

GRANDES MURALISTAS

Spanish
artists
beautify
Beaumont.
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UPbeat

Inside:
FAFSA,
Filmmaker,
Castillos,
and more



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UPbeat

SPRING 2024
A UNIVERSITY PRESS MAGAZINE

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A publication of the

UNIVERSITY PRESS

The student newspaper of Lamar University

205 Communcation Building
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Beaumont, Texas 77710

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PEOPLE



Proudly Pink

There's no need to ask **JENNA McCULLOUGH**, "What's your favorite color?" She wears the answer loud and proud. The accounting major has adored the color pink for the majority of her life. "I can't remember not loving pink, but one of my earliest memories is asking to switch rooms with my baby sister because her nursery was pink, and three-year-old me couldn't resist," the Lumberton senior says. "I love the color pink because it is both bold and feminine." Though Jenna currently owns around 50 articles of pink clothing, she wants more. "I am always looking to expand," she says. "I am an avid shopper, always on the lookout for the next perfect pink piece." Jenna acknowledges and combats the outdated stereotype for avid wearers of the color. For years, movies, books, and media have portrayed those who wear pink as "dumb." "When people see a girl decked out in pink, the automatic assumption is that she is ditsy," Jenna says. "I love being unashamed enough to wear what I love anyway, and smart enough to prove them wrong." Her pink passion inspires others to wear what they love and to dress to impress.

Story and photo by **Meredith Winkler**

D&D Director

In the 1980s, it seems like everyone was playing “Dungeons and Dragons.” The tabletop role-playing game revolves around campaigns where players create characters to complete a quest, set by a dungeon master. Thanks to the popularity of “Stranger Things” and Nerd Culture, D&D is once again the cool thing to do. **CASEY SHONTZ** is a dungeon master. They discovered the game when they found their dad’s first- and second-edition versions. “Me and my sister tried to play when we were pretty young,” Casey says.

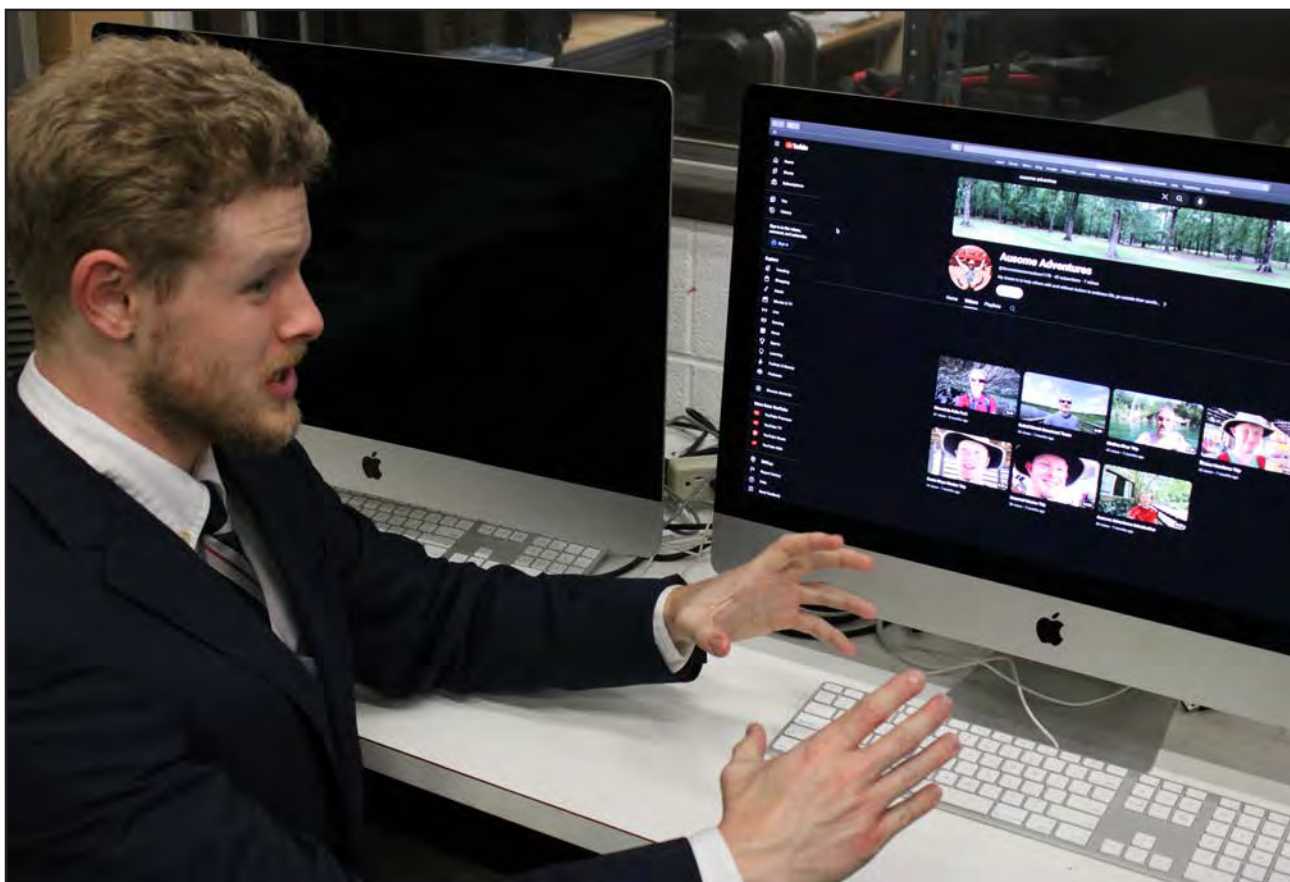
“And then, years later, when there was the rise in popularity of ‘Critical Role’, ‘Dimension 20’ and other (D&D) podcasts, I started watching those and decided to start DMing and playing myself.”

The Spring junior says being a dungeon master is like directing improv. “I want to be a film director, so directing actors and writing scripts is similar to DMing and writing campaigns,” Casey says. They are currently running two campaigns. One is an already existing module called ‘Once Upon a Witchlight,’ and the other is a space-themed campaign they wrote and designed. “My favorite thing is probably seeing all the creative stuff my players come up with,” Casey says, “because they always do things that you don’t expect.”

Story and photo by **Maddie Sims**



PEOPLE



Seizing the Moment

DONOVAN ADAMS YouTube channel, “Ausome Adventures,” champions a message of courage and passion. Donovan, who is on the autism spectrum, proves that limitations are but stepping stones to greater heights. “What I really hated was being left out or excluded,” the Beaumont senior says. “So, I found the idea to show people on the autism spectrum like me, to really reconcile people with autism or without autism.” Donovan’s dream is to help others embrace life and go outside of their comfort zone to seize the moment. “We can be just like people without autism and do stuff just like them,” the film studies major says. “We can also go out and enjoy nature and do lots of awesome adventuring.” Each “Ausome Adventures” episode features Donovan pushing boundaries, whether he’s scaling a rugged cliff or navigating the bustling streets of a foreign city. His adventures serve as a powerful reminder that life’s essence is found in the richness of experience. “I want to help people understand the world around them, and help them and teach them,” Donovan says. “I want to be more than just an advocate for autism. “Ausome Adventures” isn’t just a channel, he says, it’s a movement.

Story and photo by **Taylor Justice**



Sneakerhead

In seventh grade, **AARON SAENZ** was introduced to an underground lifestyle. No, he didn't join a gang or get into drugs. The El Paso sophomore became a "sneakerhead." Aaron started collecting after his cousin bought a pair of Nike Space Jam Jordan 11s. "I wanted some of those," the journalism major says. Unlike "Hypebeasts," who collect shoes for the prestige and don't wear them, Aaron wears his shoes. "Especially the Jordans, it's more of the history behind them, like the patent leather ones, those are the iconic black and red," he says. "I got the Flu Game 12s — after his iconic Game 5 flu game." His first pair were "72 and 10s," named for the Bulls record setting 1995-96 season. Aaron has more than 30 pairs and his full collection is back home in El Paso. But he brought several pairs with him when he came to Lamar University on a track scholarship. His most expensive sneakers are the Travis Scott Jordan 1 "Phantom," which cost him around \$700. "I was just really wanting a new black shoe," he says. "I didn't really see anything I liked, so I decided I'm just going to make enough money until I'm able to get them." Aaron isn't done collecting. Being a sneakerhead is just who he is.

Story and photo by **Brian Quijada**

PEOPLE

Bona Fide Bookworm

In an age when we are surrounded by bright screens, **KYREENA ODERBERT-GOUDEAU** is most often found with her nose in old-fashioned technology — books. The Port Arthur freshman's interests run the gamut from fiction to non-fiction, spiritual to crime. "One of my favorite books is called 'The Family Business,'" she says. "It's about an African-American crime family. I loved reading the book and it recently turned into a Netflix series." However, the political science major is wary of TV and movie adaptations. Oderbert-Goudeau says she doesn't like it when a movie strays too far from the original literary material. "I read 'The Color Purple' and I've watched both movies and thought, 'This is not adding up,'" she says. "The book gives you more vivid details, and the movie almost takes that away. I get why, because they're basically trying to copy and paste the whole book in just an hour and 30 minutes." However, not all adaptations are failures. "My favorite film would have to be 'Flowers in the Attic,' because it was almost exactly (the same) with minor detail changes." Whether it's history, animals, or spiritual quotations, as long as there's a book, Oderbert-Goudeau will be satisfied.

Story and photo by **Maddie Sims**



Fishing the Fjords

Fishing brings people together. **ADRIAN HAHN VADSTEIN** has fished in places most people only see online, including the Norwegian fjord where he caught his biggest fish, 15-and-a-half pound, 34-inch pollock. The Katy freshman has lived in Norway, California and Texas, and says he is able to feel the difference between the waters of Norway and Southeast Texas. “All fish are different,” Adrian, a middle-distance runner for LU’s track team, says. “In Norway, you may have to move your lures a lot slower because it’s so cold, so all the fish are stagnant, because the fish don’t want to use energy, while the fish here are able to move more freely.” Adrian finds just as much joy casting his lures in

Southeast Texas as he does in the cold Scandinavian waters. He has multiple fishing spots, but one stands above the rest. “Keith Lake is my favorite, because it’s easy access to salt water and I love saltwater fishing more than fresh water,” he says. Although he has caught many different fish, there are even more he hasn’t caught. “I’d love a northern pike, because I’ve never caught one and they’re beautiful, and they’re a predator,” he says. As long as there is water and a rod and reel in his hand, Adrian will casting and catching.

Story and photo by **Aaron Saenz**



FAFSA FOUL UP

Story package by **Maddie Sims**

Show Us the Money!

FAFSA DELAYS CREATE UNCERTAINTY FOR STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY

Applying for college is no easy task, especially when it comes to paying tuition. Resources such as scholarships and financial aid are potential game changers when it comes to having the funds necessary for higher education and many applicants benefit from these programs.

The total amount of financial aid undergraduate and graduate students received was \$240.7 billion for the 2022-23 financial aid year, according to research.collegeboard.org. This included grants, federal loans, federal education tax benefits and federal work-study. Additionally, the average aid for a full-time student was \$15,480 per undergraduate student, and \$28,300 per

graduate student, with the total amount of grant aid for both being \$145.3 billion. Additionally, according to [usnews.com](https://www.usnews.com), a 2023 survey found for a typical family, scholarships and grants covered 29% of college costs in the 2022-2023 aid year, which is up from 26% in 2021-2022.

As the 2023-24 school year draws to a close, the application 2024-25 deadline for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) grows closer. FAFSA's purpose is to assist students in covering their college tuition through federal student aid. According to the Lumina Foundation, FAFSA was created in 1992. It replaced the

Common Financial Aid Form of 1986 and became one of the most recommended forms to receive financial aid from the Commission on the Future of Higher Education in 2006.

In the past 30 years since its formation, students received significant amounts of financial aid. In a statistic from the National Center for Education, the average grant and scholarship aid full-time students received on four-year campuses for the 2019-20 aid year was \$14,080.

It is critical for universities to have the FAFSA applicant information as it can help match aid qualifications with future students. However, this task has been severely pushed back.

As of February, 2024, FAFSA forms have been delayed throughout the country. According to [USA Today](https://www.usatoday.com), the Biden Administration announced colleges would not receive any form information until the middle of March at the earliest due to The Department of Education not adjusting income for families dealing with inflation impacts. This prevents financial aid programs on college campuses from accessing any FAFSA forms for incoming students, and has the real possibility of applicants not being able to receive any offers for financial aid until April or May, when this information was promised by late January.

Natalie Butaud, Lamar University's assistant director of customer service, says the biggest issue is the fact that they haven't received any student FAFSAs at all.

"Currently, we are waiting to receive the applications from the Department of Education to be able to make award packages for students," Butaud said. "It's been hard, but every university and college is in the same boat. It's nice to know that Lamar is not the only one facing these issues. It's (also) unfortunate for students as they're trying to pick the right school for them based off of their money that they're going to receive, and right now they're not able to do so."

"If a student completes their FAFSA, and their parent or guardian signs it, (with) the student, (the website) just shows pending. It just stays in pending status until they finally start sending them out."

Many students who have filled out forms for the up-



coming academic year have reported their experiences online, saying they have had issues with the website not working and receiving emails stating their information will be reviewed sometime in March.

This is not the first time issues with the FAFSA have occurred. If anything, the current issues are a consequence of The Department of Education’s desire to change the form.

When Biden first assumed the presidency in 2020, he said one of the big goals for his administration was to fully commit to the overhauling FAFSA. In December 2020, The FAFSA Simplification Act was passed in Congress, which worked to simplify the list of requirements for applicants to qualify for financial aid. According to insidehighered.com, the FAFSA questions were reduced from 100 to less than 40. Additionally, the act expanded the eligibility for the Pell Grant, allowing incarcerated students to apply for it after a 26-year ban, and it made receiving financial aid more accessible. The initial dead-

line for these changes was October 2022, but the beginning of the process was slow as the government made reopening of schools after the COVID pandemic a priority.

It also didn’t help that during this time the Department of Education, with the passing of the American Rescue Plan Act in March 2021, was in charge of giving COVID relief funds to K-12 districts, non-profits and higher education institutions. Student debt relief was also a big part of Biden’s platform. These factors forced the department to extend the deadline to Jan. 1 of this year.

The Department of Education just managed to get everything in by Dec. 30, but the FAFSA website was reportedly inaccessible until Jan. 8. As a result of the changes, technical issues have arisen which currently remain unresolved. These include students who incorrectly select “Eligible Noncitizen” on the form being prevented from completing and submitting the form after correction; parents being unable to access the form de-

spite starting applications on behalf of the student; and the FAFSA application status reading “In Progress” even when the user is ready to submit the form.

Some colleges, including Lamar University, have already pushed the May 1 cutoff for financial aid.

“I don’t believe we’ve had discussion about extending it further, but I know that we’ll continue accepting FAFSAs,” Butaud said. “We’re not going to deny someone wanting to come to the university because of these issues that have been happening.”

There is a real risk of students not being able to afford to attend college at all, as some rely on FAFSA student aid to cover tuition.

“I’m hoping that it doesn’t affect anyone after the next couple of weeks and that we can receive all of the FAFSA information,” Butaud said. “But since there is a holdup, it may affect our incoming class, or our incoming freshmen or transfer students that are wanting to attend (but) are holding out to make their deci-

sion based off of what their award package will be. Typically, a lot of students have already made their decisions on what school they want to go to, but right now, they’re hesitating a little bit more than usual because they don’t know what kind of money they’re going to receive at our school versus Sam Houston, SFA, Texas State A&M — they’re kind of waiting.”

The current problems are causing fewer students to apply for financial aid, according to a CNBC report, with a current 15% decline this year. As of early March, only a small percentage of the usual 17 million students have filled out the required forms, even though most students strongly benefit from the FAFSA qualifications.

This mistake from the Department of Education has cost \$1.8B in what would have been federal student aid, according to LAist, part of Southern California Pub-



FLOURISHING FILMMAKER

Story package by **Maddie Sims**

A still from Ural's short film depicting the Zummo Tribe performing at Lamar University. Courtesy photo.

Alumni James Ural explores power of stories

When it comes to working in any industry, there are many obstacles one must work through to achieve their goals. Filmmaker James Ural, a recent graduate of Lamar University, is making his way through pride in his work and determination in all his creative fields.

His love for filmmaking started when his grandmother, Margret Moore, died in 2005. One of Ural's relatives asked him to record the funeral with the camera they had set up.

"That was the moment when I discovered the power of storytelling," he said. "I was fascinated by the idea of capturing people's legacies and sharing their stories. Film was the perfect medium to do this, as it has the ability to breathe life into stories and make them resonate with audiences for generations to come.

"Margaret's story needed to be told, so I started honing my skills as a teenager, even during the slow dial-up internet days. I learned the art of editing and began to perfect my craft, capturing footage and creating compelling stories that engaged audiences."

35-year old Ural was born and raised in Madisonville, Texas. He grew up by the train tracks along with other low-income families. He was constantly surrounded by industrial workers, who were his role models.

"People that work in industries like ExxonMobil, Chevron Phillips and Dow Chemical (are what) run Southeast Texas," he said. "Early in the morning, I would see them heading to work to provide for their families, and this inspired me to work hard and put myself in a position to secure a job that would help sustain my career, fund my education, and support my livelihood."

After he graduated high school, he went to Lamar Institute of Technology from August 2006 to December 2007 on a two year scholarship for three semesters, majoring in precision machining. While attending LIT, he became a barber in his dorm room and filmed events for local business in the area.

Ural attended Lamar, graduating in 2023 with a Bachelor of Science through the University Studies program. He ma-

jored in Multidisciplinary Studies with concentrations in business, marketing, and mass communications. He graduated with high honors and takes pride in being a first-generation student.

"Previously, I earned two associates degrees from Lamar Institute of Technology," he said. "Most of the credits were accepted at the university (which) allowed me to obtain my bachelors in a year. I worked with ExxonMobil in the safety department, overseeing railroad operations"

Ural founded his own media production company, LaRu Agency (a reverse of his name), specializing in weddings, documentaries and events.

"My degree (helped) me expand my digital content marketing abilities and qualify me for further bachelor-required jobs," he said.

Ural chose Lamar because he wanted to pursue an education with practical value, he said.

"Southeast Texas is a melting pot of cultures, just like a gumbo," he said. "(Lamar) offers professional programs

that prepare students to enter the workforce. The faculty was committed to ensuring that students learned and excelled academically. Being a part of the institution's community meant being part of a movement to create a new generation of trailblazers. Lamar University focused on building leaders, and it is known for producing graduates who go on to become leaders in their respective fields."

While LU provided many opportunities for Ural, the process was not completely void of struggle.

"I had to maintain a work-life balance while pursuing my degree," he said. "It was indeed a challenging journey and required many sacrifices to achieve my ultimate goal. My wife and I are blessed with a baby boy named Jett, which means 'excellence and abundance' in Hebrew. He was born prematurely, six weeks before his due date, due to my wife's unexpected water break. At that time, I was completing my summer classes at Lamar University and enrolled in an eight-week course program. Everything was moving at a fast pace. Around the same time, I received the news that my mother was fighting cancer and going through treatments. She was able to ring the bell before my graduation, which was a moment of immense joy and relief for our family."

Along with his filmmaking skills, Ural has written several children's books, including 'The Dream Racer,' 'Daddy's Fishing Buddy,' and 'The Case of the Loose Tooth' as part of 'The Imagination Series.' He also wrote 'Baking with a Twist.' They can all be found at any online book store.

Over the years, Ural has filmed content through Nike SPARQ Combine and has traveled around the world to places such as Africa, England, and Spain.

"It is through storytelling that we can inspire, educate, and connect with others," he said. "I am proud to use film as a medium to create meaningful and memorable stories that will stand the test of time."

Ural is the Media Director for Antioch Missionary Baptist Church and conducts training sessions every Thursday night for technical work such as operating cameras and creating live broadcasts for the services.

Ural has come a long way since his humble beginnings watching the industrial workers work hard every day.

"Don't let fear of making mistakes hold you back," he said. "It's all a part of life, and we all know how it can end. Follow your dreams and take the first step towards achieving them."

For more information, visit laruagency.com.



PHOTO ESSAY



Photo story by Brian Quijada

Arte de España a Beaumont

Spanish artists
bring unique
stylings to
Mural Fest 2024

The pungent odor from the paint can be smelled all the way down Beaumont's Laurel Avenue as artists painted walls during the annual Mural Festival, March 2-3. From Australia down under to all across the United States, muralists from around the world decorated the walls of Beaumont.

Two artists from Spain caught the

eyes of visitors with their realistic, photography-based murals. Slim Safont and Sebas Velasco have painted all across the world, from Switzerland to Serbia, and now to Southeast Texas.

Hailing from Barcelona, Slim has been painting since he was 13. He usually takes his own photograph and then paints it, but for Mural Fest, he decided to use artificial intelligence to

create his image of Southeast Texas.

"This photo first comes from some references that I found online of photographs that people take when they go to the parks to take an alligator in their hands," Slim says. "I liked this idea and this type of image. I tried to get it, but with lights and a composition that

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Murals — from page 12

was more interesting. Through artificial intelligence, using various parameters, I got more or less what I wanted, and this photograph came out.”

Safont’s mural features three young men holding an alligator in a suburban neighborhood. He says he based the idea on news stories he read of people domesticating wild animals.

“Reading a little before coming, I found the relationship people have here with wild animals very curious,” he said. “(There’s) nothing like the idea of trying to domesticate the wild, which is a very characteristic behavior of human beings who think they can control everything.

“I was watching some news about people who had giant crocodiles in their home. Or people who have snakes or people who have things that in Europe are not common. And here they do. This seemed curious to me.”

Unlike Safont, Velasco used a real photo taken by his friend Jose Delou. The pair tried to portray Beaumont as accurately as possible, they said.

“We were looking for the aesthetic elements that we like,” Velasco said. “They often have to do with night scenes in which there is silence, but at the same time you can perceive a little bit of the noise of life or the city.”

Velasco’s mural depicts a young Black man superimposed over a night city scene with blurred lights.

“Once we had thought about the

composition and the background, a little bit about the image, we needed a person to complete the image and then we looked around at night. We looked for a guy who would work with the composition.

“A local artist named Inés Alvidres helped us, and we found a guy who was working in a food establishment. The next day, we returned to the place. We took those photos with the subject with the background we wanted and then we used that as inspiration for a sketch.”

Velasco hails from Burgos, but now resides in San Sebastian, in Spain’s Basque country.

Thanks to artists like Slim and Velasco, Beaumont has gained international recognition as a mural art hotspot and has developed into a canvas for worldwide artists.





CASTILLOS EN EL SOL



Story and photos by Clarissa Hernandez

The entry gateway to Castillo San Felipe del Morro, above, in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Castillo San Cristobal, below, overlooks San Juan Bay.

San Juan's fortifications reminder of Spanish past



PUERTO RICO IS KNOWN for its beautiful beaches, vibrant culture and history. The United States territory is located in the Caribbean and is a great getaway location. Since it is a part of the United States, a passport is not needed and the currency is U.S. dollars.

In the summer of 2023, my friends and I spent four nights in an Airbnb the city of San Juan. It was half a house with our own entrance.

Most of our day-to-day activities were planned out beforehand. Visiting the capital city of San Juan was at the top of our list. On our second day, we took an Uber to the territory's largest city. Even though it had rained earlier in the morning, by the afternoon the sun was shining.

Our Uber drivers recommended we visit

the Castillo San Felipe del Morro, a historic castle. The entrance fee is \$10 a person and the pass is good for 24 hours, and included entry to another castle, Castillo San Cristobal, as well, meaning we could take our time as spread our visit over two days. The castles are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

El Morro is massive and has acres of land extended on each side. People were having picnics in the grass or just lying down, looking at the view of San Juan Bay. The walk up to the entrance is a slight incline and took at least 10 minutes. I was out of breath as we finally reached the doors to the castle.

Inside the castle, we saw the bedroom chambers of soldiers from the 1800s. There were beds lined up and also replicas of the guns they used in battle. In the open areas,

real cannons are on display. The layout is massive with stairs leading to the lower deck, where people can look out on San Juan Bay.

According to National Park Service, El Morro is the most iconic fortification built by the Spanish in the Americas. It covers a 140-foot-high promontory at the entrance to the San Juan Bay. The fortress consists of six levels facing the Atlantic Ocean, all of which were designed to create a devastating artillery fire over enemy ships. By the time of its completion, around 1790, it had the reputation of being unconquerable and was the most feared of all the Spanish colonial fortifications.

The next day, we used our passes to visit Castillo San Cristobal. This fortification was about a 15-minute walk from El Morro. The castle was built around the first defensive structure in the area which dates back to 1634. San Cristobal was completed in 1783 and was the largest Spanish fortification in the New World, covering 27 acres.

The fortification has three levels and an extensive series of outer defenses. The layout has multiple coastal observation posts looking out to San Juan Bay. From the top floor of San Cristobal, one can see the outline of El Morro. Puerto Rico conjures up images of clear beaches and pina coladas full of tourists taking in the sun. However, it has more to offer. Take a chance to learn about the island's history and see the fascinating architecture from its colonial past.

For more information, visit National Historic Site of Puerto Rico at [nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov).



One of the Castillo San Cristobal's observation posts, above, which look out over San Juan Bay. Castillo San Felipe del Morro's architecture, right, is typical of Spanish Colonialism,



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FAFSA— from page 9

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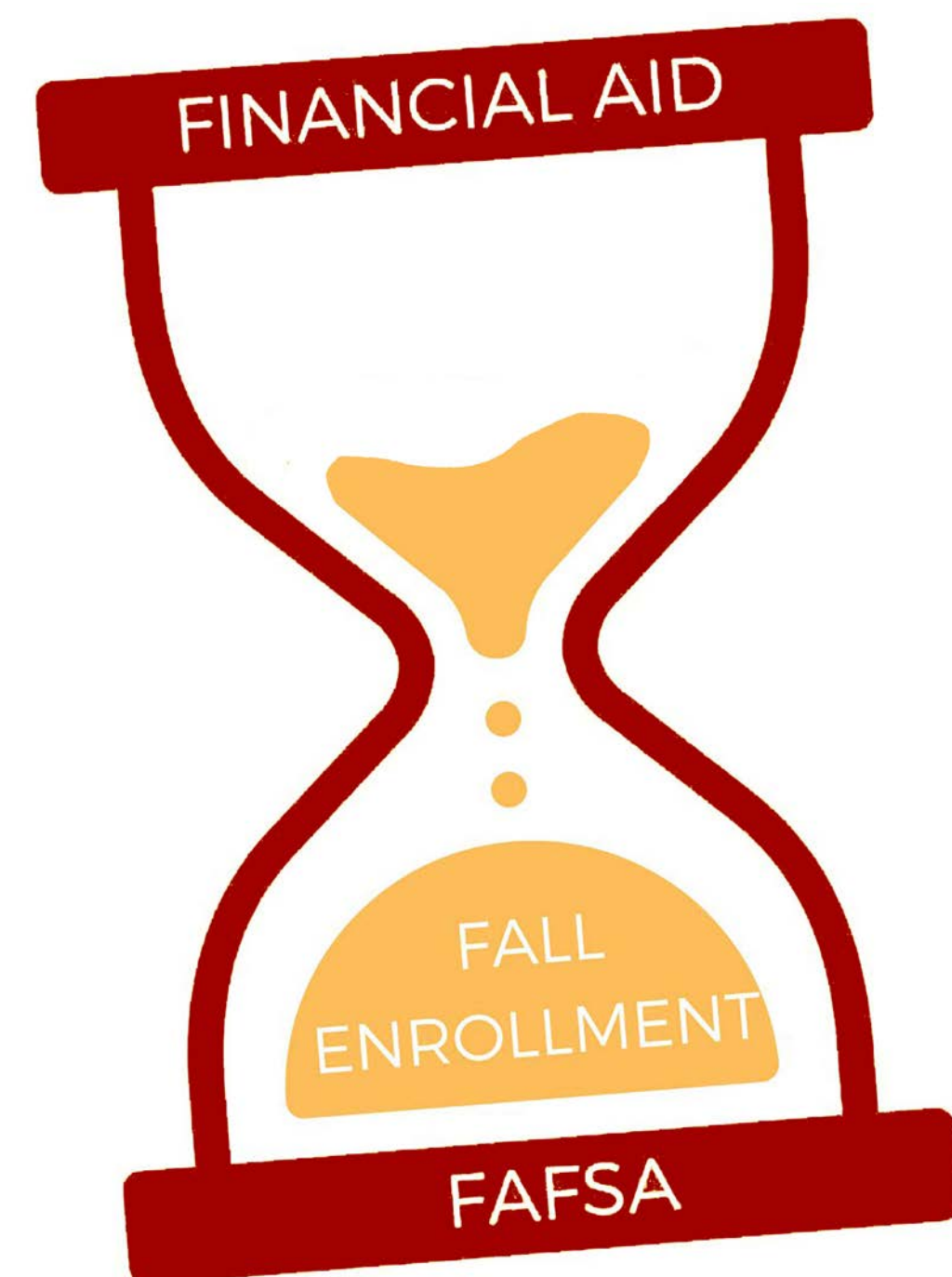
It's unclear whether or not this incident will cause a decrease in enrollment for fall 2024, but the act of simplifying the financial aid forms is anything but simple.

"I can't say that it will affect enrollment because I think students (who) come to Lamar want to come to Lamar," Butaud said. "I think it may affect the time that they get enrolled in. They may not be getting advised as quickly, and (enrollment) might be a little bit later in

the summer, rather than right in April or May."

What started as an update to FAFSA to make the qualifications for receiving financial aid easier has turned into a political mess which had been slowly steamrolling for the past four years. Once these issues are resolved, the Department of Education will have their work cut out to prevent future mistakes like this from happening.

In the meantime, students are in limbo with many unsure of their educational future.



THANK YOU, STUDENTS!

To Our Students,

On behalf of the Lamar University leadership team and athletics department, we want to Thank You for your outstanding support of our men and women athletes this year. We want to especially thank you for your support of men's basketball as they played McNeese State in February. Your enthusiasm throughout the entirety of the game made for an electric atmosphere that fans and athletes truly enjoyed. Your support plays a tremendous role in building a winning culture. We are excited to see you in the stands supporting our student athletes at all sporting events through the remainder of the semester. See you there!

LET'S GO BIG RED! LET'S GO LU!



Jaime Taylor, President



Jeff O'Malley, Director of Athletics



The athletics event calendar can be found at lamarcardinals.com/calendar



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Dishman Art Museum



Open up your mind to change





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We Are ENSEMBLE.

Photos of Dance Unleashed '23, The Revolutionists, and Lost Lake by Lynn Lane

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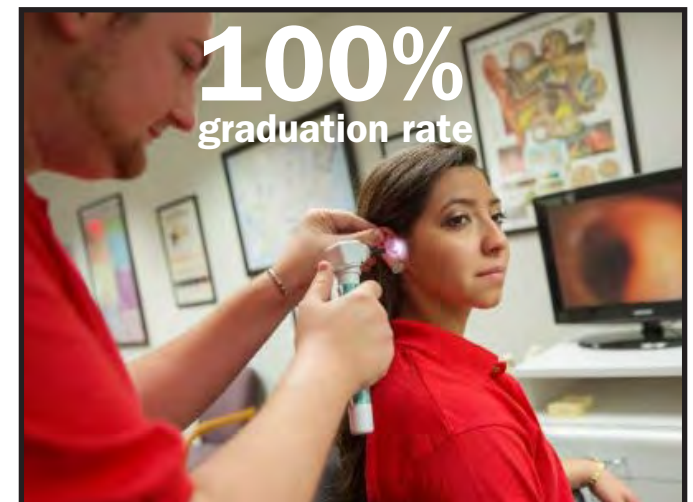
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