running, but I have been curating my Instagram profile since I was 10 years old and didn't want to obsess over yet another form of online self-expression subject to public critique.

With Strava, however, not only was my appearance being judged, but also my effort and results.

Social fitness tracking apps map your workout routes, rank your pace

on leaderboards and share these statistics with other users who can like, comment and compare. Strava frames this as encouragement: "Track your progress and cheer each other on," its website reads.

And maybe, sometimes, it is. Yet, once my previously private routine became visible as data and consumed as others' content, it also became legible as a performance that requires evaluation. Just as my strong runs felt like proof of life, my slower runs seemed to require justification.

App-based competitions can increase physical activity substantially; a 2017 National Library of Medicine large-scale analysis found a 23% increase in physical activity, particularly among previously inactive users in response to the gamification of exercise through mobile apps.

On the surface, that is a genuine public-health success, but the same mechanism that gets people moving can also redirect them to a narrow, social lens, where the motive behind working out can shift from something intrinsic — like self-care — to something performed.

Michael Li, a sophomore majoring in biomedical engineering, ran the Los Angeles Marathon two weeks ago. He is a mutual of mine on Strava, but I hadn't realized he was training for it.

A lot of the time, Li said he looks at his Strava account and thinks, "Oh, this is not a good run."

"If I don't hit a certain pace, distance, or if I feel really terrible during a run, it puts me off," he said. "I just private [the post]. It just doesn't show for public."

His mindset, he said with laughter, is "PR or ER," meaning breaking a personal record or going to the emergency room. The joke lands because it's funny, but only partly. He ran the marathon with only 16 weeks of training as a starting point in his journey into endurance sports.

Before he graduates, Li said he wants to qualify for the Boston Marathon, which has incredibly strict qualifying times. Later, he said he plans to complete an Ironman — a consecutive 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and a full 26.2-mile marathon run — and HYROX — a combination of repeated endurance

runs and functional strength training — races too.

The ambition and grit required to compete in such races are as admirable as the outcome, but there is also something telling in what doesn't make it onto the feed. Even before the race, the story of the race is already edited into a version of effort that is clean, upward and self-possessed.

This is where fitness tracking becomes morally complicated.

These platforms are highly effective at encouraging consistency through the external validation of mutuals' kudos and comments. According to research published in the *Children and Youth Services Review* in December 2020, highly controlled and intense habits can be reinforced when they align with cultural ideals of discipline and strength, even when psychologically distressing or physically harmful.

Social fitness apps don't necessarily create obsession, but they give it the structure; they can make sustainable training look identical to unhealthy compulsion: more miles, faster paces, greater frequency. The metrics flatten the difference. They cannot tell whether you are taking care

of yourself or pushing past limits because both register as progress.

When progress is defined too visibly and simply, the app can train us to think that only certain efforts count; it can make us ask whether a slow week was still valuable, whether effort matters if it cannot be posted.

And yet, I do not think the answer is to stop tracking altogether or to treat Strava like some kind of moral contaminant. The app merely reveals how quickly we can begin to measure ourselves by what is impressive to other people.

Perhaps the better question is not what we are training for in public, but what we are training for when no one is watching. We train for health, for ambition, for pleasure or for proof that we are still becoming.

Maybe the point is that some efforts are supposed to be bad, some efforts unrecorded — not because they don't count, but because they already do. The only person it should matter to is yourself.

Soefae Chen is a sophomore writing about health and fitness culture in her column, "Vital Signs," which runs every other Friday.

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CONSUMPTION

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Katiana Kartaltepe / Daily Trojan

Every day, we have a choice in what we decide to consume. The food, media and information presented to us are not picked at random; they are curated and selected through social influence and internal moral frameworks. Even the smallest decision is made with intention. When we choose one restaurant over another, a streaming service over a movie screening, we signal what it is that we value most.

In an age where the choices seem endless and everything is literally at our fingertips, we should be scrutinizing these decisions and what they mean for others. Whether we are saving money or time, where we place our attention implicates what we care about.

This supplement is focused on that very idea. What do members of the USC community and

Angelenos at large pay attention to and pick? How are these decisions then felt in other parts of life?

Beyond the environmental and political implications of consumption habits, affinity can also be formed over shared patterns. We are drawn to the things, tangible or intangible, that people we like are also partial to, and often find those people through those very decisions.

Whether you are interested in the impact of romantic media on real-life relationships, the intersection of food and politics, or why physical traces of our past are vital to understanding our history, there is an article in this supplement waiting to be read by you.

— Anya Motwani,
Features Editor

Order up! Jackson Market and Deli serves political advocacy with lunch

The Culver City restaurant raises awareness and funds for aid efforts in Palestine.

By **ANYA MOTWANI**
Features Editor

Nestled on a quiet residential street in Culver City, Jackson Market and Deli serves more than just food. Even in the middle of a Monday afternoon, customers can be seen greeting the owners on their way in with a touching familiarity — friends rather than patrons.

Owners Fawaz Istwani and Nick Conner created a space that supports relief efforts in Palestine through fundraising and events, and offers their neighbors a place for community.

The market first opened in 1925 as a convenience-type store offering gas station snacks and limited goods. Though the market is now a breath of fresh air amid the bustle of Los Angeles, it was initially shaped by an unwelcoming environment and a focus on profits.

Istwani first encountered Jackson Market and Deli in 2000, after leaving Santa Barbara where his parents owned a market and was frustrated that he could not find a job.

“I wanted to work; the guy was gonna sell,” Istwani said. “It wasn’t doing well, [it was a] dumpy store. I mean, it was linoleum floors. There [was] nothing like this.”

Cigarettes and lottery tickets were a staple of the initial market, but in the following 26 years, Istwani and Conner turned toward sandwiches. Ultimately, the enterprise transformed into a permanent fixture within the local community. More than just a restaurant, the ethos of Jackson Market centers on giving back and offering a place for everyone.

“We keep improving the space, and that’s really well received,” Conner said. “We try to do a lot to support local schools. ... We do a really healthy discount for all the city workers and police [and] the fire department. [We] do fundraisers for the schools [and] basketball team, and it’s a community store.”

For Istwani, the store was never about making the most amount of money; it’s meant to be a place where customers should feel like guests in a home.

“The more [we] kept putting back into the property, rather

than just taking the profit ... in the long term, [that] builds up a lot of goodwill, a lot of repeat customers,” Conner said. “We watch kids grow up, and in some cases, that makes me feel old, but at the same time, it’s really cool, because you just see how it keeps circulating.”

In 2023, the market’s focus shifted slightly when Istwani realized the potential the business had in raising awareness about the war in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis affecting Palestinians.

Istwani, whose family was originally from Palestine, said he saw how selective news coverage was and he felt there was a general lack of knowledge regarding the region’s history — especially after the start of the Israel-Hamas war — which meant that many of his neighbors

and peers had no framework to understand the current war.

“A lot of people don’t even know what Palestine is,” Istwani said. “I had to talk. I had to tell people the story, because kids are dying.”

Since then, Jackson Market has hosted fundraisers for relief in Palestine and Sudan and documentary screenings of films like “No Other Land” (2024) and “Palestine 1920: The Other Side of the Palestinian Story” (2022). They’ve even held dialogues with organizations like Human Library, a Denmark-based nonprofit organization that helps provide a forum for difficult conversations. In September 2024, the market announced that 24% of its proceeds that year would be donated to mutual aid efforts in Gaza.

The market also played a role in a 2023 resolution approved by the Culver City Council, “condemning the recent attacks on Israel and standing in solidarity with Israel and its people.” The resolution, passed two weeks after the Oct. 7 attack, made two mentions of Palestinian casualties, but for Istwani and Conner, it was still skewed.

“They’ve been killing Palestinians and now, after Oct. 7, why don’t we protect both?” Istwani said. “We were very angry. How can our city automatically pass it?”

Only three people spoke in support of the resolution, according to Istwani, one of them being a prior patron of Jackson Market, who no longer comes due to the Palestinian flag in the market’s back patio.

“He used to be one of our best customers,” Istwani said.

Alongside organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and Not in My Name, the market brought over 400 people to the Culver City Council to petition a resolution calling for a ceasefire in the region. However, the council still would not adopt the ceasefire resolution.

For the most part, Jackson Market’s political advocacy has received positive responses from customers, according to Istwani. Their involvement has garnered the attention of patrons from well outside of Culver City, with visitors traveling from Orange County, West L.A. and the like coming to eat.

“The ambience is definitely one of the biggest [draws],” said Alice Medrano, an L.A.-based artist. “I did notice that the workers are wearing ‘Free Palestine’ shirts, and I definitely like that aspect of it as well. ... I’d like to see [political engagement] from more businesses and more people, just in general.”

For Khalid Doufesh, a Westchester resident, part of the draw of coming back to Jackson Market is that it is Palestinian-owned.

“[I’m] just supporting my people,” Doufesh said.

Heritage is a key aspect of Istwani’s work and political involvement.

“[Palestine] was there for thousands of years,” Istwani said. “My name goes back 1,000 years. My last name Istwani means ‘circle.’ We used to sit in a circle and make peace among our tribe. I exist. You check my DNA, I go back to that land.”

But the restaurant has also faced backlash. Most weeks, they are audited based on false complaints about rats or their appliances, according to the owners.

“We’ve had attacks on us,” Istwani said. “They called the health department on us. They called the city on us ... because we’re pro-Palestine.”

Despite the controversy now surrounding the restaurant, owners Istwani and Conner feel proud of the work they have done.

“Part of what I didn’t realize is how it creates a space for people right here to come together that are affected by these things,” Conner said. “It takes a lot to do it. You don’t find places like this too often, because you have to leverage a lot, be willing to sacrifice a lot just in case, but we’ve been really blessed.”



Anya Motwani / Daily Trojan

Fawaz Istwani and Nick Conner, co-owners of Jackson Market and Deli, help provide a space for fresh air, greenery and political engagement at their Culver City restaurant.

Consuming love in the age of algorithms

When romance becomes content, expectations for connection start to shift.

By **ANDREW CARDENAS & ARIA HAJALI**

Daily Trojan

Love is often imagined as resisting logic — a force that happens to us, emotional and unpredictable, rather than something we choose.

Today, love is increasingly shaped by systems that ask people to define preferences, filter options and evaluate potential partners — turning spontaneity into calculation.

This logic shapes not just how we meet, but how we imagine love. Streaming platforms deliver constant, personalized romance, setting standards that real relationships often struggle to meet.

Dan Lainer-Vos, an assistant teaching professor of sociology, framed love through the lens of “enchantment” and “disenchantment.”

“If we think about rationalization as turning life into a process of calculation and measurement, love is often imagined as the complete opposite,” Lainer-Vos said. “[Love is] something that happens to us, outside of our control, almost behind our back.”

For Angela Mvogo, a freshman majoring in communication, that tension is already visible in the way her peers navigate connection.

“We’re socialized to believe in certain archetypes of love ... that don’t translate as well to real life,” Mvogo said. “It can be difficult to form genuine relationships because the expectations are so high, so you end up pushing away people who don’t meet a standard that’s unrealistic.”

Romantic media celebrates spontaneous, fated love, but in real life, love is shaped by choice and

evaluation — what Lainer-Vos describes as a “rigorous search process” of comparing potential partners.

That contradiction is most visible in modern dating. Online, an endless pool of potential partners forces users to define what they want, accept and reject.

“If you don’t define these criteria, you don’t really operate the system,” Lainer-Vos said. “You’re not optimizing your search.”

Love has become a marketplace: people are products, endlessly compared rather than seen as unique — a shift from the traditional ideal of romantic love.

“We are sifting through multiple candidates and [comparing],” said Lainer-Vos. “Sometimes we learn about things that we like through those comparisons or things that we don’t like.”

In this environment, attraction is shaped over time, built from patterns rather than singular meaningful encounters. Lainer-Vos said, people become connoisseurs, learning what they like — and what they reject — through constant comparison.

Mvogo reflected on grappling with this comparative and formulaic journey to love in real life.

“It can feel more cerebral because you’re comparing yourself to [real] people ... around your age,” Mvogo said. “The unrealistic expectations and pressure can become mounting at that point.”

At the same time, the content people consume is far from neutral. Just as people curate themselves on dating apps, social media has become another space where individuals carefully craft how they want to be seen.

Unlike everyday conversations, where presentation is flexible and fleeting, online profiles and posts

are more stable and deliberate — a fixed version of self that others can view, evaluate and respond to. Creating an online profile requires conscious choices about how to present yourself, Lainer-Vos said.

“Essentially, if you build your own profile, you have to sit in many pictures of you and say, ‘I want the world to see me like that,’” Lainer-Vos said. “And you need to think about, ‘Okay, do I overemphasize being funny? Prioritize this? Why? How do I present myself?’”

This curation isn’t just theoretical. Maraella Khoo, a freshman majoring in music industry, manages social media for indie artists and has seen how creators carefully curate their public identities.

These efforts are designed to create a version of someone audiences can easily understand and connect with, highlighting their best moments while leaving out the messy realities.

“Every piece of their content is so curated and is designed to show their best moments. ... It isn’t as authentic as it seems,” Khoo said. “With social media, I don’t think you can ever get the entire picture of what someone is like.”

And yet, the media we consume rarely reflects this reality. This gap between representation and experience can produce dissatisfaction. Real relationships, with their ambiguity and effort, struggle to compete with the clarity of fiction.

That same logic of curation isn’t just individual — it is embedded in the platforms themselves.

Algorithms intensify this dynamic, shaping not just what people see, but how they experience it. Platforms like Netflix and TikTok deliver rapid, personalized bursts of content, reinforcing ideals of romance and teaching what love “should” feel like.

The long-term effects of this personalization remain unclear, but it

shapes expectations. Some viewers may seek intensity above all; others drawn to cynicism may approach love skeptically. Emotional expectations are shaped as much by curated media as by real experience.

Mvogo sees that tension reflected in how people’s real-life expectations are shaped by the media they consume.

“I’d hope love at first sight is real ... but, people mistake love for lust or maybe infatuation,” Mvogo said. “You’re basically projecting all of these things you want in a partner onto this person before you’ve even had the chance to get to meet them and know them.”

Together, these systems don’t operate in isolation — they reinforce one another and shape how people seek, present and ultimately understand love.

Belief and behavior don’t always align. The systems guiding love impose a logic beyond the stories we consume, leaving modern romance caught between enchantment and realism — felt emotionally, processed rationally.

These pressures don’t remain abstract — they shape how people interpret their own relationships in real time.

Technology has only intensified that dynamic, reshaping not just expectations, but behavior.

“[Social media has] normalized this codependency, and relationships always needing to be available,” Mvogo said. “People feel they’re entitled to your time ... and can easily create unhealthy relationship dynamics.”

Modern culture idealizes love as emotional and irrational, even as the pursuit of it becomes rationalized, Lainer-Vos said. Romantic media reflects this ideal — offering



Piril Zadi / Daily Trojan

frictionless intimacy that can be paused, replayed or abandoned.

To consume love is easy; to live it is not.

“I think we are far enough that we are maybe completely disenchanted about love,” Lainer-Vos said. “And a lot of people just think that love is a rational fear, that love is some sort of meat market that we need to maximize utility, and there’s nothing more than that — which, I think, is very tragic.”

Too many advertisements, not enough attention for them

What appears to be a part of daily routine reveals USC students’ consumer habits.

By **SARA MCCARTHY & SOFIA MUSAKHANOVA**

Staff Writers

As Donnie Jackson, a freshman majoring in communication, makes her commute through USC Village, her environment is shaped by the overwhelming presence of advertisements around the University.

Walking along Trousdale Parkway on USC’s campus seems like a small part of students’ daily routine, but a closer look reveals a dense marketplace of brands, organizations and campaigns all competing for their attention.

Ambassadors call out from their branded tables, offering samples or membership to an organization. Colorful posters are stacked along nearby walls. Flyers are handed out, strategically designed yet often discarded in minutes. These promotions are everywhere but are often avoided or unacknowledged by many in the USC community.

However, this lack of awareness doesn’t diminish their influence.

“People are simply overwhelmed,” said Lars Perner, an associate professor of clinical marketing at the Marshall School of Business. “There’s just so much going on around ... you kind of have to move on and ignore a lot of it.”

This sense of excess shapes the foundation of how these promotions are received. Students are constantly exposed to new persuasive content, but most of it is ignored almost instantly. Beyond visibility, an ongoing challenge for organizations

is drawing attention long enough to make a lasting impact.

“Around campus, I don’t generally notice that many [advertisements], but they probably are there,” said Chris Sanchez, a junior majoring in legal studies. “When I do see something, it’s probably because it caught my attention.”

Many students might not consider how the ads they consume could impact them, but Perner explained that their consumption may not always be conscious.

“Life is a kind of lifelong learning process,” Perner said. “By learning, I don’t mean learning in the academic sense so much as being exposed to different brands or different behaviors of people.”

Navigating this gap between visibility and influence requires student organizations to utilize strategic planning, sometimes paired with trial and error.

“Our major promotion is through Instagram, but sometimes we’ll do fundraising,” said Harley Chen, a member of the Chinese American Student Association and a junior majoring in cinema and media studies.

While social media builds long-term recognition, tabling on Trousdale can create an immediate familiarity.

Still, with USC’s busy environment, getting people to stop by remains one of the biggest challenges.

“Usually it’s because they’re busy and there’s a lot of fundraising going on here,” Chen said. “Maybe they’ll get overwhelmed, and a lot of stuff is overdone, so it’s kind of hard to get people to actually be interested in your advertising.”

To counter the noise, organizations rely on various tactics, some simple yet effective. Chen noted

| see **ATTENTION**, page 7 |

LA-based archives are proof of past

USC’s ONE Archives and the Los Angeles Public Library work to safeguard history.

By **MIA AREVALO & EMILY LOLENG**

Staff Writers

In today’s world, it seems that most information is just a Google search away. From breaking news to historical accounts, almost anything can be found given a few seconds and a wifi connection. But what contributes to this accessibility of information are carefully kept records, and behind these records, the dedicated people who maintain them.



Ethan Thai / Daily Trojan

USC’s ONE Archives provides the local community with physical traces of LGBTQIA+ history less than a mile away from campus.

| see **ARCHIVES**, page 7 |

of faith, said Bryzcki, one that believes stories of the past and present need to be remembered in the future.

This faith is reflected in the diverse collections that house thousands of photographs, newspapers, periodicals and, most recently, one copper box that spent a century hidden behind a men’s restroom wall.

This copper box, a time capsule placed in 1925, was unearthed earlier this year in light of the L.A. Central Library’s 100th anniversary.

The public’s reaction? Completely unexpected.

“The public reaction has been overwhelming,” said Lerew, a key orchestrator in the capsule’s removal. “The day that we unveiled it, we didn’t know what to expect. I would guess we had about 600 people, way more than we could fit in our auditorium and all of our meeting rooms that we’d set up [for] overflow.”

In the following weeks, Brzycki was met with numerous requests to view the capsule’s contents, which were initially housed in the Special Collections Reading Room, a demand that led to their current public display in the L.A. Central Library.

“There’s almost always somebody there looking at it,” Lerew said. “It is a rare opportunity to have such a direct physical connection to Angelenos of the past.”

To Lerew and Brzycki, this time capsule is a fulfillment of the mission that guides the L.A. Central Library: to collect, preserve and accurately represent the stories of L.A.’s past.

A mere 20-minute walk away from University Park Campus, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries has a strikingly similar mission: to protect and provide access to the stories of their community.

“Every time someone new steps into the archive and is amazed by what we have and feels seen,” said Alexis Bard

ATTENTION | Some USC students feel overwhelmed by promotional material

| continued from page 6 |

giveaways featuring popular drinks or items like matcha were a key tactic for effective marketing. Even brands not affiliated with the University can be seen around campus.

"We had the Summer Fridays pop-up that showed up a few weeks into the second semester, [where] everyone was able to go and get free things," Jackson said.

The presence of a group or a known brand creates a certain sense of trust, which Perner described as "social proof." This strategy can entice passersby to stop and interact with a given product. Still, for some students, the

promotional material they encounter daily proves tedious.

"To an extent [the advertisements] can get overwhelming," Jackson said. "It stresses people out more than it helps, even if that advertisement is exciting or has some sort of reward system attached to it."

While many students acknowledge the bombardment of marketing they face, Perner said that some may not realize the cost of this distraction.

"If you have a speaker on campus that you would've been interested in, but you don't notice the poster for that speaker because you're looking at so many other things... all of the different stimuli are actively distracting [you] from what you want," Perner said.

As students enter the final stretch of the spring semester, they will continue to navigate through the competitive web of advertising at USC, ultimately shaping the marketing trajectory and consumer behavior of the upcoming academic year. While the quantity of advertising may not change, students can find a better understanding of their consumer relationship.

"If you have a certain level of self-control, you can monitor whether it controls your behavior," Jackson said. "But I have to always remember the relevancy in which it can actually contribute to my college life."



Luis Ochea / Daily Trojan

Students encounter a variety of brands, on-campus organizations and independent retailers tabling daily on Trousdale Parkway as they make their way onto USC's campus.

ARCHIVES | Digitization and budgets pose issues

| continued from page 6 |

Johnson, curator and interim director of the ONE Archives. "That reminds us why we do what we do."

The archives, which started in the 1950s and boast the largest repository of LGBTQIA+ materials in the world, became part of USC in 2010. Its roots run deep in grassroots queer organizing and preservation, according to Johnson.

With memorabilia ranging from drag costumes to protest signs from some of the earliest marches on the White House, there are thousands of material pieces that illustrate LGBTQIA+ life before it was covered by mainstream media.

"We've been here for a while, and we're not going anywhere," Johnson said. "It's super important ... that we exist and people can come here and feel ... that they're not the first person to have felt XYZ type of way. There's a community for them."

For decades, print media was a lifeline for LGBTQIA+ people, being the only way they could communicate with one another, according to Johnson. Many of these publications — the smaller, local ones — can't be found online, so these physical copies that the archives maintain, which document past struggles, she said are even more critical.

"We have the playbook," Johnson said. "Going back to history and playing some of that again at this current moment is very important, and we have an archive that helps us do that."

The work of keeping this history safe is not glamorous. Johnson said challenges like staffing, cataloging, metadata and digital storage cost more than people

expect. Yet, even with these difficulties, bringing physical media into the digital age is significant enough to continue on.

"Not only do you want to keep the materials, but you want to make them accessible," Johnson said.

Lerew said that with physical media, there's a certain sensory, "embodied relationship" that doesn't translate to the visual. History, it seems, is intrinsically woven into the physical.

This growing gap between physical and digital media has led archivists to turn toward digitization. But as society continues to move away from the analog, archivists face a new challenge and a particular uncertainty.

"I think about how today's history and culture is going to get preserved for the future," Lerew said. "So much of human life and experience and culture is born digital now, and there aren't clear operations or methods for preserving that."

Now, documentation of LGBTQIA+ life, Johnson said, happens mostly on social platforms in the form of posts, comments and stories. There is no straightforward method for saving that yet.

"There's so much that has not and never will be digitized," Lerew said. "[It's] a problem that not just libraries, but archives and culture more broadly [are] going to have to think about."

Historical archives have and will continue to be vital records of where communities have been and what they've been through. But preserving these stories for future generations is a constantly changing, "never-ending project" — one that must continue.

Live media is becoming harder to access, but more meaningful

Experts said streaming and monopolies discourage both creativity and community.

By **KISHNEET KAUR & SUDHIR MATHEW**

Staff Writers

Surreal VHS tape visuals painted the room when Evan Williams performed at Non Plus Ultra, a DIY venue tucked inside a Los Angeles warehouse. The space is covered with a collection of props and pop culture references, reflecting the multidisciplinary creativity of the artist collective that runs the venue.

For Williams, a junior majoring in music composition, performing live at venues like Non Plus Ultra is a fun experience that fosters community.

"There's something about the atmosphere at these shows," Williams said. "Knowing that you don't know everyone, but that you have something in common, that is probably appealing to people. I think especially for me, when I got to college, it was just a way for me to meet new people."

In the past two decades, the consumption of music, film and other media has predominantly switched to streaming services and algorithm-driven platforms, allowing for individually tailored consumption in industries that were previously monocultural — where individuals were all tuning in the same popular media at the same time.

Streaming platforms have made media more accessible than ever before, but have also eroded the communal aspect of media consumption. Perpetual availability has centered individual convenience over shared experiences.

Live performances, however, have remained one of the few places where creativity and community converge, even as rising costs and industry consolidation have made those experiences harder to access.

Perry B. Johnson, who holds a doctorate in communication, is a music scholar, producer, and part-time lecturer at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, said being a social person requires experiencing the unavoidable awkwardness of live, in-person interaction.

"There is something about the exchange of energy that happens when you are in community with other people that nourishes and fulfills something that we as social beings, at our core, cannot manifest in isolation," Johnson said. She added that the reliance on technology for socialization during the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the social desire for in-person community.

For Williams, that community was found in the live music scene.

"After [the pandemic], these shows and events felt much more special. It gave people a place to go and meet and be with their friends and forget about other things," he said.

Non Plus Ultra, a nonprofit based in L.A., has hosted a variety of wacky and creative performances, from live film scoring to clown shows, for the past decade. Leon Manson, a board member of the organization, said the economic stress of COVID-19 forced some venues to sell to large entertainment companies.

"There was a big push during COVID times to save our DIY venues, to save our spaces," Manson said. He said that many small venues were purchased by Live Nation, referencing their acquisition of the Echo.

Live Nation, which has recently dominated the live performance industry internationally through ticketing, venue ownership and concert promotion, is currently facing an antitrust lawsuit due to artificially inflated prices. Johnson said monopolization of ticketing impacts performers and audiences by taking revenue away from artists as well as making communal

events more expensive and less accessible for concertgoers.

Manson said that as the live performance industry has become more profit-driven, showcasing creatives has become less of a priority, and smaller bands face increased challenges in booking shows. "A lot of venues have shifted to a model that is more consistent with doing less shows and doing more things that make money, which are usually these sort of themed DJ nights that you see, like the indie sleaze night, or emo night," he said.

He criticized venues that won't book newer or smaller artists in favor of events designed to appeal to mainstream audiences, saying,

"They don't really feel that cool. They don't really feel that weird," he said. "Cool, to me, is weird and different. I want to go and experience something that I've not experienced before."

Williams performed at Non Plus Ultra last year with a group called Missing Wiba. For him, smaller venues, like Non Plus Ultra, provide a different kind of community building — one where the culture is established around the space instead of the performances passing through it.

"It's much easier to develop a connection with the style of a smaller venue like Non Plus Ultra, if you can show up to any event at the venue and know that you'll probably be interested in it," Williams said.

Manson posed DIY venues and culture as the solution to an industry that feels inaccessible for creatives, one that still provides a community to its consumers that streaming doesn't.

"Everyone wants community, especially these days where the passivity is being reinforced, the isolation is

being reinforced," Manson said. "The answer to all of that, the way to resist the oppression that we're currently facing, is community, and ... working together to create different experiences and feel alive with each other."

Johnson said intentional effort is required on behalf of people to get involved in live events, but that there are plenty of opportunities on campus for students who seek them out.

"There is a power of being in community, in those spaces, just by virtue of showing up for the same thing at the same time," Johnson said. "I think live events, whether [it's] theater, whether it's film screenings on campus, whether it's concerts on campus, they, by virtue of being in person, make visible to us those points of shared interest that can then help to bridge community."



Alexa Esqueda / Daily Trojan

USC Surplus Store diverts move-out waste from landfills

The store finds new homes for items donated by USC students and departments.

By **NIDHI BHOGI & ANNA RYAN**
Staff Writers

When Lucian Frisby moved out of his dorm sophomore year, he had to throw away items like laundry baskets, storage containers and shower caddies.

"I had to fly back home before I moved into off-campus housing. I had to leave behind a lot of things because I couldn't physically take them back home," said Frisby, a junior majoring in English.

Frisby said that being able to give away his things to someone who could use them would have made him feel a lot better. At this time, Frisby had never heard of the USC Surplus Store, a second-hand store aimed to mitigate waste generated from student move-out.

Beginning in October 2025, after a pandemic hiatus, the USC Surplus Store offered a new home to furniture and household objects donated from USC departments and students. To buy items, prospective customers register to shop with their USC email and then pick up purchased items from the warehouse.

At USC, about 7,000 students move out of University housing every year. On average, college students in the United States produce about 640 pounds of trash each year, according to Planet Aid, a sustainable development non-profit.

Calvin Holmes, the director of mailing and material management services, which manages the USC Surplus Store, said it offers refurbished items at "bargain" prices.

"My goal is to get us to a point where students and faculty alike



Asiana Guang / Daily Trojan

Students and faculty can browse furniture and other household items donated to the USC Surplus Store when it tables at McCarthy Quad during the Trojan Farmer's Market.

are looking towards us first whenever it comes to buying items, so that way, we're not generating new waste," Holmes said. "The more that we're able to repurpose these items, the greater impact we have on our sustainability efforts."

The surplus store team evaluates the condition of every item that is donated on location, and brings

them to the store's warehouse, less than a mile from USC's campus, Holmes said. So far, their process has seemed effective. According to Holmes, the store diverts 15% to 20% of items that would have been discarded upon move-out.

"If we look at the previous state, where there was no Surplus Store, a lot of students would gather

older items from dorms and place them into a bin that goes directly to the landfill," Holmes said.

The Surplus Store also donates some of the clothes it receives during move-out week to Office of Sustainability-hosted FreeSCycle Fridays. The monthly events from January to April allow anyone with a USC ID to pick through

donations and go home with any item they choose for free.

"A lot of our presence relies on opportunities that the Office of Sustainability is able to provide," Holmes said. "We're finding creative ways to find customers and students so they can shop with us. We've grown from about 100 to well over 3,000 followers [on Instagram]."

Millanna Biller, a sophomore majoring in environmental studies, said she has noticed the University's sustainability efforts through compost and recycling bins, and sees the Surplus Store as an opportunity to further waste-reduction efforts on campus.

"It gives whatever is being donated a little bit longer of a lifespan, which is important to get as much use out of one product as you can," Biller said.

In addition to the Surplus Store, the University has taken further measures to promote sustainability during move-out. At the end of each year, USC Housing and the Department of Public Safety collaborate with Goodwill and the American Textile Recycling Service to repurpose second-hand items that students are unable to bring home with them, such as extra bedding and clothes.

"[Buying] secondhand would, one, save me a lot of money," Frisby said. "Second, when I would get stuff from IKEA, I would have to rebuild it, so it [would save] me a lot of time as well."

Holmes said the mental shift in students is key to improving sustainability efforts, especially considering the Surplus Store functions on donations and does not offer any incentive for people to part with their things.

"If you're a student and you need to replace something, or you need to purchase something new, think about where you want it to go, and how you can try to prevent it from just going to waste," Holmes said.

Food affordability on campus remains pressing concern

Some students think USC should do more to publicize food assistance programs.

By **DANIELA MATTSON & SAIRAKSHA THIRUNAVUKKARASU**

Daily Trojan

When Amber Quiroga has a full schedule from early morning to late evening, she has to either pack food or spend money. As a student living off campus and having no time to go home and eat, Quiroga has very few choices.

Between classes, club meetings and homework, eating can be a challenging task to fit into a restricted schedule and budget.

USC students have eating options on campus, at the shops within USC Village and at surrounding businesses. For students living on and off campus, USC estimates they'll spend \$8,442 on food. But for students on a limited budget, eating can be difficult, especially for those who are no longer enrolled in a meal plan or are facing food insecurity.

"In the last couple of years, I think no matter which kind of food we're talking about, there's been a steady rise in prices, whether it be food that you purchase and prepare yourself, or food that was prepared for you," said John Wilson, a professor of spatial sciences and sociology. In 2023, Wilson contributed to a publication regarding the ecological risk of food insecurity in Los Angeles during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cardinal and Flex120 Meal Plans are mandatory for freshmen and upperclassmen living in on-campus housing, though prices for the student meal plans have



Miyu Ikeda / Daily Trojan

increased by 5% in the last few years. For the 2025-26 school year, the Cardinal Meal Plan costs \$4,219 per semester, and the Flex120 plan is \$2,074 per semester.

Ethan Karten, a freshman majoring in economics and math, is on the Cardinal Plan and said he uses its unlimited meal swipes primarily at the dining halls and Tutor Campus Center.

"There are a good amount of options [at TCC]. It's kind of frustrating that Panda Express doesn't have any options for the meal swipes in specific," Karten said.

Without a meal plan, TCC meals can cost anywhere from \$9.99 to \$20. At USC Village, eateries like Cava and Sweetgreen have prices ranging from \$13 to \$17 for a bowl. These are in the upper price range

compared to other options at the Village, such as City Tacos, where one taco costs about \$5.

Jenny Pietrzik, a junior studying communication, lives off campus and is not enrolled in a meal plan. She said she spends about \$200 per month on groceries and eating out.

"[USC] could definitely do better on actually helping students and just making more affordable food options," Pietrzik said.

Wilson attributes the rising costs of meal plans and dining options to recent inflation and the effects of tariffs.

"The difficulty with inflation is when prices, across the board, start rising... the things the farmer needs to buy to grow the food [are] getting more expensive, so in order to sell it, they need to earn more income," Wilson said. "Unfortunately, when you're at

school, oftentimes you don't have any income. You're trying to prepare for a life in which you earn an income, and so the students are in, for a moment in their life, a vulnerable spot."

With the rising cost of meal plans, the University offers some resources for students who are experiencing food insecurity.

USC Student Basic Needs offers support to students when they require food assistance, such as the Trojan Food Pantry, which provides more equitable access to food.

According to the Student Basic Needs website, to be eligible to access the Pantry, students must meet the requirements of being actively enrolled USC students, experiencing food insecurity and not having an active dining hall meal plan.

Quiroga, a junior studying business administration, said she first found out about the Trojan Food Pantry while visiting the First Generation Plus Success Center.

"I was talking to one of the staff there," Quiroga said. "That was the first time I was ever hearing about it, and it was from the staff themselves. Even if there are resources, it's not widely known."

Quiroga said she averages spending \$400 a month on groceries, eating out or buying food on campus. To save money, she said she tries to prepare her meals at home.

An emergency meal swipe program for students experiencing a short-term food-related emergency is also run by the Student Basic Needs department. The program allows students to load a limited number of meal swipes to their USCard that can be used at campus dining halls during the semester. Tommy's Table is another program that redistributes food surplus from private campus events to students facing food insecurity.

However, for students who are not qualified for program benefits, campus food options remain expensive.

"[The University] has ways to give people a lift up," Wilson said. "But they could be better socialized and advertised. We probably could be better at being more proactive because I'm sure even if we did the advertising, there are still some people that it doesn't reach."

Apart from on-campus initiatives, CalFresh, a food grant program funded by the state of California, offers eligible students up to \$292 each month in SNAP or EBT benefits.

Students must meet specific income and social security guidelines to receive CalFresh benefits, such as receiving a Cal Grant, working over 20 hours per week or receiving federal or state work-study funds.

"[These programs] help uplift people with relatively modest means," Wilson said. "Whenever you tighten that eligibility, then some people are going to be pushed out of that safety net, so their lives are going to become more precarious and harder."

Despite USC's current resources, Pietrzik said she still finds food options on campus out of reach.

"I feel there's almost this assumption that, because we are USC and our tuition is so expensive, that everyone who goes here has money to spend," Pietrzik said. "I'll just go grab lunch, and it's the amount of money I would spend on a whole day's worth of food."

Quiroga said she believes that USC should inform the student body through social media about the resources it provides so students feel more aware of the kinds of support accessible to them.

"What we could do as a University is to be more open and explicit about what kinds of help is available and then let people make their own decisions," Wilson said.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Anna Duboc captivates audiences with her voice, storytelling

The student performer and songwriter will bring her music to The Mint in April.

By LARA GRAVES
Staff Writer

Tucked behind a single bar door and a haze of Chinese lanterns were four tight rows of folding chairs and a stage that had no business holding a whole band. Somehow, it managed to wedge a full drum set, a bass amp stack and guitar rigs on it.

The sound was not particularly great, but none of that mattered when Anna Duboc grabbed the mic.

Duboc's performance at this cozy hole-in-the-wall dive bar, Genghis Cohen, is one moment that stuck with guitarist and music director Enzo Iannello. He has worked with Duboc for nearly five years, but that night, he found himself distracted from his job.

"The confidence — she really came into her own as a performer," Iannello said. "I was having trouble playing my guitar and focusing on what I was being paid to do there because I was like, 'I'm watching a concert from behind the stage.'"

Duboc, a freshman singer-songwriter majoring in popular music performance, has amassed over 50 million streams across platforms, including TikTok and YouTube. Her powerful vocals and emotionally driven songwriting have earned her recognition as a rising indie pop artist, with her song "Sinking Feeling" winning Best A Cappella

Arrangement at the International Championship of High School A Cappella Awards. She has also performed alongside Katy Perry, Kenny Loggins and Andrea Bocelli.

Music has always been a central part of Duboc's life. She said she began performing in musical theater at age 4 and has appeared in more than 30 productions, later releasing her own music at 13.

Duboc's influences span genres from classic pop and musical theater to contemporary artists like Ariana Grande and Billie Eilish, according to her website. She grew up immersed in music. Her mother, a USC alum, is a jazz vocalist and songwriter who has written for artists including Patti LaBelle and Chanté Moore.

"I've always known I wanted to be on stage in some capacity," Duboc said. "Songwriting just sort of came to me easily."

Her songs explore themes of vulnerability, relationships and personal growth. One track, "Cherry Pick," is about female empowerment and refusing to be taken advantage of, a theme she continues in her upcoming single "Lily," set for release on April 17.

"There's so much division. ... I would just love my music to ... connect people as humans," Duboc said. "Rather than connected through a political party or connected through fashion ... I would love to see a world where we're just like, 'Oh, hey, we're all actually people. Let's just connect on that.'"

Chloe Haack, a freshman majoring in pop music performance



Ben Hansen

Freshman popular music performance major Anna Duboc has amassed over 50 million streams across various music platforms.

who plays bass and performs with Duboc, said Duboc's honesty in conveying her emotions is what makes her music resonate.

"She speaks from the heart of past relationships, current events and overall outlooks on life," Haack said. "Not only do the lyrics really reflect

such honesty, emotion and experiences, but they are also reflected through the songwriting and how she crafts her songs lyrically and harmonically."

Her knack for storytelling is something Michael Arrom, Duboc's piano instructor and an adjunct instructor of popular

music at USC, said he believes will continue defining her work as she grows as an artist.

"Every song I've heard of hers feels very conversational. It feels like she's speaking directly to you, or to the person that the song is about," Arrom said. "It feels like a good friend."

Iannello said Duboc also has a talent for live performance, which makes working with her unusually smooth for a young artist. In one rehearsal, a day before a performance, Duboc introduced a brand-new song that had never been recorded or even fully demoed. Within an hour, the musicians had arranged it, and the song ended up being a highlight of that set, Iannello said.

"To retain all of that and take it to the stage the next day, and just kill it ... takes a lot of confidence, and a lot of [previous] practice," Iannello said. "Doing these things on the fly, and being able to make decisions that quickly, in which the artists and the rest of the band are both happy, it's a rarity."

Duboc will bring her stories to the stage again April 10, where she will perform a 45-minute set along with several other Thornton School of Music students. The show will feature mostly original songs along with a few covers.

This time, Duboc and her band will step through the intimate black doorway of one of Los Angeles' oldest clubs, The Mint. The stage may be bigger, the lights brighter and the crowd larger. But if her performances so far are any indication, the setting won't matter.

'Pretty Lethal' is pretty unexceptional



By THAMRA HUSSAIN
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Ballet is on the minds of many in the world of entertainment — thanks to a certain high-profile actor's recent comments on the dance form — making it the perfect timing for the release of "Pretty Lethal." The film is an action-thriller from director Vicky Jewson and writer Kate Freund, released March 13 on Prime Video.

The film follows five ballerinas who have to fight to survive a life-threatening detour on their way to a showcase in Budapest. After their car breaks down, they find themselves at the sketchy Teremok Inn, run by the cold and mysterious Devora (Uma Thurman), once a ballerina herself.

When one of the guys hanging around the bar, Pascha (Tamás Szabó Sipos), shoots and kills their dance teacher (Lydia Leonard) after she rejects his advances, the story takes a bloody turn.

We're introduced to a promising ensemble of ballerinas from the start: The cast is full of actors with great past projects. Unfortunately, it's almost immediately clear that the characters are one-dimensional clichés.

Bones (Maddie Ziegler) is a talented-but-apathetic dancer who's less well off than the others. Her conceited rival, Princess (Lana

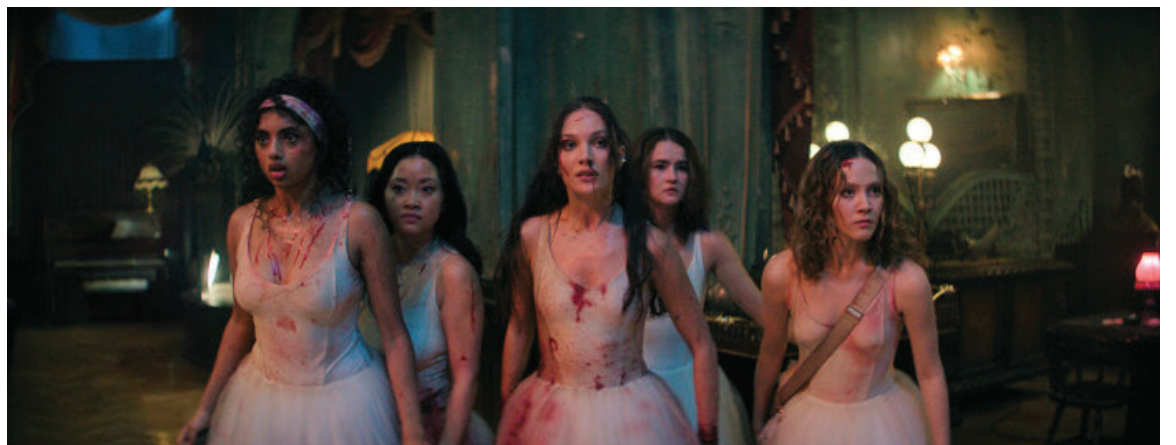
Condor), hates her for having a solo. Avantika Vandanapu plays Grace, a religious, ditzzy personality. Millicent Simmonds plays Chloe, a more serious dancer who's hard of hearing, and Iris Apatow plays her sister Zoe, who doesn't have much of a role besides being her sister's interpreter.

Bones is portrayed as the only level-headed dancer. The others are either freaking out, complaining, high or simply not there. The majority of the main characters are underdeveloped, making it difficult to become invested in their individual stories, something essential for an ensemble cast. This isn't helped by weak and predictable dialogue.

The girls need to escape from Pascha, as he sends assassins after them because they were witnesses to the murder. It's looking grim, but as Bones puts it, "these guys are drunk and out of shape and we're prima fucking ballerinas." It's one of many corny one-liners that plague the film's dialogue.

After the assassins arrive, the film's first major fight scene begins as the ballerinas fight back. It's a fun sequence, involving plenty of high kicks, sharp hairpins and even a couple of impressive pirouettes. They put up a good fight and take the men down. Oh, and they're dressed in their tutus and tights the whole time, a silly visual detail.

Although the fight scene was entertaining, it's important to note that pretty much since arriving at the inn, Chloe has not been with the rest of the dancers. It was a strange decision to omit one of the core five dancers from a major scene. It's especially sad this happened to Chloe, as it's already rare to see representation of hard-of-hearing folks in film.



Prime

Maddie Ziegler, Avantika, Millicent Simmonds, Lana Condor and Iris Apatow star in ballet action-thriller "Pretty Lethal," which released March 13 on Prime Video.

Eventually, the girls return to the lobby together and Zoe accuses the rest of them of forgetting her sister. It comes off like an attempt to brush over the writer's bad decision. They attempt to escape, but are caught by Devora's henchmen.

Now, bonded as a team, makeshift weapons in hand, they get in position and ... start performing "Waltz of the Flowers" before attacking the henchmen. It starts corny, but seeing ballerinas kill grown men to the tune of Tchaikovsky is kind of awesome.

Afterward, all seems well until Bones is stopped from escaping again, this time by Devora herself. We learn that Devora lost her leg after her father couldn't pay Pascha's father, Lothar (Michael Culkin), back, thus ending her ballet career and leaving her resentful and bitter.

Thurman delivers the film's best performance here, conveying the anger she feels at losing her chance to be a star ballerina. She leaves Bones

to her employee, Doktor (Gábor Nagypál), who almost amputates Bones' leg, until she is saved by Grace.

As the dancers run, they learn that the building is wired with explosives but have little time to worry before Pascha's father arrives with his own henchmen, ready to eliminate all witnesses of his son's crime. At this point, Devora decides to let the girls go, saying, "This is my solo."

In an epic climax, Devora sets all the bombs off just as the girls escape the inn, the explosion blowing out the windows as they fall out of the building. She gets her revenge against Pascha's family, and the girls gratefully motorbike to the showcase.

The final scene is a beautiful ballet performance from the five dancers, still in their bloodied clothes. This contrast from all the action makes it a great way to end the film. Working together, the girls have bonded and gotten over their differences, and the audience is brought back to the art

and dance form that brought the characters together in the first place.

The film had its ups and downs. It was definitely fun to see ballerinas kill henchmen using blades they use to prepare their pointe shoes — the storyline was unique and fresh, definitely something not seen before. In addition, the action sequences that combined dance and combat were special and super engaging.

Unfortunately, the sheer lack of character depth for most of the main characters as well as uninteresting and sometimes cringey dialogue definitely brought it down. What could have been a complex action film that showcased the art of ballet through character growth was instead a more surface-level story with eye-roll-worthy dialogue.

It might have been great if it went full over-the-top comedy or thriller, but nonetheless, it's a fun, campy watch, and might be the second-best publicity ballet has had in a while.

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POLITICS | Students can stay informed with political newsletters

| continued from page 2 |

said USC students should care about politics since anything from what they eat for breakfast, how they get to campus, how much they pay for the clothes they wear and their student loans is related to politics.

Yet despite the importance of city politics, elections see low voter turnouts. In 2022, the Carnegie Corporation of New York reported that less than 15% of voters vote in municipal elections, and less than 10% do so in school board elections.

Andrades said once students get to the bottom of the ballot, it becomes more and more difficult for them to understand, especially since California has nonpartisan elections, for municipal, judicial and some other races, requiring students to do more research to see who aligns with their values rather than just voting for the Democratic or Republican candidate.

How can students' votes impact LA?

But, for Andrades, student voting is important since so few people vote; students taking action could make a big difference in local elections.

"[If] every USC student and staff voted, they would probably have the majority or close to the majority in any city election," Andrades said.

Andrades said that municipal elections tend to come down to a few hundred or a few thousand votes, and those are the elections that matter and tend to have an impact for USC students.

"Part of it might be voter depression and this belief that your vote doesn't matter, when the reality is that your vote matters at the municipal level more than it does anywhere else," Andrades said.

Some things that students could vote on in 2026 at the city level are updating the city charter, which aims to make the city function more efficiently by changing the ways tax dollars are spent, and city council elections, which also determine how tax dollars are applied to problems

that affect students such as fixing potholes, Andrades said.

José Múzquiz, a politics and international relations doctoral student, said there are three issues that students should be paying attention to: increasing rent prices, public transit changes being made for the upcoming Olympics and homelessness.

Additionally, Schnur said students should pay attention to the upcoming gubernatorial election since the governor could have a big impact on USC in terms of issues like student financial assistance programs, the safety of the community, transportation, the quality of air and water in the community, and other important factors.

How can students vote in LA?

Students can get involved in L.A. elections by changing their primary residence address to their L.A. address as long as they are a U.S. citizen, Andrades said.

Students can do this by visiting vote.gov, selecting their home state and changing their address. Rules vary by state, but for California, this can be done online, in person or by mail.

If students do not want to change their voting address, they can still get involved in L.A. city politics through volunteering for candidates, even if it is just for one afternoon a week, Schnur said.

Students can visit the websites of local candidates in order to find out how to volunteer for their campaigns and can make phone calls, organize campaign events or work in campaign offices.

"Whether you're here for four years or for your entire life, you are an Angeleno," Schnur said. "You deserve to have a stake, and you deserve to have a say about the city in which you live."

How can students get involved outside voting?

Schnur recommended that students support civil society organizations that resonate with their values. L.A. is home to 642



Asiana Guang / Daily Trojan file photo

Students can vote on initiatives in 2026 at the city level such as updating the city charter, which aims to make the city function more efficiently by changing the ways tax dollars are spent.

civil rights and advocacy organizations, such as the California Immigrant Policy Center and the ACLU Foundation of Southern California, according to Cause IQ.

Additionally, USC has numerous political clubs and campus organizations that students can join, like the USC Political Union; USC Political Student Assembly, which hosts political panels and sends out a newsletter; and VoteSC, which works to ensure student access to voting and increase the availability of voting information.

Students can also get more information on L.A. city politics through subscribing to political newsletters, which come from various news outlets around the city. Andrades recommended students look at the LA Reporter and social media accounts of various local reporters from the *L.A. Times*.

Andrades said he is also part of a group of administrators and researchers working to figure out how to increase voter turnout in November.

"Now we are starting to see that the University really cares, and we're going

to make the investments we need to to make our students as informed as possible," Andrades said. "Then if they want to vote, the choice is still theirs."

According to Andrades, students not voting decreases the incentives for candidates to engage with them, leading to candidates supporting special interests instead.

"As citizens, as everyday USC-affiliated people, we have to change that dynamic and show our elected officials that we actually do have the power in our voices and we deserve to be heard," Andrades said.

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The New York Times Crossword

Edited by Will Shortz

No. 0220

- ACROSS**
- 1 Disney character who sings "In Summer"
 - 5 Product code used in inventory management
 - 8 Ropes in
 - 14 Ones always grinding at their jobs?
 - 16 Connect
 - 17 Baking sheets, cake pans, muffin tins, etc.
 - 18 Manages
 - 19 Pleasant chill in the air, say
 - 21 Baylor of N.B.A. fame
 - 22 Org. whose work takes many forms?
 - 23 Took in
 - 24 Smear
 - 26 Nahuatl speaker
 - 28 Muse aloud
 - 29 Actress Seehorn of "Pluribus"
 - 30 "I smell trouble ...!"
 - 34 Break down while studying?
 - 37 First place?
 - 38 Docs that deal with sensitive information
 - 39 Miracle on the ___ (surprise French/English victory of W.W. I)
 - 40 Like many working horses, but not many working dogs
 - 42 Binges
 - 43 N.Y.C.-based dance group
 - 46 Wonder
 - 47 Descendants of the Picts
 - 48 Someone you might like to get to know better
 - 52 Wyndham hotel brand
 - 53 Has to keep going
 - 55 Extra
 - 56 Instruction before an M.R.I.
 - 57 Gets wise to?
 - 58 L'i ___ (tykes)
 - 59 Fix
- DOWN**
- 1 Seller's shorthand for "I'm willing to haggle"
 - 2 W.C.s
 - 3 "Is this being broadcast now?"
 - 4 Posh hotel room amenities
 - 5 Cholesterol-lowering drug
 - 6 ___ Bass, first female mayor of Los Angeles
 - 7 Customer, in tech-speak
 - 8 Social activity that may involve wearing a vest
 - 9 Relaxed
 - 10 "Let it stand"
 - 11 One of the Obamas
 - 12 It has eight players
 - 13 Word with bird or leave
 - 15 Arrogant self-assurance
 - 20 Becomes aged, in a way
 - 24 Extra
 - 25 Was a copycat of
 - 26 To come
 - 27 Shady dealers
 - 29 Trade for cash
 - 31 "Some free advice ..."
 - 32 State bird found in only a single state
 - 33 Valuable deposits
 - 35 They might be made up in the spring
 - 36 Brings in
 - 41 Online nickname
 - 42 Things made by toddlers and directors
 - 43 Hairstyles often associated with the '60s and '70s
 - 44 "Well done!"
 - 45 x
 - 47 Wood finish
 - 49 Crispy flaps of crust on sourdough loaves
 - 50 Org. with a "Know Your Rights" campaign
 - 51 ___ Bunny, toon who debuted in "Space Jam"
 - 54 Carry on

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

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PUZZLE BY KATE HAWKINS

- 20 Becomes aged, in a way
- 24 Extra
- 25 Was a copycat of
- 26 To come
- 27 Shady dealers
- 29 Trade for cash
- 31 "Some free advice ..."
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SPORTS

PAGE 12 | FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026 | WWW.DAILYTROJAN.COM/SPORTS

Baseball dazzles on the diamond halfway through season

Despite an all-time start, the No. 12 Trojans still await their first ranked victory.

By **MARCUS PARTIDA**

Baseball Beat Writer

Despite some recent bumps in the road, USC baseball continued one of its best starts in program history over Spring Break, led by astonishing performances on the mound.

Following the best start in program history (19-0) and a tied record for the longest winning streak in program history, No. 12 USC (24-2, 8-1 Big Ten) has made a name for itself among some of the top programs this season. From strong arms to heavy bats, the squad seems to have the tools for success, though there are some hurdles to be overcome.

With a bit more than half of the season remaining, the Trojans will need to be on top of their game to put the cherry on top of a historic run and a potential shot at the College World Series in Omaha.

Strong start propels USC into Top 25

Starting the season with a 7-0 run, including series sweeps of both Pepperdine University (6-18, 2-1 West Coast) and Rice University (15-11, 1-2 American Athletic), USC broke into the Top 25.

The Trojans then broke the program record for the best start in USC history after a 6-1 win over

Long Beach State University (8-16, 3-6 Big West Conference).

Entering a weekend double-header against Northwestern (8-12-1, 2-4), USC was the last remaining undefeated team in the country. The Trojans took the first two but lost the final game, shattering their team record-breaking undefeated streak at 19.

Still, USC won 24 of its first 25 games before facing its first ranked opponent, No. 16 Oregon State (18-5). The Beavers marked the Trojans' first-ever loss at the new Deadeux Field and reliving memories from the brutal beatings in last year's NCAA Regional Finals.

In the 12-4 loss on Tuesday, the Beavers scored nine runs in the first four frames before the Trojans' bats started making some noise and added four runs to the board.

However, these four runs would be the only scoring made by USC, as Oregon State would seal the game with three insurance runs in the ninth. No Trojan pitcher tossed more than two innings on the mound.

Key performances on the mound, diamond

With many standout players and performances so far, rediscovering its rhythm could help USC find its first ranked win this season.

On the mound, Trojan pitchers are allowing just 5.2 hits and 2.4 runs per game. The rotation is led by junior left-handed pitcher Mason



Edmund Wu / Daily Trojan

Junior starting pitcher Mason Edwards leads Division I in ERA and second in strikeouts. He is pictured in a game against Illinois on March 6.

Edwards, who also leads Division I with an ERA of 0.25 — just one earned run in 36 innings pitched.

Edwards has allowed only seven hits and struck out 64 batters. He has earned three Big Ten Pitcher of the Week honors, with his third coming from last weekend's 5-0 shutout of Washington (10-14, 4-5).

Freshman pitcher Gavin Lauridsen, who received Big Ten Freshman of the Week Honors on Monday for a scoreless final three innings of the Washington shutout, is another standout arm for the Trojans.

Sophomore pitcher Grant Govel continues to be someone the Trojans can trust on the mound, holding a 0.69 ERA, good for fifth in Division I. Leading the team with 39 innings pitched, Govel has struck out 41 batters and leads the nation with six wins.

At the plate, the team holds a solid .268 batting average, averaging 8.5 hits and 6.7 runs per game.

Of the lineup mainstays, sophomore utility player Maximo Martinez leads the team with a .319 batting average. Junior outfielder Kevin Takeuchi and junior infielder Adrian

Lopez are the only other qualified two players hitting over .300.

With five home runs and a .606 slugging percentage, senior outfielder Jack Basseer leads the team in both categories. His walk-off two-run shot over the left field wall called the game in the 4-3 win over CSU Bakersfield (9-15, 3-6 Big West) on March 18.

Challenges await Trojans in second half

Heading into the latter half of the season, USC has a few big mountains to climb.

The hardest challenge all season will come against No. 1 UCLA (22-2, 9-0) on April 3 to 5 in Westwood. The Trojans are 41-52 all-time against UCLA, although they took an 11-5 win in their most recent meeting last season. This season, the Bruins have looked especially formidable, with wins over multiple ranked programs.

A series against No. 20 Oregon (21-4, 7-2) will close out the regular season and prove to be another challenge for USC, which was swept by the Ducks in last season's series.

Overcoming both of these ranked powerhouses could give the team momentum as it approaches the Big Ten Tournament in late May and a potential spot in the College Baseball World Series.

USC's next matchup comes at College Park for the start of a three-game series against Maryland (11-13, 1-5) on Friday at 3 p.m.

The Makai Lemon hate is unwarranted

Sean Campbell

A WANNABE SPORTS WRITER



I have written a lot of articles in my still-new journalism career; nearly 200 here at the *Daily Trojan* and north of 400 in total.

However, in a decade or so, when I'm hoping to capitalize on a previous interview subject's recent success in a post on X or the equivalent, I'm pretty confident which story will be linked. I'd bet money on it. My whole *DT* stipend, even.

A quasi-feature on Makai Lemon's consistency, confidence and stability amid what ended up being a very unstable season for USC football; that'd be my bet.

Lemon is a very likely first-round selection in April's NFL Draft, and I wouldn't be shocked to see him make multiple All-Pro teams and become a national star. The Biletnikoff Award winner has been projected as high as mid-single digits, and a recent ESPN projection had him at No. 16.

Any team would be lucky to have him — perhaps even the nearby Los Angeles Rams, who have the No. 13 pick.

He's a hard worker, and he's about as consistent as it gets. I meant what I said in the lead of that feature, he is "a man of few words, yet many yards."

So, what a shock it was to see the ridiculous criticism sent Lemon's way after NFL Scouting Combine media availability in late February.

Lemon's stoic, perhaps a-bit-too-nonchalant-for-soundbites persona once forced me to scrap a full-length feature on the superstar,



Matthew Diederich / Daily Trojan file photo

Wide receiver Makai Lemon won the 2025 Biletnikoff Award. Lemon is entering the NFL Draft and is projected to be a first-round pick. He is pictured here in a game against Northwestern on Nov. 7.

it remains fully professional and unproblematic. Now, somehow, that has become a hit to his reputation.

A major one. At least, online.

Some made fun of Lemon, saying he was trying to seduce teams, uninterested, aggressive or a combination of the group.

"[He] absolutely bombed it," a scout supposedly told former LSU defensive tackle Breiden Fehoko, according to his X post.

I understand thinking Lemon's small size might limit what he's able to accomplish in the NFL, though I think it would be crazy to write off one of the most dominant players in college football last year simply for that. He averaged almost 100 yards and one touchdown a game last season. That's in the Big Ten.

But saying his character and demeanor are a reason not to draft Lemon, like some social media

"influencers" suggested soon after the viral interviews, is ridiculous.

The eye contact and swaying were a little bit odd, I'm not going to lie. But that's all.

If he said at least one or two things that raised concern, my concern would be, well, raised. If even one person in my massive daily dosage of USC-sports-related social media criticized what he was saying, rather than a bit of an odd vibe, I'd at least hear the criticism out.

I haven't.

In fact, all I've seen is defense of Lemon, at least from those who have interacted with him outside of the fateful February interview.

His only post on his X account, where he follows literally nobody, is a repost of Roddy Rich saying simply "stay solid regardless." That sounds about right.

Lemon always attributes his success to "God-given talent," so much so that it has seemingly become his mantra, as he repeated in an interview with USC Athletics after USC Football's Pro Day on March 12.

He talks positively about USC, Lincoln Riley and junior quarterback Jayden Maiava. He stays humble. Teammates like his quasi-protégé sophomore wide receiver Tanook Hines have only amazing things to say about him.

Outside of what will probably stay a vague first-quarter benching of Lemon and fellow future NFL receiver Ja'Kobi Lane in USC's regular-season finale against UCLA, later explained by Riley as a "violation of team policy," Lemon's USC career has been spotless. I don't expect anything different from his NFL career.

In a story Riley told reporters in October that perfectly encapsulated

Lemon's work ethic, the coach recalled the star receiver's intensity in a drill called "Pat-and-Go."

It's often used as a warm-up. Receivers hit a go route and work on their catching technique. Quarterbacks prepare their arms for the days to come.

Riley said Lemon has taken thousands of "Pat-and-Go" reps. He couldn't recall a time Lemon didn't take one as if it were in a game.

"You could tell he's out to truly get better, not just get through the practice," Riley said. "That's hard to teach."

After Pro Day, multiple NFL executives and experts told the *Los Angeles Times* that, unlike the rhetoric pushed by many online, people with power didn't see Lemon's Combine interview persona as a negative. In fact, an anonymous team executive quoted in the story appeared to see it as a positive.

"We don't want a guy who's phony and coached up," the executive told the *Times*. "As long as he's not a jerk, we love it."

Rams General Manager Les Snead told the *Times* interview personas are often different from what the athlete is typically like, making it unlikely anything he said would significantly impact his draft stock.

So, whether Snead's local squad ends up getting the superstar wideout, or some other team, I'd expect to see Lemon's name in headlines again soon. And it won't be for eye contact.

Sean Campbell is a sophomore writing about all facets of USC sports in a voice- and reference-heavy style in his column, "A Wannabe Sports Writer," which runs every other Friday. He is also an associate managing editor at the Daily Trojan.