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PIECING IT TOGETHER

The Tampa Bay chapter of the American Institute of Graphic Arts hosted a collage competition at Cage Brewing. Hear about the USF students who competed.

By Luke Cross
lukecross@mail.usf.edu

Regional Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Martin Tadlock announced Allyson Leggett Watson (pictured above) as the new dean of the College of Education on March 22.

Watson will begin serving as dean July 1, while Olivia Hodg es continues to serve as interim dean of the CoE. Watson is the Assistant dean and professor in the College of Education at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. Even after 20 years of educational experience, Watson still harbors the passion that gripped her when she began. “When I started my education al career, I was placed in a classroom and the students just drew me in,” said Watson. “The moment I stepped foot in a school, I knew it was the right place to be and never looked back.”

Watson earned both her master’s and a doctorate in Educational Administration, Curriculum and Supervision from the University of Oklahoma. Her bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education was received from Bethune-Cookman University. Despite not being a Pinellas County local, Watson has strong family ties to St. Petersburg. Her granduncle, Dr. Gil Leggett, was a local, Watson has strong family ties to St. Petersburg. Her granduncle, Dr. Gil Leggett, was a pioneer in the city’s civil rights movement. Much of her career centered on high poverty schools and urban education. As a developer of the Teaching & Urban Reform Network (TURN), a program where teachers in training bring coursework to urban schools for immersive training, Watson believes the key to teaching is experience and compassion. “Teachers can’t even imagine the impact they have with just a smile, a pat on the back, just believing in students,” stated Watson. Watson wants to apply the same creativity she used in developing TURN at USF St. Petersburg’s College of Education. Some of her plans involve revamping the current STEM master’s degree coursework to urban schools, where teachers in training bring

THE GIFT OF GRANDIN

After serving as an infantryman in Afghanistan, Anthony Cook looked into getting a service dog. Meet Grandin and hear about how he makes Cook’s life easier.

One dean announced as another departs

By Dinorah Prevost
dprevost1@mail.usf.edu

Veteran activist Melanie Carling “took her eye off the ball” during Barack Obama’s tenure as president. Carling admits she’s guilty of feeling that inequality, especially towards women, was solved once and for all. “We’ve been comfortable for so long. It’s hard to get out of these soft walls,” said Carling, a trade supervisor at USF St. Petersburg’s Barnes & Noble bookstore.

Carling first got involved in activism in the 1970s as a teenager when the Supreme Court case Roe v. Wade brought the issue of abortion to the attention of the American public. But now Carling, 59, calls the election of President Donald Trump the lowest point in American politics she’s ever seen. “I’ve become rather more discouraged than I’ve ever

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3-2-1 WAYS TO SAVE ON BOOKS

Have you heard about the new bookstore that opened in Tyrone Square Mall? Get textbooks, hardbacks, paperbacks and more for less than three dollars at 321 Books.

The early bird gets the classes

By Michael Moore Jr.
michaelmoor@mail.usf.edu

Registration for summer and fall classes begins today.

March 27 officially marks the opening of course registration for USF St. Petersburg students. Throughout the process, each student will receive a time ticket that will indicate when they can register for classes.

You can review your time ticket by logging onto Oasis, going to the “Student” tab, selecting the corresponding term under the “Registration” option and then hitting “Register, Add or Drop Classes.”

Before your time ticket opens, you can use Schedule Planner to configure an ideal selection of classes.

Schedule Planner is a new feature that aims to make the registration process smoother. The current Add/Drop procedure sees you hunt and peck your way through desired courses while comparing them in your head against your own availability.

With the new tool, you can select courses based on your degree requirements while adding room for breaks and/or your work schedule. It will then generate a list of every available, conflict-free option. You can favorite and save schedules to have them ready for when your time ticket opens.

You can find Schedule Planner in Oasis under the “Student” tab. Before you register, the office of the registrar recommends that you meet with your academic advisor in order to ensure that you are still on track for graduation. An appointment with an advisor can be scheduled in the My/USF page under the “Learning & Teaching Tools.”

Also, be sure to check for any holds in Oasis that will prevent you from registering on time.

Any questions about registration should be directed to the office of the registrar, academic advising or financial aid.

Student planning to walk at graduation in the summer need to do so on Oasis before the June 9 deadline.

Local activist group takes first steps to oppose Trump

By Dinorah Prevost
dprevost1@mail.usf.edu

Veteran activist Melanie Carling “took her eye off the ball” during Barack Obama’s tenure as president. Carling admits she’s guilty of feeling that inequality, especially towards women, was solved once and for all. “We’ve been comfortable for so long. It’s hard to get out of these soft walls,” said Carling, a trade supervisor at USF St. Petersburg’s Barnes & Noble bookstore.

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Indivisible Activism: Jean Nelson (left) and Sandra Acton (right) hold signs in front of Rep. Charlie Crist’s office on Friday, March 24. Nelson, Acton and other members of Indivisible FL-13 met there to rally and thank Crist for promising to vote against the American Health Care Act.

See “Dean” P2

See “ACP” P3

The Crow’s Nest

The Crow’s Nest is the weekly student newspaper at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. All content in the publication is produced by USFSP students. Single copies free.

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Volume 48, Issue 10 - March 27, 2017 | Online at www.crowsneststpete.com
Acclaimed Florida authors tackle ecological issues

By Luke Cross
lukecross@mail.usf.edu

What comes to mind when you think of the Gulf of Mexico? As Floridians, we are privileged to live next to it, therefore we often associate it with beauty, beaches and fishing. Across the country, however, many define the Gulf by the ecological disaster for the foreseeable future.

Striving to reclaim the Gulf as a significant figure beyond petroleum spills, Jack Davis wrote “The Gulf: The Making of An American Sea.” Davis took part in a discussion over his most recent publication in Harbor Hall, Wednesday, March 22. With the help of Lee Irby, a fellow author releasing his newest novel “Unreliable,” Davis and Irby discussed the lifestyle of a writer, their previous works and shared experiences of growing up in the segregated South. The two USF alumni also shared their first meetings and roots in the St. Petersburg area.

“I just owe so much to this campus, I don’t think I’d be where I am now without USF St. Pete,” said Irby.

Much of the event revolved around how Davis’ experiences as an ecological historian influenced his writing, specifically in his newest piece, “The Gulf: The Making of An American Sea.” His recently released work tells the tale of the Gulf of Mexico from prehistoric beginnings to its present-day status. Davis connects the body of water to humanity through both his own interactions and experience.

“When writing about ecology, you’re really in touch with your subject through touch, taste, smell, hearing,” said Davis. “I wanted this sensory experience to help carry the writing, to guide it.”

The discussion also addressed the role of historic figures in “The Gulf,” expanding on the narrative influence of many colorful characters, such as the king of Tabasco turned conservationist.

“I also tried to understand the historic figures, to understand how they interacted with their environment using the same senses,” said Davis.

The conversation shifted midway through the event to focus more on ecological concerns, economic possibility and activism within Florida communities. Davis subtitled his book “The Making of An American Sea” with a purpose: the BP oil spill had tarnished the once prestigious name of the Gulf of Mexico.

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ACA continued from P1

been in my life this time, this particular movement. "I just don’t see the avenues I had back then (in the 60s and 70s) to take."

For Carling, a local resident who works in account- ing at a liability insurance agency, the feeling was similar. "I was very happy with President Obama. I was really disappointed with the election," she said. "I feel like young people who knew President Trump got elected and I think it was complicity." The benefits are undoubtedly part of Trump’s agenda such as healthcare, a new movement called Indivisible is organizing to be once again. Arveme Carling sorely misses.

Local activist groups are springing up across the country, and Indivisible FL-13 is firmly rooted here in Florida’s Congressional 13th District. Acton is one of the organizers of the group. Acton said the biggest reason for so many people to become involved in activism for the first time.

As a USFSP senior majoring in Biology, Carling describes herself as "normal, boring person."

"I have never done anything like this before. But after the election, I was feeling disappoint- ed and disheartened and a little bit hopeless," she said. "And my sister had sent me a copy of the Indivisible guide. I actually ended up reading it a couple of times and it just was kind of a light bulb moment."

After discovering that there was no active Indivisible group in the area, Acton started one on Facebook.

"I just felt called to do it," she said. "I knew that I wanted to do something." She knew that she couldn’t just sit back and watch our country change in a way I didn’t want."

In its guide, Indivisible men- tions the staunchly conserva- tive Tea Party movement as the inspiration for its tactics. Just as the Tea Party move- ment aimed to disrupt former president Barack Obama’s agenda early in his presiden- cy, Indivisible seeks to stage similar disruptions for Presi- dent Trump. Namely, by using a “purely defensive approach” and opposing all of Trump’s policies, according to Indivisible- FL-13’s website.

"I think we can [have the same impact as the Tea Party]," said Carling, an Indivisible member, “but the issue between us and them is that we want a big tent and they’re not always agreement in a big tent.”

"I would hope to have [an impact like the Tea Party] but I fear that [Indivisible has] gotten so much notoriety very rapidly. I worry that it’s going to fizzle out. Because I feel there was so much momentum initially and it just kind of ex- ploded and it’s only been three months now,” Acton said.

According to the Indivisible guide, the movement operates by three tactics: “forcing them [the Trump administra- tion] to redirect energy away from their priorities, say Rep- resentatives and senators to support or drive reactionary change and reaffirm the illegitimacy of the Trump agenda.”

In addition, the movement uses “four local advocacy tactics” to achieve those goals. Members attend town halls and other local public events to show their presence. While attending, Indivisible members ask politicians “hard” ques- tions. They also visit and make coordinated calls to politicians’ district offices.

Recently, about 20 Indivisible FL-13 members attended a town hall held by Rep. Charlie Crist in the USF campus. "I think he was scheduled for two hours and he ended up being [there] over four hours because he really wanted to listen to what everyone had to say," Acton said. "There was just so many people there that it was hard to get time to ask our questions."

Last Friday, members held a rally outside Crist’s downtown St. Petersburg office to deliv- er a thank you letter to him for promising to vote against the now-scraped Republican American Health Care Act. The group is also trying to reach out to Florida senator Marco Rubio to arrange a meeting with him. "Representatives can be a very valuable counterweight to Trump’s policies and agenda,” said Erik Durneika, a USFSP senior majoring in political science.

He said constituents contacting their representa- tives to voice their opinions on policies is important to bringing about change.

Durneika, 18, hasn’t been heav- ily involved in political activism. But he believes in the necessity "to become civically engaged in the university setting." In anticipation of last year’s presidential and congressional elections, he volunteered with voter registration activities at the USFSP Civic Engagement Fair last semester.

Carling also feels that the ac- tion of younger generations is important for bringing change. "I see a lot of energy right now with the younger people it’s gonna be a tougher road than I had just because there’s more blockages," she said. "With the advent of the internet, this is a tool in which the people that are young now are very familiar with and I think that is the deciding factor between progress and no progress."

To her, younger genera- tions challenging Trump’s administration represents a changing of the guard.

"I’m gonna be 60 pretty soon and I don’t have as much ener- gy as I did, so my stage [for ac- tionism] now is this, this place,” Darling said, referencing her job at Barnes & Noble. "So I can make contact with people who can go out. I can tell them something (and) it might give them the impetus.”

To give a face to individ- uals who are threatened by the Trump administration, Indivisible in general wants to go further than just telling their stories. It wants to re- cruit “women, people of color, LGBTQ people, immigrants, Muslims and the poor and working class” as members to represent themselves.

"We hear from other group members that we need to be more diverse. We’re trying to reach out to other activist groups in the community, but it’s just hard because everyone has their own priority," Acton said. "I think it also helps just bringing a different perspective in. Everyone’s got their story and that’s something we’re interested in," she added.

Acton also wants more student involvement in the group as well.

“We would love to have some students. It would be nice to have some diversity in our group. Most of us are adults. We’re a little older,” she said. For Carling, having the ded- ication to accomplish the goal and an extended attention span is the key to success in continu- ing opposition to Trump.

"In the ‘60s, people gave their lives to [activism]. They knew that’s what they were doing,” she said. "That is what we need to do now.”

For more information you can visit their website indivi- dualsfl.net or follow them on Facebook: Indivisible FL-13 or Twitter @IndivisibleFL13.

Thank You: David Higgins (right) delivers a thank you letter for Charlie Crist to district director Steven Gary (left) in Charlie Crist’s office on Friday, March 24.
Anthony Cook celebrated a special birthday last week. Not his, but Grandin’s. Grandin is Cook’s service dog who turned two years old last Thursday.

Cook first met Grandin at Iowa-based Paws & Effect in March 2016. They trained together for two weeks as they learned how to interact with each other. The two are now an inseparable pair.

Grandin is protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act, which allows Cook to take Grandin along with him to any space that is open to the general public. Cook has only had one experience where the management of a public place told him he couldn’t bring Grandin inside. Cook realized that such a rule was illegal and fought against the management so that he and others with service animals wouldn’t face discrimination there.

He wouldn’t name the place he had a dispute with, but on campus, Cook hasn’t had any problems.

“I haven’t had any issues at school whatsoever,” he said. “He’s kind of like a celebrity at the school, people love him and he probably has more friends than I do to be honest with you.”

Grandin might be a celebrity on campus, but Cook’s face is just as well known.

Cook is president of the Student Veterans Organization and holds the university and community affairs chair in Student Government. He works alongside student senator Albert Moreno, a fellow veteran, in both organizations.

“We decided to run for Student Government to bring a unique scope of maturity, being we are non-traditional age, and our military and life experiences are unique from most,” Moreno, 30, said.

They first met in the Student Veterans Organization and have gotten along ever since.

“It is an absolute pleasure to have served in Senate with him and to have known him over the past year as he is one of the most caring people I have ever crossed paths with in the world,” Moreno said.

Moreno says that Cook’s kind personality makes him a perfect fit for the UCA chair in Student Government.

“For as long as I’ve known him, he’s been a great volunteer and continues to set a great example for veterans, students and for anyone wanting to be a decent human being,” said Moreno.

But Cook attributes his friendly demeanor to Grandin, who he says allows him to stay affectionate and care for others.

“I work very hard to try and destigmatize veterans, PTSD and people with disabilities and service dogs,” said Cook. He helps me get in touch with my emotions. A lot of people that deploy would agree that you lose a lot of that. When you come back, it’s very hard adjusting.”

“Pupper Pair: Cook first met Grandin at Iowa-based Paws & Effect in 2016. They trained together for two weeks as they learned how to interact with one another. The two are now an inseparable pair.”

Cook and Grandin are inseparable. Grandin might be a celebrity, but Cook doesn’t see it that way.

“We work together, we’re a team,” he said, watching Grandin play in the backyard.

“He’s just such a dork, so cute and funny that it’s hard to be mad or sad when you have a dog around,” Cook said.
Fast paced, cut & paste collage competition at Cage Brewing

By Devin Rodriguez
drodriguez7@mail.usf.edu

A
amed with a pair of scissors and magazines, Sierra Schneider, an alumnus of USF St. Petersburg’s graphic design program, had just 30 minutes to make something beautiful. She struggled through pages and pages of pictures and text while considering the prompt the judges gave her — the future. Then she found it: a picture of a zebra.

“I was trying to find just one image that clicked with one of my ideas,” Schneider said. “Endangered animals are probably not going to be here in the future.”

After the judges called the round to close, Schneider presented her work. In it, a zebra stood surrounded by red.

“It could be flames or it could be blood, but it definitely isn’t good,” she told the judges.

Schneider came in first place, the judges said they enjoyed the creative narrative that went along with her piece. She received a $40 gift card to AOE Supply, an art shop in Tampa.

“I entered the competition to compete with someone told me at the beginning of the semester that I should do things that make me completely uncomfortable,” Cottrell said. “They said, otherwise you’ll never grow.”

“Those uncomfortable moments will make you think more creatively. Before the competition I was so nervous, but after getting the prompt and considering what light meant to me, all the nerves went away. It was completely freeing.”

Cottrell ended up in third place after the final round. He said he would continue to get out and improve his skills. He was impressed by his competitors work, and how creative they got with the final prompt. The winner, Schneider, graduated USFSP in 2015, and now works for GSL Solutions in Tampa. GSL Solutions is a small veteran-owned design firm that works with small businesses. Schneider said her time in the graphic design program taught her a lot about creativity.

“I really learned how to fail and with each failure you will learn,” Schneider said. She said that the biggest lesson she learned was to begin to create art that was just as much a part of herself as for someone else.

“I also learned a lot about who I am in the program. When I started I was making things people wanted to see, but that’s not what this is about. That’s just a cop-out,” she said.

Cut Up: Jason Cottrell, a senior graphic design student, came runner-up in a collage competition at Cage Brewing.

Music After Dark — the second night in the weekend Art After Dark series — featured a showcase of bands across campus.

Music brings people together.”

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EMILY BOWERS | THE CROW’S NEST

The Musicians Club began the evening with a series of hard-hitting jams. They were joined by a French horn player and saxophonist. Elba Terrero belted “Uptown Funk,” the Bruno Mars hit, to the pleasure of the scattered students sitting in the front lawn of the SLC. Guitar player, Zach Bulio, enjoyed playing the event. “This was my first time up on stage in a while. It was invigorating,” said guitar player Zach Bulio. He enjoyed every minute of performing, as he danced around and happily interacted with his fellow musicians.

Andy Dang and Warren Buchholz, both of whom work for the USC, were instrumental in organizing the showcase. “For this program, we wanted to prove that there’s a music community and that people of all ages, genders and occupations can rock out,” said Buchholz.

“Music brings people together.”

EMILY BOWERS | THE CROW’S NEST

By Emily Bowers
emilybowers@mail.usf.edu

Tampa Bay chapter and alumna of USF St. Petersburg. Zabala said that for the past few years, the chapter was inactive, but recently they’ve picked up and scheduled networking events across the area.

“A lot of the events we’ve hosted were about networking, but we want to get people really involved and hold community bonding exercises where people can work together and have design discussions but in a really fun way,” said Zabala, who graduated in 2015.

She said that the graphic design program taught her a lot about creativity.

“I think the best part of the program was that it was concept heavy. We learned how to think about design,” Zabala said. “When you go out in the field, you can have the fundamental skills, but if you don’t develop a concept, then you don’t have anything.”

Current students of the design program also participated in the X & V: A Collage Competition & Networking Event. Current students of the graphic design program, made it into the second round of the competition to compete with Schneider directly. He was nervous for two weeks before the competition.

“I entered the competition because someone told me at the beginning of the semester that I should do things that make me completely uncomfortable,” Cottrell said. “They said, otherwise you’ll never grow.”

“I started I was making things people wanted to see, but that’s not what this is about. That’s just a cop-out,” she said.

EMILY BOWERS | THE CROW’S NEST

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The Crow’s Nest

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THE CROW’S NEST
MARCH 27, 2017

Opinion

By Lis Casanova
Senior English major with concentration in Writing Studies
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For two years, the music from downtown echoed its way into my dormitory. The mashup of instruments, singers and shouts became the ever-present background to my weekend nights. Filing through homework, I’d look out at the city lights from the window above my desk and wish for my own space to practice cello.

Four years as a music major at a fine arts high school had certainly spoiled me and I was used to the commodity of practice rooms. To this day I still credit my high school success to Tampa’s Howard W. Blake School of the Arts to the fact that I could spend half of my day studying music. I often stayed after school to get extra time in the music building’s soundproof rooms.

By the time I became a senior, the only thing that motivated me to get to school was my morning orchestra class and my final period AP Music Theory class. In 2013, I finally graduated and arrived in St. Petersburg. I’d chosen the USF St. Petersburg campus because it seemed like the mecca for music and arts.

The school itself was small, which pleased me, and I felt sure I’d find a quiet corner to play.

Shortly after settling into my private dorm room, I started to realize that practicing was not going to be as easy as it was in high school. My roommates expected silence, or at least nothing unrelated to ping-pong balls and trap music. Playing Bach on my cello immediately made me the odd one out. After several attempts to stop stringing out some more tunes, I was shut down due to my instrument’s “obnoxiously loud” sounds.

I gave into my roommates’ complaints and started searching for other spots: the common rooms, the staircases and even outside; everywhere was either in the way or in use. After several sessions of tenses interaction with roommates, I finally managed to move off campus in Spring 2015. Once I moved away, I felt at liberty to practice.

Now I am a more familiar with the campus and have come to realize that promising areas do exist here that could be designated and tailored to function as practice rooms. Harbor Hall, the USF and the Poynter Library already have existing spaces that could be remodelled or reserved for our student musicians.

Members of The Musician’s Club gather in Harbor Hall’s Palm Room and have performed at The Tavern. Their attempts to coordinate efforts in order to nourish a safe and musical campus environment proves the existing need on campus for practice areas.

Such a project also provides a solution to administration’s current efforts to encourage commuters to participate more on campus after their classes.

The need for USFSP to incorporate space for musicians to practice is an armful that could grow into something beautiful.

By Anna Bryson
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I went braless for six months in order to protest societal norms regarding women’s clothing. I’ve heard countless stories of women protesting in a similar fashion, but last September I decided to make my own stand. This is my story.

Let me be clear: this was NOT an easy task, however, I persevered through the face of adversity for the sake of social justice. My act of female empowerment and rebellion caused quite a bit of commotion at school, work, and even in the streets.

On the first day of my momentous societal journey, I was walking to my 8 a.m. class and the junior in the hallway nodded hello. He immediately noticed that I wasn’t wearing a bra and became so enthralled that he seemed to forget where he was.

As I walked past, he turned around to watch me, and several peers, eyes wide in utter disbelief. I wanted to turn around and run away, to abandon my cause in order to preserve even a bit of my reputation. Yet I reminded myself that I was doing this for the sake of women everywhere and that my clothing choice is demonstrating a point larger than I.

As I sat down in my chair, the girl seated next to me pensively leaned over and whispered, “I can see your nipples.” This was my breaking point. I tried to hold myself together, but a silent tear rolled down my cheek.

I hadn’t thought this experiment through. All of my classmates now knew that I have nipples. They probably even know now that my left boob is bigger than my right one, oh what have I gotten myself into?

The professor that day was so distracted by my breasts that he faked a headache and dismissed the class early. He taught every subsequent class with a blindfold on. I think he was afraid that he wouldn’t be able to teach us because he wouldn’t be able to think about anything besides my braless breasts.

Day after day, incidences like this occurred. My heroic act of going braless caused car accidents, street fights, and even a forest fire. Despite all the distress caused to the Tampa Bay area, it was all worth it for the change that I made.

My one word of advice to my followers is to be prepared for how much commotion the natural shape of your breasts will cause. Six months ago I was a regular woman, and today I am a radical rebel in the face of society.

Opting to live your life braless is liberating and everyone who can do it and should. It might seem strange at first, but you will soon begin to wonder why ever thought it was a sensible idea to wear an uncomfortable article of clothing with no practical use.

I acknowledge that there could be a physical necessity for some women to wear a bra, and don’t mean to dismiss them from something that might be a health benefit. But I feel the majority of women are stuck in a cycle of discomfort forced on them by societal norms. It’s nonsensical to wear a restrictive article of clothing that literally has a wire in it only to uphold an unrealistic, idealized image of what the female body should look like. At this point in time, going sans-ira isn’t a head-turning ordeal, and it shouldn’t be.

It’s not a novel idea to choose to be comfortable enough with your body to not restrict it into any unnatural shape. It’s time to stop objectifying the female body and accept it for what it naturally is.

The nipples that brooked through the glass ceiling

By Anna Bryson
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BOOBS NOT BOMBS: Anna Bryson thinks that society shouldn’t put such an emphasis on the female body and that wearing a bra isn’t mandatory.

Students who are going home to practice or have moved away from campus because of a lack of accessible practice spaces would feel encouraged to stay on campus. Our Student Government needs to dedicate a space for musicians. It would have little to no cost to the university, provided that those designated spaces were empty classrooms or conference rooms. If the space proved useful enough, the school could move towards remodelling a space to be soundproofed.

Until then, any simple and easy idea that could be implemented would be sufficient to benefit an artform that could grow into something beautiful.

BOOBS NOT BOMBS: Student Life After Dark event highlighted the need for USFSP to incorporate space for musicians to practice.
We’d Love to Hear from You

The Crow’s Nest accepts letters to the editor. All submissions should be no more than 250 words. Writers must include their full name. In addition, USF faculty should include their title, department and extension. All letters are subject to editing for clarity and length. Letters can be sent to drodriguez7@mail.usf.edu with subject title “letter to the editor.”
By Whitney Eilstrom
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Bookworms Rejoice: Count down the savings with 321 Books

Students and staff from Big Sisters of Psychology, the Career Center, Omicron Delta Kappa, the International Community of USFSP, the Collection, Psy-Chi, Tau Sigma and Student Government came together to try and use Big Talk to bring the USFSP community closer together.

The event started with a surprise video playing on the Reef’s large Braille Eye screen. The video was a brief explanation and demonstration of the concept of Big Talk. As the video came to a close, Parrhale’s “Happy” began playing in the background and a 15-minute countdown timer began on the screen. The students and staff rushed down the stairs and into the Reef to begin their discussions. Big Talk initiators were given a handout with questions to help guide the discussion. Some example questions were: “What do you want to do before you die?” and “What advice would you have given yourself five years ago?”

Julia Maselli, a freshman environmental science major, participated in the Big Talk Experiment. Maselli found the experience “almost intrusive” but still enjoyable. Maselli explained that these questions prompted questions of her own like “Am I doing what I love right now?”

“As college students, we already think about all this stuff by ourselves. But having someone else to talk about it with is really comforting,” said Maselli. Every student experienced a different discussion. Some initiators sat with students for the entire 15 minutes. Others bounced between students who perhaps only felt like sharing a little of their time.

Nan Ho, a graphic design sophomore, sat through most of the event on his phone until he was finally approached. While the discussion was “kind of personal,” he said he wasn’t uncomfortable. Ho said he found the Big Talk to be a “good opportunity to reflect.”

“Engaging with students is important. Not a lot of people interact with people like me because I’m usually by myself, but I really enjoy talking with people,” said Ho.

While many students enjoyed the event, some saw room for improvement. According to Alberto Perez, a freshman biology major, some questions were very personal and could be “a bit awkward.”

“I don’t ever tell people about my past or feelings, but she really wanted to know how I felt,” said Perez.

Antonio Permy, a political science sophomore, was one of the people helping initiate the Big Talk. Permy sat down with a group of high school students who were touring USFSP. Permy was surprised by the discussion he experienced. “It was very eye opening. It went so many different places that I was not expecting. It was very surprising because I didn’t think I would get very much out of them at first,” said Permy.

Permy helped facilitate a discussion that he believes brought the students closer together. According to Permy, they discussed the loss of loved ones, societal perceptions, and even one student’s experience of finding out his parents were drug dealers.

As the 15-minute timer ended, the groups began to wrap up their discussions. Students were invited to share their experience on video for a school memory video. The entire event was documented by USFSP Connect.

Tracey Garbutt, president and founder of Big Sisters of Psychology, designed the event to help students make some of the division in the community. “I can’t stand to see how the divides in society are becoming greater. We’re slicing ourselves up in all these ways and I just see it getting worse and worse,” said Garbutt. “There’s no healing after. The wounds are open, the blood is flowing, people are angry, people are upset but there’s nothing pulling us back together.”

Gurbtt wanted to find a way to bridge the gap between everyone’s differences. She found her answer in “Big Talk.”

“When you ask someone ‘what do you want to do before you die?’ they can’t wear any of those masks that divide us. There’s really no societal mask sitting on top of that,” said Garbutt.