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Opinion:
**UT
falls**

flat

When it comes to
protecting students
on campus from
COVID-19, UT's
policies lag behind.

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TUESDAY, JAN. 26, 2021

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CAMPUS

RecSports expands intramural opportunities



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RecSports is expanding more play activities this semester. Due to COVID-19 safety precautions, many activities were not offered in the fall 2020 semester.

By **Tori Duff**
@torianedduff

RecSports is expanding intramural league activities this semester, after many were canceled in March as part of COVID-19 safety precautions.

Some of these activities, including volleyball, cornhole and the annual track meet, were offered in the fall semester but will have expanded play opportunities this semester, including more available dates and larger groups. Other activities, like softball, soccer, tennis and foot golf, are being reintroduced after their cancellation in March due to the pandemic.

"RecSports wants to make sure that we are providing safe activities (following University protocols) and allowing students to try something new, to be able to socialize safely and to social distance with friends," said RecSports senior director Jennifer Speer.

RecSports will not begin in-person activities until Feb. 1, following the University's guidance for a two-week period of online-only instruction, Speer said.

RecSports did a trial run of one of their larger events, the annual track meet, in the fall at the intramural field with students six feet apart, said Darci Doll, the associate director for intramural sports. She said the success of this trial assured them that they can continue to safely offer more opportunities.

"We're following what we're hearing from the University," Speer said. "If we had a sudden spike in (COVID-19) numbers, we could always pare back some of these activities."

RecSports offers activities as both league events and one-day special

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STUDENT LIFE

International vaccine concern

International students are unsure of COVID-19 vaccine distribution plans in their home countries.

By Hairuo Yi
@hairuoyeet

UT plans to provide available COVID-19 vaccines to students and staff, but students who currently live outside of Austin said they have received little guidance from the University on how to access them.

Students outside Austin should consult local public health authorities to get information about the vaccine, Susan Hochman, associate director of assessment, communications and health information technology for University Health Services, said in an email. Currently, any student, faculty and staff may receive the vaccine if they qualify under the 1A or 1B phase by state guidelines, according to the Protect Texas Together website.

"Vaccine distribution in the U.S. is determined by federal, state and local authorities," said Hochman. "There is a great amount of

variability from state to state. There is even further variability internationally with regard to vaccine supply and distribution plans."

As of Jan. 25, only 53 countries have started actively vaccinating citizens in limited groups, while multiple countries have no available vaccine, according to Our World in Data.

Michael Moon, a petroleum engineering sophomore

staying home in South Korea, said it is frustrating to live in a country that is wary of outside vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. "I am concerned. ... If vaccines become a requirement and if (UT) requires students to come back and take classes, (what happens if) Korea doesn't import the vaccines by then," Moon said.

Even though a negative test is required to enter the

U.S., Hochman said there are no current plans to mandate the vaccine at UT. According to the Texas Global website, plans for the fall 2021 semester regarding travel policies will be announced on or before May 15.

Surendar Malai, an electrical and computer engineering applicant, said he is concerned about the controversial and less effective vaccines from his home country, India, and the possibility of a vaccine mandate.

"(It) would be a major

concern for me if (the U.S.) made it a requirement," said Malai. "People are just really concerned about how the vaccine is because everyone is aware that our country is trying to hide the real numbers, the number of deaths, ... the number of COVID-19 cases."

Hochman said students who qualify to receive the vaccine can travel to Austin to receive the vaccine from UT if they wish to do so.

"However, vaccine distribution is by appointment,

and there is typically a short window between when an individual is contacted to schedule and their actual appointment, so they would need to factor that in," Hochman said in a text.

Moon said he would not be willing to travel to Austin to get the vaccine.

"I think there's more risk going to the airport, riding the plane and going to Austin, and that process is more risky, I'd say, than the benefit that I get out of (the vaccine)," Moon said.



ROCKY HIGINE / THE DAILY TEXAN STAFF

RECSPORTS

CONTINUES FROM PAGE 2

events, said Doll. A list of all activities and sign-ups for intramural leagues can be found on the RecSports website.

Social distancing is enforced between teams, and groups must be 10 people or less. Teams or clubs larger than 10 people must practice separately, Speer said.

Speer said masks are

mandatory when inside the facilities. Outdoor activities with social distancing precautions do not require masks, Doll said.

"If (students) feel sick at all, they're encouraged to stay home," Speer said. "We have the opportunity for them to reschedule those contests if for any reason they're not able to participate because they're in ... isolation or quarantine."

History senior Kaitlyn

Dougherty said having opportunities like intramural sports can be very helpful to ease the stress of college life and the pandemic.

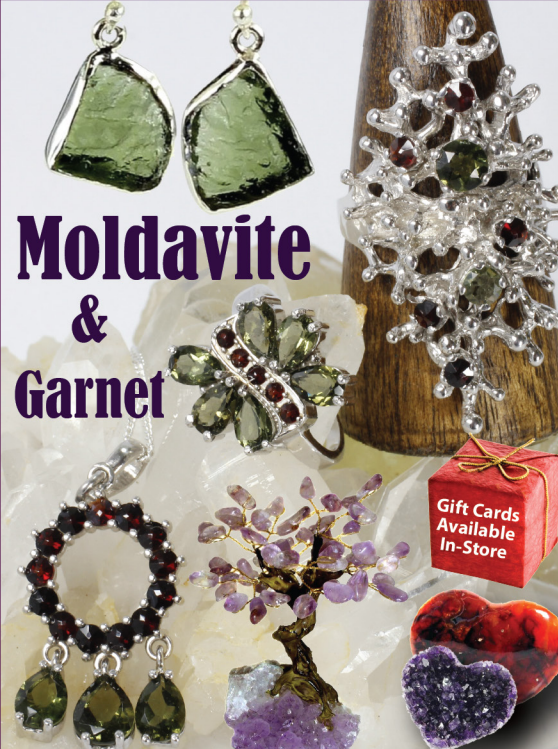
"Students that play intramurals really rely on that game time to unwind and blow off some steam," said Dougherty, a supervisor and official at RecSports. "College can be really stressful, so playing games with friends makes it much easier to manage."

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EDITORIAL

Other universities set standard

As students return to campus this spring, it's clear UT can do more to combat the spread of COVID-19.

By The Daily Texan Editorial Board

As COVID-19 numbers continue to climb in Texas — reporting an average of 300 deaths per day — public and private Texas universities welcomed at least a portion of students back to campus in person this spring.

UT administration decided to hold all hybrid courses online through the end of January, delaying their in-person elements. UT informed all on-campus

residents they would be required to take a COVID-19 test within four days of returning.

However, while the University encouraged students to get tested before and after returning to campus, there are no testing requirements for nonresident students, faculty or staff.

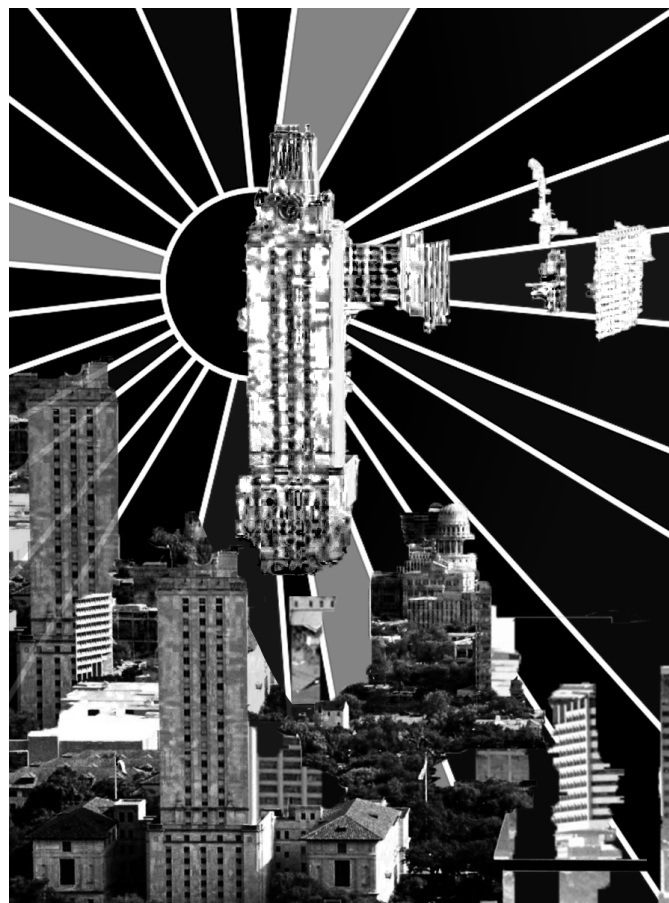
“(We’re) trying to encourage students to come back over a period of time, to test before and after arrival, to reduce the size of that initial peak,” said Art Markman, head of the academic working group for COVID-19 planning.

We acknowledge that UT has made some steps in the right direction, but it’s not enough.

We studied other universities’ COVID-19 protocols and talked to students to learn about their schools’ responses to the pandemic. From our research, we know other schools have handled the pandemic on their campuses, at least in certain respects, better than UT has.

The University of Oklahoma required all students living in the dorms to provide a negative COVID-19 test before returning to Norman. OU has also made a noticeable effort to remain transparent with students by appointing a COVID-19 officer, Dale Bratzler.

“Dr. Bratzler has been very accessible to us,” said Jordan Miller, OU journalism and political science senior and editor-in-chief of The Oklahoma Daily. “We’ve been able to talk to him about



ISABELLA HOLLIS / THE DAILY TEXAN STAFF

different things the university is doing and things happening across the state.”

We’ve pushed UT administration to be more transparent about its COVID-19 protocols and make information about protocols more accessible to students since last spring, with limited results.

At Texas A&M University, students are given a variety

of testing service options. In addition to their main walk-up testing locations on campus, the university also offers drive-thru testing and testing kiosks.

“Testing (is) one thing that I’ll give A&M an A+ on,” said Brady Stone, journalism junior and editor-in-chief of The Battalion. “Any student on campus who wants to get tested can get tested within a day.”

In contrast, UT’s proactive testing has irregular hours, doesn’t allow walk-ups and has had low student participation.

At Stanford University, students on campus must fill out a daily Stanford Health Check. The online survey dictates campus access depending on the student’s reported symptoms and university protocol compliance. Students without a green rating are not allowed into buildings on campus — except residency areas — until the Health Check is completed.

In comparison, UT implemented the Protect Texas Together app at the beginning of the fall semester, a program designed to monitor student symptoms daily and enable contact tracing.

Besides the two on-campus proactive testing sites that require a completed symptom survey to enter, though, the University has failed to implement any sort of system to hold students accountable for using the app.

Baylor University required a negative test from all faculty, staff and students before the first day of class, and students, staff and faculty are required to get tested every week. Each student is assigned a weekly testing day, time and location to streamline the testing process.

UT touts itself as a Public Ivy and is consistently ranked as one of, if not the best, university in Texas. It’s time for UT to live up to that reputation, starting with its response to the biggest health crisis we’ve seen in a century.

GALLERY



CHARLIE HYMAN / THE DAILY TEXAN STAFF

UT students get involved in Texas' 87th Legislative Session

By Lauren Goodman
@laurgoodman

UT students are working with state legislators in many forms this semester during Texas' 87th Legislative Session.

Over 1,800 bills have been introduced so far for the 87th Texas Legislature's regular session, which began Jan. 12 and will end May 31.

Kevin Roberts, vice chair of the Longhorn Lobbying Commission, a commission affiliated with University Democrats, said they convene every legislative session to advocate for bills their organization supports. Roberts said the students in the commission are advocating for numerous bills related to raising the minimum wage to \$15, voter registration and women's rights.

"I'm looking forward to the session," government sophomore Roberts said. "A lot of the focus will be on COVID-19, redistricting and the budget, but I'm definitely optimistic that we can get some of these bills passed this session."

Government junior Hector Mendez said he is keeping track of education-related legislation with a Twitter bot he created called TXLege Student Watcher, which automatically retweets any tweets related to the hashtags #TxEd and #TxLege every hour. Mendez said the bot is nonpartisan and began as a personal project for him.

"I'm hoping that more (students) will be able to follow (the legislative session)," Mendez said. "There's a lot of bills that pertain to college students that I think would be very important for them to learn and find out."

Mendez said he is personally following the progress of H.B. 93, which

would designate polling places on college campuses. Hook The Vote, a nonpartisan agency in UT Student Government, brought the bill to representatives to increase voting access for students.

"It's a big deal for me to make sure that college students have a voting site that is close to them on campus so they don't have to go out of the way to go to other voting places," Mendez said.

Government freshman Carter Moxley will work directly in the Texas Capitol as an intern for state Rep. Phil King, R-Weatherford, who is chairman of the House Redistricting Committee, which will draw district boundaries based on 2020 U.S. Census data.

"I wanted to give back to my community since they provided so much for me through financial aid and scholarships," said Moxley, a member of UT's chapter for the Young Conservatives of Texas. "I love my community and District 61. To tell you the truth, it's very humbling to be able to come here and represent them in the office of District 61."

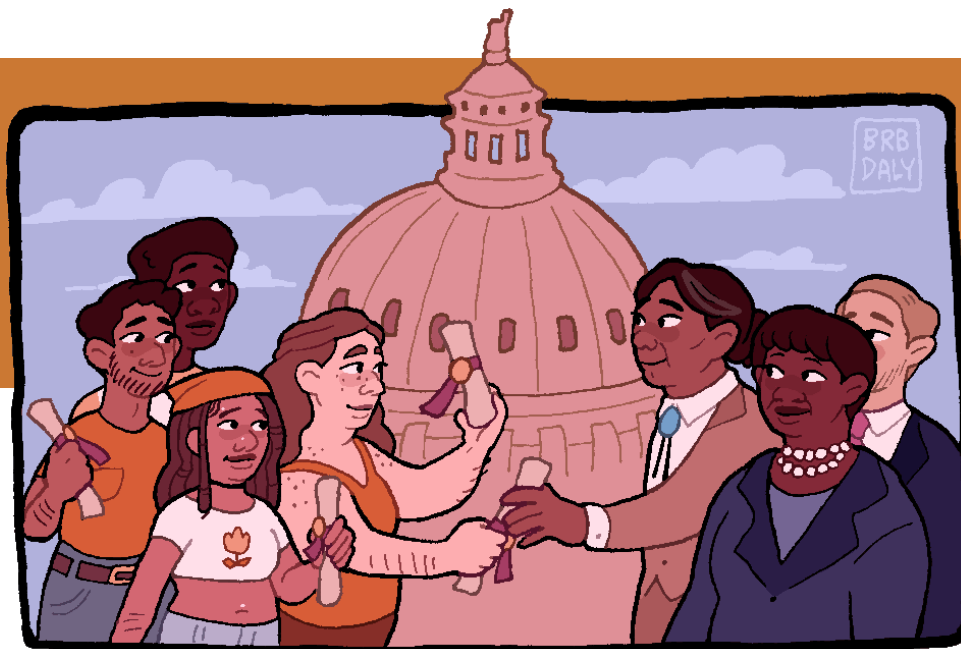
Moxley said he responds to constituents' letters and phone calls as a legislative intern. He said that it's been an amazing experience getting to work at the Texas Capitol.

"On the Texas House Capitol, I am blessed beyond words," Moxley said. "I love the hustle and bustle of government work and all the intricate parts and how it works."

Mendez said more students should be paying attention to state and local legislatures because bills and resolutions can directly affect day-to-day life more than national politics.

"If (students) want to know what's going on, and even voice their own opinions about it to have some change, they should absolutely be paying attention to the Texas Legislature," Mendez said.

LEGISLATIVE



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ALUMNI

UT graduates work on the frontlines of COVID-19 pandemic

By Lauren Goodman
@laurgoodman

Last weekend, Kelsey Bergman saw her family for the first time in five months since she started working as a resident nurse in the intensive care unit in August.

"I used to work at the same hospital as a patient care technician through nursing school, so I was already familiar with how the hospital ran," Bergman said. "Then whenever I started as a (resident nurse), that's when the pandemic had happened. ... It made everything feel so real and so scary."

There have been more than 25.3 million COVID-19 cases and over 420,000 COVID-19 deaths in the United States, according to The New York Times database. According to a projection from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the death toll is expected to reach nearly 570,000 in the U.S. by May.

Bergman, who graduated from UT in May with a bachelor's degree in nursing, said it takes a lot of teamwork and support from her colleagues at St. David's Medical Center to work through the overtime hours during the pandemic.

"I definitely think that everyone is burning out a little bit," Bergman said. "We all have a positive attitude together that keeps us going as a group because we're all there living it every day."

Bergman returned to her hometown of Frisco, Texas, for her mother's birthday Jan. 22 after spending the winter holidays either at work or isolated in her apartment.

"I kept reminding myself that all of our patients are there by themselves without any family and spending the holiday alone in the hospital," Bergman said. "I try to boost the mood for my patients and wish them a Merry Christmas and hold their hand while no one else could. It felt good to have a purpose to serve over the holidays."

Kelsey's mother, Lynn Bergman, said her heart broke after Kelsey canceled her plans to come home because it was too risky. Lynn said she would send Kelsey little Christmas gifts throughout December to keep Kelsey's spirits up.

"As a parent, you're trying to be supportive without showing your own fear for the situation as well," Lynn said.

Lynn said she left the Christmas tree up in her house so it would feel like an extension of the holidays when Kelsey returned for her birthday.

"It was the first time any of us got to hug her or put our arms around her," Lynn said. "It was the best birthday present, obviously, that I could have ever had."

Rachel Bershada, a UT alumna with a bachelor's degree in nursing, works with children as a resident nurse at a San Antonio hospital. Bershada said it was an emotional experience getting both doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in December and January.

"It was surreal," Bershada said. "Walking in the room and just being with happy and hopeful people — it almost made you want to cry."

Bershada said volunteering to administer vaccines was a fulfilling experience. She said that getting the vaccine is a personal decision, but the benefits outweighed the possible risks for her.

"People came in so happy and excited," Bershada said. "Some were nervous, but it was like the most wild human interaction that I've had in the last nine months."

Kelsey Bergman said getting vaccinated was a "wave of relief" knowing that there could be a positive light in the future.

"I knew the nurse who had administered the vaccine to me. ... We were like, 'Oh my gosh, this is history in the making,'" Bergman said. "I'll never forget that moment. Like if I close my eyes, I'll be able to see everything and feel everything forever."



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UT alumna Kelsey Bergman gets the COVID-19 vaccine at St. David's Medical Center. More than 25.3 million COVID-19 cases and over 420,000 deaths have been reported in the United States.

FEATURE

'Boys State' star talks film

The documentary won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival last year.

By Thomas Casler
@thethomascasler

A lone in his dorm room, Steven Garza enjoyed a box of tacos while scrolling on Twitter when he saw the tweet. The documentary film, "Boys State," had just won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival.

"I was just running around and screaming," government sophomore Garza said. "Who do I need to call? I need to call my mom (and say), 'Mom, we just won!'"

Every June, politically interested Texas high school students spend a week on The University of Texas campus. The historic program known as "Boys State" engages its participants in a simulated state government, where the students pass votes, make speeches and run for office.

In August 2020, a documentary titled "Boys State" starring Garza was released about the program on Apple TV+. The film takes place during the program's 2018 session in which Garza runs for lieutenant governor — the highest position at Boys State. After he lost the mock election, Garza later won the hearts of viewers at the Sundance Film Festival when the documentary premiered in January 2020.

"Not only (was) Boys State a transformative experience, (it) let me know, yes, you can give a speech," Garza said. "And yes, you can win over hearts and minds. And yes, you can make a difference in somebody's life so long as you stay true to your convictions and your morals in the face of adversity."

In 2017, the program made national headlines when the simulated Texas government voted to secede from the United States. Jesse Moss and Amanda McBaine, a married couple



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UT student Steven Garza stars in the 2020 documentary "Boys State." The documentary follows multiple high school students at a weeklong political camp.

and Californian filmmakers, saw the news and decided to make a documentary about the program the following year.

"The boys were clearly feeling this political discontent," Moss said. "We thought, 'Maybe this (documentary) is a way to have a conversation about politics and this moment through the eyes of young people.' That was really exciting to us."

A month before the June program began, the directors traveled to Houston, Texas, and met Garza at the Boys State orientation. They immediately knew they wanted their camera to follow him throughout the weeklong program.

"Steven is not the loudest in the room, but he has a kind of wisdom beyond his age," Moss said.

After shooting for the film finished, Garza later went on to work on Wendy Davis' political campaign where he met his best friend, Joe Cascino.

"I enjoy being Steven's reality check," Cascino said. "I think that after his 15 minutes of fame are over — which again, I'll always clown him for — he will be very involved in serving his community."

Moss and McBaine also still keep in touch with Garza, who said they encouraged him to attend college and are like a family to him.

"Whenever I need to make a big

decision in my life, I talk to my mom, and then the second (people) I talk to are Jesse and Amanda," Garza said. "If it (weren't) for them, I wouldn't be in college."

As for now, Garza is focused on his classes and interning at Unite America, a grassroots political organization. He is also still actively involved in promoting the documentary.

"I have a pretty interesting life as a college student," Garza said. "I get to do what I love, which is politics. I get to get an education. And at the same time, I get to promote this project made by wonderful people, full of wonderful people and share it with wonderful people."

STUDENT LIFE

LGBTQ+ students come out to family amid pandemic

By Fiza Kuzhiyil
@fiza11k

Quarantined in her Austin apartment in August, Fay Medina pressed her phone to her ear and came out to her mother as bisexual. There was a pause.

"You know you're going to hell, right?" her mother said.

Medina's heart sank. Shaking, she asked her mother if she still loved her. Her mother ignored the question.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, families spent months together inside their homes, while others struggled to remain connected while apart. Some LGBTQ+ students knowingly faced hard conversations to come out to their families as a way to connect with them.

Medina, an international relations and economics senior, said her

younger brother is immuno-compromised, and she hasn't seen him or her mother in almost a year. In her apartment, she spent hours watching videos and reading stories about people coming out to their families.

"Especially during COVID, I wanted to be closer with my family," Medina said. "I wanted to have more people to talk to daily about things and not have any restrictions."

After coming out to her mother over the phone, Medina said they didn't speak for weeks. She said the silence hurt her and she blamed herself.

"I want to talk to my mom (because) she's my mom, you know?" Medina said. "(But) then she wouldn't say 'I love you' and that hurt me for so long."

Four months later, Medina and her mother have not spoken about that phone call. She said she is willing to not talk about her sexuality if it means

she can be a part of her mother's life and she can watch her little brother grow up.

COVID-19 sent biology sophomore Trinity Rust back to her League City childhood home in March. For the first few months, Rust said she felt uncomfortable hiding her sexuality from her family and wanted to go back to Austin.

"I had been avoiding coming out to my mom for a while, just because she's a deeply religious person," Rust said.

During an argument one day, Rust said she blurted out to her mother that she was gay. She said she hadn't planned for that moment, but both of her parents were ultimately supportive.

"I'm really glad I came out to both my parents because it is easier to be home," Rust said. "I'm able to talk to my mom about girl problems instead of just being like, 'Oh, I'm not dating

anyone, ... just focusing on school."

When the time came to return to Austin in the fall, she said it was hard to leave.

"Coming out to my mom, while one of the hardest things I've done, was one of the best things I've ever done," Rust said.

Alone with his father on the drive home to Kennedale from Austin for Thanksgiving break, government sophomore Leland Murphy came out as queer. With no escape from the car ride, Murphy said it was really nice to finally have a conversation about his sexuality.

"There have been a lot of bad, really dark, low points throughout quarantine, but I feel like now it is better especially after (coming out)," Murphy said.

After telling his family, Murphy said he doesn't have to be as secretive about his life. Now he talks openly

about his boyfriend with his family, which he said seems so small but means a lot to him.

"Everyone should be able to love openly and show love openly and have a relationship openly," Murphy said. "It's a big burden lifted off, and I feel a lot happier now that I have come out."



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FILM Q&A

‘The Blazing World’ producer talks quarantine filmmaking

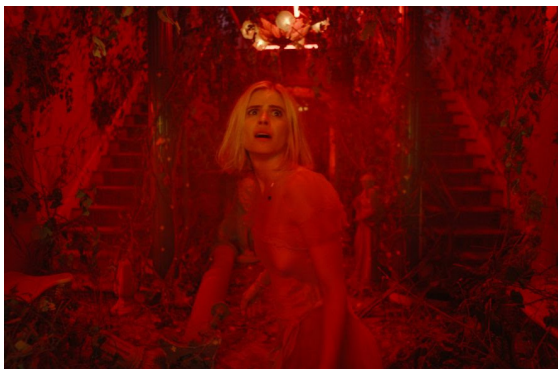
By Noah Levine
@ZProductionz

“The Blazing World” is a new feature film produced by Brinton Bryan that follows a young woman who accidentally finds herself in a twisted alternate dimension. The film, created on location in Dripping Springs, Texas, is set to premiere at this year’s Sundance Film Festival on Jan. 31 as well as a drive-in screening in Austin, Texas. Bryan spoke on the phone with The Daily Texan about the production process, filming amidst a pandemic and working with director, producer and actor Carlson Young.

The Daily Texan: How do you go about creating such a surreal film without overdoing your production budget?

Brinton Bryan: We scouted locations here in Austin last January. Coincidentally, the very first house we looked at was the house that we shot the film at out of Dripping Springs. We realized that our hero house was actually a character in the film. We actually approached it (with) more of a casting point of view. We didn’t have a massive budget to be able to create exactly what Carlson had in mind, so we needed to find something that was incredibly unique ... that was the most important part of the entire development process. Once we found that house, we knew that we had a movie.

DT: What has been your involvement in the project from its start to finish?



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Director/writer/actor Carlson Young stars in the fantasy horror film “The Blazing World.”

BB: Carlson has been one of my best friends for over 10 years. She made a short film called “The Blazing World” that was in Sundance in 2018. I saw the film (and) I was blown away by it. When I knew that she had a feature (film) that she was developing for it, I was very interested. When she came to me, it was just a stack of papers. She brought me a script and said, “Do you think that there’s a movie here?” It was my responsibility to break it down, do a schedule, put together a cast list (and) kind of solidify the entire plan. It has been my full-time job seven days a week, 12 hours a day, for the past year. (Carlson’s) job is to get everything up on the screen and my job is to give her all the tools that she needs to put up on the screen.

DT: What other films inspired the approach to “The Blazing World”?

BB: Carlson is a huge cinephile of 70s horror. She loves European cinema. “Suspiria” is one of her favorite films. She loves “Pan’s

Labyrinth.” I’ve always kind of described this (film) as if Sofia Coppola were to have directed “Pan’s Labyrinth.”

DT: Were there any unexpected challenges that popped up in production during the COVID-19 pandemic?

BB: We were really lucky. We had a film that was essentially in one isolated location for the majority of the movie but there were some scenes that needed to be rewritten in order to do that. The biggest challenge for us was that we didn’t have a huge budget to be able to risk a shutdown. (We had) to find a place that we could all live together and create this quarantine bubble. We were very fortunate to find this wedding retreat in Dripping Springs that was closed. We rented it out and it was summer camp. Everybody lived in cabins and RVs. In addition to producing a film, I also felt like I was the mayor of a small town. My problems ranged from the typical producer challenges to somebody’s microwave not working in the RV.



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FEATURE

From court to camera

Junior center Charli Collier is sharing her love of basketball from a different lens.

By Taylor Hawthorne
@taylorhaw

Junior center Charli Collier's love for basketball is evident as she rips down rebounds and soars over multiple defenders for a layup, but it has also driven her to start a new series on Instagram's IGTV called "Center Court."

Collier is familiar with being interviewed by the media, but "Center Court" serves as a way for her to be the interviewer instead of the interviewee. A two-time Big 12 Player of the Week honoree, Collier mentioned on a Jan. 13 teleconference that she wants to be a sports broadcaster for ESPN whenever she's done with basketball. The series creates a stepping stone to achieving this goal, Collier said.

"I like to talk in front of the camera," Collier said. "I want to be a sports broadcaster when I'm done with basketball, so it's just giving me that experience. I like doing it and a lot of NBA and WNBA stars have been telling me, 'Hey, this is great. I would love to come on your show.'"

During a Jan. 30 teleconference, head coach Vic Shaefer said that Collier plays with "extreme



JACK MYER / THE DAILY TEXAN FILE

Junior center Charli Collier soars over defenders for a floating shot during a game against Iowa State on Feb. 13, 2020. Collier has twice been named Big 12 Player of the Week, but she is also making an impact off the court with her IGTV series "Center Court."

poise and confidence," something she incorporates into her show as well.

Caitlin Smith, a UT alumna and friend of Collier's, helps with the behind-the-scenes editing, but also gets to witness how Collier conducts herself as an interviewer. Smith said Collier's radiant personality shines through her conversations, which helps her connect with her guests.

"I'm impressed with how calm and collected she is," Smith said. "Obviously, she's been in the basketball culture

forever so she can relate to these people super well. She's super chill and also has some sass and smoke that I love."

The guests on the show have ranged from high school basketball star Jada Williams to former Texas basketball and current Indiana Pacers center Myles Turner. Collier was able to carry the traction from the Turner interview to secure her next NBA player and biggest name guest yet, ten-time NBA All-Star Kevin Durant.

Getting Durant, who won the Naismith Player of

the Year award in his lone season at Texas, to come on the show was a Christmas gift, Smith said. Literally.

"On Christmas morning, (Collier) texted me and said, 'I have something to tell you. Kevin Durant said he will do the interview. My present to you, Merry Christmas,'" Smith said. "It was so crazy and exciting for both of us finding out on Christmas day."

Since starting her IGTV series, Collier has had to hunt for interviews like the journalists who cover

her games. Collier said her favorite part of the process is just getting a response from her prospective guests.

"They get a lot of interview requests, and I was fortunate enough to get the people that I have so far," Collier said. "So, when people take the time out of their day to interview with you, it's a good thing because I know how it feels. Sometimes I don't want to do interviews, so I just appreciate them taking the time out of their busy schedule."

The main things Collier

wants her audience to take away from "Center Court" are the stories and advice her guests share.

"I really want them to actually listen to the words," Collier said. "They know basketball, and the whole reason for the show is to inspire other people. The things we go through as athletes, a lot of people don't know about, so just listen to (the guests) upbringing, background and how they got started in basketball, because that's what it's all about."



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STUDENT LIFE

Texas Ultimate teammates find solace in disc golf

By Stephen Wagner
@stephenwag22

David Garcia is familiar with Circle C Ranch's disc golf course.

The physics senior and Texas Ultimate team member has played the course's unforgiving trees, rocky terrain and 500-foot holes dozens of times in the past six months. Once his club, the Texas Ultimate team, had its 2020 season canceled due to COVID-19, Garcia began playing disc golf as often as four times per week as a way to be safely active outdoors while still engaging in some semblance of traditional Frisbee. And he isn't the only Texas Ultimate player who took up the sport.

In the last six months, more than 14 Texas Ultimate players have started playing disc golf weekly as a way to socialize, socially distanced, while maintaining a connection to the sport they love.

"I think it's just that I like throwing Frisbees. Watching them fly and take their full flight and how they turn and glide, it's so cool to watch," Garcia said. "But also to be able to be good at (Frisbee) and compete with

your friends is a ton of fun. That competition is similar to what you find in Ultimate."

John Clyde, computer science sophomore and Texas Ultimate player, shares Garcia's view on the similarities between disc golf and Ultimate Frisbee. Clyde began playing with his own Frisbees instead of disc golf discs, just to stay sharp for the 2021 Ultimate season.

“

I think part of it is that it's just an easy way to get out and do something active with friends and people from the team.”

JOHN CLYDE
COMPUTER SCIENCE
SOPHOMORE

But not all members of the Ultimate team were as quick to take up the sport. Some of Clyde's teammates, like Greg Lowry, aerospace engineering senior, were initially hesitant to begin playing disc golf out of fear that playing and throwing the discs would hinder their ability to throw a Frisbee.

However, when much



ROCKY HIGINE / THE DAILY TEXAN STAFF

of the country entered a lockdown in late March due to COVID-19, Lowry became bored enough to give disc golf a shot.

"When COVID hit and we weren't really able to play Ultimate, a lot of us were like, 'Well, we can probably figure this out, this probably isn't going

to be too hard,'" Lowry said. "Let's go play this sport because we know we can socially distance and be safer."

As of Jan. 25, Texas Ultimate has yet to begin practicing but hopes to open the 2021 season in late spring. Not all players are certain if they'll return

to the team this season due to safety concerns regarding COVID-19 or when they may play Ultimate Frisbee again.

But one thing is certain: Garcia, Lowry and Clyde will continue playing disc golf, regardless of if there is an Ultimate season in 2021 or not.

"I think part of it is that it's just an easy way to get out and do something active with friends and people from the team," Clyde said. "It's a fun thing to do in general. Since we weren't able to play Ultimate, it's a safe and easy way to just have fun hanging out with friends."