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The Canadian flag and the Olympic flag fly high during the 2026 Olympic Games in Italy.

Olympic.ca

the omega

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Drug decriminalization: from exemption to enforcement

Will the end of the province's decriminalization program be a help or a hindrance?

ELLEN KAZEMBE STAFF WRITER

British Columbia's three-year drug decriminalization pilot program ended Jan. 31, returning criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of certain drugs. The exemption was introduced to reduce stigma and encourage people to seek help without fear of arrest. With the policy now over, people working in harm reduction, recovery services, mental health and policing spoke with The Omega about how the change may shape daily realities in communities like Kamloops.

"Arresting people for simple possession and sending them to jail does not stop people from using substances or address their addiction issues," said Guy Felicella, a harm-reduction advocate working with Vancouver Coastal Health and the B.C. Centre on Substance Use. Felicella, who has lived experience with homelessness and addiction, described the end of the pilot as "disappointing."

"The public consumption people saw wasn't caused by decriminalization," Felicella said. "Those challenges existed before decriminalization and they still exist now. The only thing that's changed is that people can be arrested again for carrying these substances."

Felicella said stigma continues to shape how people access care. "When people feel judged, they are less likely to reach out for help," he said. "There's a big story behind the people we see struggling on the street."

Felicella pointed to housing as a major barrier to recovery.

"If you don't have a place to sleep or a door that locks, it's pretty hard to overcome mental health or addiction issues," he said.

From a recovery-focused perspective, Jeff Arlitt, recovery manager at the Mustard Seed, described how public spaces felt different during the pilot.

"When drugs were decriminalized, people were using them more openly in parks and on sidewalks," Arlitt said. "Parents are scared about their kids seeing drug use or picking up paraphernalia."

Arlitt said criminalization did

not prevent him from seeking recovery. "When I was struggling, knowing drugs were illegal helped me think twice," he said. "Addiction is a disease, but there still has to be responsibility. Our behaviour affects families and communities."

At the same time, Arlitt said compassion remains central in recovery work. "If someone relapses, we don't automatically remove them," he said. "We talk about what happened and give people a chance to try again. There has to be accountability, but there also has to be compassion."

Canadian Mental Health Association executive director Alfred Achoba said the return to criminalization may revive barriers the pilot aimed to reduce.

"Before decriminalization, stigma was one of the biggest challenges," he said. "Recriminalization may push people further away from services at a time when communities are already polarized around drug use."

Achoba said enforcement alone does not lead to long-term stability. "When people leave jail without housing or support, they often return to the same conditions that led them there," he said. "We didn't build the systems people needed around decriminalization, so we didn't see the results people hoped for."

He also raised concerns about unequal impacts. "Policies may look neutral, but they don't land equally," Achoba said. "People dealing with intergenerational trauma and poverty are more likely to be visible in public spaces and more likely to encounter enforcement."

Achoba pointed to what he described as the "four pillars" model as a framework that was not fully implemented in B.C. during the pilot. The model includes prevention, treatment, harm reduction and enforcement, an approach that works best when all four pillars are built together rather than applied in isolation.

"You cannot take out pieces of the model and expect it to work," Achoba said. "In places where this approach has been effective, all four pillars were implemented at the same time."

Kamloops RCMP media relations officer Cpl. Dana Napier said the end of the exemption does not signal a return to enforcement-first responses.

"Police understand we cannot arrest our way out of the toxic drug crisis," Napier said. "Enforcement will continue to be balanced with health-led responses, treatment pathways and harm reduction, with public safety and compassion guiding frontline decision-making."

Napier said frontline officers receive training in trauma-informed approaches and cultural awareness. She also pointed to Kamloops RCMP's Integrated Crisis Response Team, which pairs officers with mental health clinicians to de-escalate crises and connect people to community services.

Despite differing views on the impact of decriminalization, those interviewed pointed to gaps in housing and treatment access. "Being homeless enhances mental health and addiction challenges," Felicella said. "We need supportive housing."

Achoba said communities without enough detox beds or aftercare supports face additional strain.

"We are seeing more pressure on emergency services, shelters and mental-health supports," he said.

As B.C. moves forward without the exemption, Felicella said the focus should remain on care. "Let's stop arresting people for struggling with a health condition."

Arlitt emphasized structure in recovery. "We still accept you, and we still care about you," he said, "but using drugs is destroying lives."

Napier said police will continue to rely on partnerships with health services. "We will keep balancing enforcement with health-led responses," she said.

For front-line workers, the end of the exemption marks another shift in how addiction is governed, not how it is lived. As people continue to move through shelters, emergency services and public spaces, they say the distance between policy and lived experience remains wide, and it is within that distance that recovery remains difficult to sustain.

The war against marginalized voices

During a guest lecture for Black History Month, Marva Ferguson spoke about the negative and harmful impacts of silencing marginalized voices

ADESIRE AJAYI-SMITH NEWS EDITOR

Social worker, advocate and educator, Marva Ferguson, made an appearance at TRU last month to give a talk on anti-Black racism in academia. The event, which was held in recognition of Black History Month, was sponsored by the TRU faculty of education and social work, the Office of EDI and Anti-Racism and TRU World. During her hour-long lecture, Ferguson expressed her curiosity about one major issue.

"What has happened," she wondered, "since George Floyd?"

The talk, titled Black History Month: Silencing and Silent in Fugitive Spaces, was increasingly relevant in the face of what seems like growing backlash of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) policies across the country. Her question about the changing state of the world since the 2020 civil rights protests sparked by the police murder of George Floyd pokes at this problem.

In recent years, we have seen what can be described as a rolling back of many of the gains from those protests. Ferguson asserts that minority voices, and, for this conversation in particular, Black voices, are once again being silenced and pushed to the margins.

She begins by retelling her own experiences as a Black woman in academia, the racist treatment she'd received both from individual students and colleagues, as well as institutionally.

"And then, [Floyd's murder] happened," she said. "There were lots of

demonstrations, there were lots of discussions. For some reason, there was a change in the community."

Ferguson began her advocacy career early, writing frequent letters to newspaper editors back home in Jamaica. It was a learning lesson for her: there were avenues to getting your voice heard, even in situations where you were too often overlooked or sidelined. Ferguson wrote letters about anything from infrastructural complaints to highly contentious issues that posed real risks to her safety.

This habit remained even after moving to Calgary in 1993, where she encountered an environment that seemed unwilling to do the hard work of racial justice. People found words like "racism" and "Black" uncomfortable, and so many of these conversations were taped over.

"I continued to speak out, and I continued to advocate," she said.

As an associate professor in the department of child studies and social work at Mount Royal University in Victoria, Ferguson spent many years advocating for representation in academia. She has extended her interests in anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, and critical race theory to her approaches both within and outside of the classroom. In 2018, noticing the lack of acknowledgement of Black history in her department, Ferguson began raising funds to address it.

"This year marks the ninth

year," Ferguson said of the program she pioneered. "Last year we had over 300 participants attending the event, and this year is actually going to be bigger."

The willing arm extended to work like hers, especially after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, now seems to be retracting.

"We are seeing the removal of books from libraries," she said. "We are also seeing the dismissal of the LGBTQ+ community—they are now struggling, and a lot of individuals [from this community] are in silent mode. There's also the termination and demotion of Black professionals in the community."

She also discussed the recent moves across Canada to rebrand EDI. At her university, the EDI office was renamed "The Office of Community and Belonging." Similarly, the University of Alberta previously announced that it was dropping the language of EDI in favor of the term "Access, community and belonging".

Ferguson outlined another means of advocacy that has been similarly under attack: art.

"Woody Guthrie spoke about 'This Land is Your Land,'" She said. "But many of us are feeling the pain of being treated like fugitives in the land that is supposed to be supportive of us."

Since last year, public artworks dedicated to both George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement have been removed. From Utah, Texas, D.C. and beyond, several pieces of protest art

have been taken down, and murals literally whitewashed, often with developers citing vandalism and maintenance costs as reasons. Ferguson said that there is a need to pay careful attention to this particular phenomenon.

"A few years ago, everything seemed okay," she said. "And I don't know what happened. We are seeing, and we are experiencing anti-Black racism in the silencing of voices."

Unwilling to end on a negative, Ferguson insisted that attempts to silence marginalised voices do not necessarily mean they are voiceless.

"There are gonna be times when you feel that you don't have a voice to speak out," she said. "Write it down. Use your pen, use your pencil. Use the support that you have. There's a tendency for students coming from international countries to be isolated. I ask for faculty to do more, because in doing more, we get more from our students."

She points to the Scarborough Charter, a higher-education framework created in 2021 to combat anti-Black racism and promote Black inclusion in post-secondary spaces.

"Universities are now called on to foster an inclusive environment," she continued. "It starts with the course outline, it starts with the curriculum. It also means removing barriers for success."

On Feb 25, TRU became the 61st university in Canada to sign on to the charter.

Demystifying breast cancer

Kamloops physician empowers the community with practical tools to identify and reduce risk of breast cancer



PAUL FALARDEAU

The pink ribbon is the universal symbol of breast cancer, illustrating the cause, raising awareness and bringing together women in solidarity.

OLIVIA SIMMS STAFF WRITER

Cancer is scary. As one of the most common cancers worldwide, breast cancer has affected the lives of many TRU students and their loved ones. That is why the Wellness Centre, WolfPack recreation, and TRU human resources) teamed up to bring in Dr. Liz Ewart to dispel myths and spread information.

Ewart is a general practitioner in oncology at the Royal Inland Hospital, lead physician at the Rae Fawcett Breast Health Clinic and clinical instructor with the UBC Department of Medicine. She has a close connection with TRU, having previously served as a campus physician.

Ewart's talk, delivered to a crowded room in the Administrative Services building and to many virtual attendees, explored topics ranging from breast cancer risk factors to treatment and survivorship.

A key takeaway was the importance of regular mammograms after the age of 40.

"[Mammography] saves lives," Ewart said. "There's no doubt about it."

She shared that screening mammography "reduces breast cancer death by about 40 to 50 per cent" and can result in less invasive treatments if cancer is discovered early.

Most breast cancers

start as ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), where cancerous cells are entirely confined to the milk duct.

"If you catch a cancer at that stage, it is 100 per cent curable because it has not invaded outside of the duct and it cannot invade into the breast tissue," Ewart shared.

"Many people are very scared about the radiation associated with the mammogram, and they worry that that would cause breast cancer," she said. "The radiation exposure from a mammogram is 0.4 millisieverts. You need an exposure of 100 millisieverts per year to have a risk of cancer... So the amount of radiation associated with a mammogram is very, very minimal. It's equivalent to about three to five weeks of background radiation just living in this world."

The recommended screening mammogram frequency is once every two years, or annually for high-risk individuals.

Ewart emphasized that breast cancer screening is not only important for cisgender women, but for transgender, non-binary and two-spirit individuals as well.

"It's important to recognize that top surgery is not the same as a mastectomy," she said. "There is still tissue left

behind when you have top surgery, so you still need to have screening, even if you've had some breast tissue removed. If you're a trans woman, you should start your screening as per cis female guidelines, if you've been on hormone therapy for more than five years."

Among the workshop's 40-plus attendees was Selena Carl, a second-year master's of environmental science student.

"I've had lots of family members with a variety of cancers," Carl shared. "My mom actually just had early breast cancer from a mammogram. [It was] fine, because it caught it so soon."

Carl said that campus health events matter because they provide "ease of access," as students don't have to go out of their way to get reliable advice from a physician.

"If you're already coming to school, and you can fit it into your schedule, why not?"

With the prevalence of social media, students are frequently inundated with medical information and advice of dubious accuracy. "There's a lot of myths out there," Carl said. "It's nice to actually hear from an expert."

"I tell people not to Google things [after a

diagnosis]," Ewart told the Omega. "I give them a list of resources - reliable websites that I trust. I'm not saying people shouldn't do their own research, [but] it's important that they ensure the sites they're looking at are accurate. There's so much misinformation out there."

The Omega asked Ewart how she keeps her head up, given the heavy task of communicating breast cancer diagnoses to patients.

"Someone has to do it," she replied simply. "When you present [a diagnosis] to someone, you can give them an idea of what they're going to expect in the next couple of months ... I think it's important for someone to be able to say, 'Okay, you're probably going to see a surgeon in two weeks. You can expect your surgery in five weeks.' These are the things that you can expect. These are the things that we're looking for ... It's important for them to know they're going to be looked after. They're not going to fall through the cracks. If they know they're going to be supported through it, it makes a big difference."

Readers interested in learning more about breast cancer can visit the BC Cancer website for key facts on diagnosis and treatment.

Maté: Pain is essential



CHARLES RANKIN/THE OMEGA

ADESIRE AJAYI-SMITH NEWS EDITOR

Physician and bestselling author Dr. Gabor Maté discussed the social and biophysical conditions of addiction in his talk on Feb. 11, hoping to broaden the common understandings and correct general misconceptions about substance use and addiction.

The event was part of TRUSU's Common Voices lecture series, which has been running for two decades and has brought internationally recognized thought leaders to the TRU campus.

Maté opened his lecture by addressing the recent tragedy at Tumbler Ridge, describing the perpetrator as a "young woman" with a "mental health history."

"What I can tell you with 1,000 per cent assurance and confidence, without knowing anything about her," he said. "Is that she was a traumatized person. Because trauma is the basis of mental illness."

He also addressed what he saw as the hypocrisy of land acknowledgements in a nation that too often undermines Indigenous sovereignty. He pointed out that, despite making up just five per cent of the Canadian population, Indigenous women are severely overrepresented in the justice system, with around 50 per cent of female admissions in federal corrections.

"Where," Maté asked, "is the reconciliation?"

His 12-year stint in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside gave him a unique perspective on the drug crisis. An area of particular focus in the substance use epidemic facing the country, the Downtown Eastside also has the highest concentration

of Indigenous people in the city, with around 31 per cent of its population made up of Indigenous people from all across the country.

"If the success of a physician is to be measured by the health of his patients, I was a total failure," Maté said. "Because my patients died of their overdoses, they died of HIV, of infections caused by injection use, hepatitis C, abscesses in their spines, loins and brains, of suicide, of violence. Crossing the street in a drunk haze and being hit by cars."

Though the area has only gotten worse since he left in 2011, Maté does not see this as a problem with the Downtown Eastside. Instead, he sees these issues as problems of the Canadian state—inadequacies of social support that drive people to substance use issues, addictions and dependencies.

Maté, throughout his talk, challenges certain myths around addiction. A major one was the idea of addiction as a choice.

"The whole legal system is based on this approach to addiction," Maté said. "That it is a choice people make, for which they are culpable and need to be punished. So, for some reason, these Indigenous people are just making bad choices, you know? Which incidentally seems to be true not only here in Canada, but in all colonized countries."

This common assertion, Maté said, has zero scientific evidence behind it. Yet it has significantly influenced policy and policing practices in the Western world.

He points to the failure of the "Just Say No" campaign championed

by Nancy Reagan, then-First lady and wife to United States President Ronald Reagan, as well as the history of alcohol prohibition. In each of these cases, he said, choice-based understandings of addiction created inadequate responses.

To illustrate his points, Maté was brutally honest about his own history of ADHD, his childhood trauma as a Jewish infant during the holocaust and his shopping addiction.

"The addictive brain is fantastic when it comes to self-delusion, sophistication and rationalization," he said. "There were some holes inside me that I wanted to fill, and I was just as scrupulous and dishonest as my patients in the Downtown Eastside."

For Maté, every individual who develops an addiction, no matter what it is, is doing so in order to fill these holes. In the section discussing opioids, he addresses the history of opioid use in pain management that stretches over thousands of years. Today, he says, is no different.

"Pain is essential," he told the crowd. "What do you call somebody who is drunk and says that they're feeling no pain? That is my [view] on addiction. Don't ask why the addiction, ask why the pain."

As the event closed, guests rushed outside to purchase signed copies of Maté's latest book, *The Myth of Normal*.

To learn more about Maté, his accomplishments and where to find his work, visit drgabormate.com. You can also go to TRUSU's webpage to keep abreast of the next Common Voices lecture, or any of the other programs offered by the union.

Runnin' with the 'Pack

Featuring Faith Christensen

ALEXA LIPTAK SPORTS EDITOR

ANDREW SNUCINS/TRU WOLFPACK

Fifth-year TRU student Faith Christensen came to the WolfPack Volleyball team knowing the program needed to be built up, and she planned to be a part of that. Now in her final year, Christensen has become an integral part of the record-breaking team, ranking second in blocks, third in solo blocks and ninth in sets played in program history while also joining a prestigious club as a five-time U Sports Academic All-Canadian. Christensen talked with The Omega's sports editor about what it means to be a part of the WolfPack team that broke many program records and recently hosted its first-ever home playoff game.

ALQ: You've been here and seen this team grow from a 2-10 team, to now hosting your first ever home playoff series, what's that journey meant to you personally?

FC: Honestly, it's been an experience of a lifetime. I came into this program knowing we were not a great team, and that it was a program that had to be built up. So now getting to that kind of end goal of being a top team and hosting a playoff game and breaking TRU records

has been really cool.

ALQ: Within your season, 10 of your 14 wins as a team came in straight sets. Which is the most in program history. What do you think it says about the team as a whole?

FC: I didn't even know that. That's awesome. We're determined this year, and I think that's kind of a difference that we've had between my other years here. My first couple of years were kind of just here to have fun and play for a bit, and then this year we're [here] to win. I think that shows in our gameplay. We show up and we're determined. In our locker room we're ready to go--as soon as we step on the court, we're ready to go. I think it's just that determination that we have this year.

ALQ: You're ending your career here being second in blocks, third in solo blocks and ninth in sets played in the entire program history. What do those accomplishments mean to you personally, seeing that you've done so much?

FC: It's been pretty incredible to have those stats as well. The people above me were incredible players, so to even just be in those top standings with them is

really cool. To be in ninth for sets, played and having been playing since my first year is a really big accomplishment for me and I'll take that with me wherever I go.

ALQ: You guys are one of the best performing WolfPack teams of the year. How does it feel to you that the women's teams have been kind of consistently better than most of the men's teams over this last athletic season?

FC: I am the biggest advocate for women's sports and I think that they have been growing so much. Especially in volleyball, [it's] growing exponentially throughout the years and it's really cool to know that there's so many young girls that come and watch our game and want to be us or look up to us and [they] know what you can accomplish as a female athlete.

ALQ: Has your psychology major influenced how you approach playing in games?

FC: I definitely think you go and learn how your brain works and you learn what you do under pressure and what...how much your mindset can affect every aspect of your life. I'm super passionate about what I learned about in school too, so I've taken all of that

into everything that I do. But it definitely changes the game when you know how much your mind works and how your entire body and everything that you do is living in your head. So going into games and trying to shut that off sometimes or not think about that is definitely a little bit difficult.

ALQ: What's your favorite WolfPack memory, accomplishment, achievement, or anything that you're really just going to remember from your career here?

FC: I've been asked this before and I can never think of a discreet answer. Just being a student athlete is such a privilege and such an incredible lifestyle that I've gotten to have these past five years here. My team went to Türkiye, that's one that always stands out. Volleyball wise, that's probably it, but just all the little things I'm going to miss the most, like dance parties in the team room after a win, or our travel weekends with the men's team on buses playing heads up on the bus, like so many of those little things that have always meant so much.

To read the complete version of the interview, head on over to theomega.news today.

A Canadian Olympic recap

The Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games are over. How did our Canadian athletes perform?

ALEXA LIPTAK SPORTS EDITOR

OLYMPIC.CA

The 2026 Winter Olympic Games were held in Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, from Feb. 6 to Feb 22, 2026.

With the Olympics now over, Team Canada brought home a total of 21 medals – five gold, seven silver and nine bronze. This is the least amount of medals earned by Team Canada since the 2006 Turin games. In the past four Olympics, Canada has won 26 in Beijing in 2022, a record high 29 in 2018 in PyeongChang, 26 in Sochi's 2014 Olympics, and 26 in 2010, the last time the games were held on home soil in Vancouver. Two different cities hosted the Olympics for the first time in the 2026 Milano-Cortina Olympics.

The 2026 Olympic Games opening ceremonies were historic in that they

were hosted simultaneously across four locations: Milan (San Siro Stadium), which hosted the main artistic program and official Olympic protocol; Livigno (the snow park); Predazzo; and Cortina d'Ampezzo, which also hosted more official parts of the festivities and parade. Team Canada marched in Livigno and Predazzo with flag bearers Mikaël Kingsbury and Marielle Thompson leading the delegation.

Day 1

On Saturday, Feb. 7, long-track speed skater Valérie Maltais captured bronze in the 3,000-metre relay, earning

Canada its first medal at the 2026 Olympics.

Elsewhere, the women's hockey team beat Switzerland 4-0 with goals from Natalie Spooner, Sarah Fillier, Julia Gosling and Daryl Watts, three of which came in the third period. Canada outshot Switzerland with a major 55-6 shots during the game.

Day 4

It was not until Tuesday that Canada managed to medal again, when Courtney Sarault, William Dandjinou, Félix Roussel and Kim Boutin won silver in short track speed skating, marking the first time Canada has medaled in the

event since it was added at the 2022 Games in Beijing.

Day 5

The following day, after the performance of their lives, Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier won a well-deserved bronze medal in the ice dance. Marjorie Lajoie and Zachary Lagha finished 10th overall, and Marie-Jade Lauriault and Romain Le Gac placed 14th overall for Canada.

Day 6

The first multi-medal day of the Games for Team Canada came on Thursday, Feb. 12.

In the men's mogul event, flag bearer Mikaël

Kingsbury secured a silver medal, while his friend Éliot Grondin captured a silver medal in the men's snowboarding cross. In hockey, both the women, facing off against Finland in their rescheduled game, and the men, playing opposite Czechia, trounced their opponents, with scores of 5-0. Notably, the men's game also marked the first time NHL players have been allowed to play in the Olympics since 2014.

Day 7

Although the following day of competition yielded no new medals, it was not without excitement. In the men's figure skating event, Toronto-native Stephen Gogolev performed his long program and jumped from tenth to fifth place overall, just 1.12 points away from a medal. Meanwhile, the men's hockey team secured the top spot in Group A after a 5-1 win over Switzerland.

Day 8

On Saturday, the women's hockey team dominated Germany in the quarter-finals to advance to the semi-final. Assisting the team in their 5-1 victory, Marie-Philip Poulin scored her 18th career goal as an Olympian, tying her with Hayley Wickenheiser for the most all-time goals by a Canadian. Elsewhere, Canada ascended to the podium again when Laurent Dubreuil claimed a bronze medal in the men's 500-metre long track speed skating event. At the end of the day, despite some impressive performances by our athletes across multiple events, Canada had still not earned a gold medal.

Day 9

Canada's First gold medal finally came the following day, on Sunday, Feb. 15. Mikaël Kingsbury captured the gold in

the Men's Dual Moguls, which proved to be a massive moment in the freestyle skiing program as Kingsbury became the first skier to reach five career Olympic medals. The men's hockey team dominated in their game against France with a 10-2 win, in which nine different players scored, including two goals from Canada's 19-year-old Mackin Celebrini, who scored twice.

Day 10

On the tenth day of competition, Team Canada had seemingly found its groove. In the Freeski big air event, Megan Oldham from Parry Sound, Ont., earned the top spot on the podium, contributing Canada's second gold medal of the Games, while Courtney Sarault from Moncton, N.B., won her third medal of the Games by taking home a silver in women's 1,000-metre Short track.

Day 11

With momentum on their side, the Canadians looked to expand their medal count. In the women's team pursuit long-track speed skating event, Ivanie Blondin, Valérie Maltais, and Isabelle Weidemann successfully added another gold medal to the tally. Unfortunately, that would be the only medal the team would secure on day 11 of the Games.

Day 12

Two medals came within 30 minutes of each other in speed skating on day 12, when Danaé Blais, Kim Boutin, Florence Brunelle and Courtney Sarault won bronze in Short Track Women's 3,000-metre relay, edging out the Netherlands by nearly five seconds. Elsewhere, in the men's 500-metre Short Track Speed Skating event, Steven Dubois won a gold medal, beating brothers

Melle and Jens van 't Wout from the Netherlands.

Day 13

Day 13 of the 2026 Olympic Games saw Canada's women's hockey team face off against the United States with a gold medal on the line. During the first period, both teams fought hard, each preventing the other from scoring the opening goal. It was not until nearly 21 minutes into the second period that Canada took the lead, when Canadian forward Kristin O'Neill scored with an assist by Laura Stacey and Renata Fast. After the United States was slapped with a penalty near the 54-minute mark of the game, U.S. goalkeeper Aerin Frankel was yanked from the net, allowing forward Hilary Knight to take to the ice and tie the game with just over two-minutes remaining in regulation play.

With the gold medal at stake, Canada pushed hard. But a goal by defenceman Megan Keller 14 minutes into overtime sealed the game for the United States, who won the game 2-1, leaving Team Canada with a silver medal, bringing the team's total medal count at the time to three gold, five silver and four bronze, with three days remaining in the Games.

Day 14

Much to the delight of the Canadian fans watching in person and at home, day 14 saw Team Canada add two more bronze medals to the total.

The first of the two bronze medals was won by Valérie Maltais of La Baie, Que., for her performance in the women's 1,500-metre speed skating competition. Later that day, Brendan Mackay, a native of Calgary, Alta., snuck by Nick Goepper from Team U.S.A. in the men's ski halfpipe to earn

himself the bronze medal.

Day 15

Having reached the final two days of the Games, Canada looked to continue their streak of taking home a medal in curling at every single winter games since Nagano 1998. First, the women took on Team U.S.A., as they vied for bronze. From ends one to five, the two teams traded points, with neither able to gain any significant advantage. However, by the culmination of end 10, it would be the Canadian's who would walk away with the bronze following a 10 to 7 victory.

Later that same night, the men would take their turn with the stones, squaring off against the team from Great Britain. Though the Britons fought valiantly, in the end, the Canadians would hold their gold medals high after a 6-9 victory. However, the two bronze medals were not the only medals to be handed out. In the women's mass start in long track speed skating, Ivanie Blondin took home the silver medal, beating her closest competitor, Mia Manganello of the United States, by 20 sprint points.

Day 16

On the final day of the Olympics, many Canadians woke up in the early hours of the morning to watch their men's hockey team in the Gold medal game against their rival team from the U.S.A. The men fought hard throughout the game, outshooting the U.S. at almost every turn, but a gold medal victory was not in the cards. The men's team eventually fell to their American counterparts in a gut-wrenching overtime loss, 1-2. With that final silver medal, Team Canada would end the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games with five gold medals, seven silver medals and nine bronze medals.



ALEXA LIPTAK

Skyler the wondrous wiener dog was too busy trying to ketchup to current fashion trends to attend the Kamloops Storm wiener dog racing event.

When racing goes to the dogs

ALEXA LIPTAK SPORTS EDITOR

On Feb. 7, the dogs were off to the races at McArthur Sport and Event Centre when the Kamloops Storm hosted their fourth annual wiener dog races in conjunction with their game against the Merritt Centennials.

The wiener dog races are now a tradition with the Storm. They were created by the Storm's former general manager, Barry Deogr, who organized the inaugural event before the COVID-19 pandemic put future plans on hold. However, Matt Kolle, the Storm's current General Manager and owner, decided to bring the races back shortly after restrictions were lifted.

"A hockey team is a form of entertainment to our fans and the public, and we're always looking for themes and ideas to enhance our game day experience," Kolle said. "We look back, and the wiener dog race had been fairly successful in the past when it was run, so we chose to restart it."

While the races are the main attraction of the night, there are a few aspects that accompany it. Besides the Storm, who were also chasing a divisional title, the game featured a silent

auction, 50/50, a red carpet for the dogs and even a wiener costume contest.

"As far as the night goes, we have a red carpet that we take pictures of the dogs on, and a lot of these dogs come with amazing costumes," Kolle said. Some of the racers were spotted dressed as piñatas, Harley-Davidson motorcycle riders and even lumberjacks with overalls.

Leading up to the game, the Storm posts all of the dogs on their social media to "hype them up like it's the Olympics," and ensure the fans get as excited as possible about the races each year.

All proceeds from entry fees, the 50/50, and the silent auction went to support the Angels' Animal Rescue Society, based in Merritt, which operates on donations. They house between 25 to 35 dogs, cats and other animals, including farm livestock that have typically been abandoned, abused or neglected.

"The fact that it can help us raise funds for a good cause are generally the reason that we would choose this event over many other options," Kolle said.

"It's a great event, raising

money and awareness both for the animals and for the organization. And we truly appreciate the Storm taking an interest in the organization to be able to raise the money and create that awareness." Angels Rescue member Una Kuzio said. "[The money] goes to house animals, feed animals, vet bills, emergency services for them, transport, and just the day-to-day operational costs of running an on-the-ground rescue with that many animals."

Around 30 dogs were entered for this year's races. The dogs race in two heats during the first intermission, and the top three winners of each heat advance to the championship heat in the second intermission.

While most people enter their dogs for fun, some races can get competitive.

Malory Hugin, whose dog is nicknamed 'Black Lightning,' was the winner of the last two years. She said, "I think the best part is hearing the kids cheer in the crowd for the dogs when they win."

Some dogs need more training than others. Charlotte Hutchison said of her dog, Murphy, "Last year he ran straight off the ice, so this year I'm hoping

he at least runs to us."

Hutchinson also mentioned that Murphy, who's 16 years old, needs a lot of sleep to prepare for these races. He's raced the last three years, and this would be his fourth and final.

By the time intermission came around, you could feel the anticipation building. When the first group of wieners was released, the crowd erupted with cheers as the dogs raced to the finish line. By the second heat, many in the crowd seemed to believe they knew which dog would win.

In the second intermission, the competition was tight, with just the top six dogs left for one final shot at winning it all. However, only one dog could take home the win, and that was Finley.

This year marked Finley's third time competing in the races. Previously, he'd taken home the silver. Reacting to his victory, Kate, Finley's owner, said, "He's not food-driven. He's ball-driven, so if you have a squeaky ball, he'll do anything for you." And he did just that, by beating everyone to the finish line.

Congratulations to Finley, who is certainly a very, very good boy.

WolfPack legend inducted into CW Hall of Fame



BILLIE GLADUE STAFF WRITER

Former WolfPack volleyball player, Iuliia Pakhomenko, has been inducted into the Canada West Hall of Fame.

The Canada West Hall of Fame highlights the best in university sports across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It was established in the spring of 2019 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the creation of the first Western-based post-secondary athletic organization in Canada, The Western Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union. Each year, they select teams, individual athletes, coaches and administrators who have contributed significantly to university sport and community. Canada West staff members are responsible for nominating and voting for new inductees. In Jan. 2026, the Hall of Fame announced eight new inductions.

Chad Grimm, Pakhomenko's former coach at TRU, informed her of her induction. According to Pakhomenko, the news was unexpected, as she had not played for the WolfPack since 2017. "When he told me, I was obviously very surprised, but I'm very honoured and glad that I can be a part of this program and that I can still put the word out there about our university and team," she said.

Pakhomenko joined the WolfPack in 2014 while completing a Master of Business Administration. Prior to her arrival, the women's

volleyball team had gone two consecutive seasons without winning a match. The 2014-15 season saw a drastic change for the 'Pack, as they earned ten wins. During her rookie season, Pakhomenko was a top scorer, ranking second in Canada West with 405 kills and averaging 4.6 kills per set. That year, she earned the Canada West First Team All-Star Award.

During her second year, in the 2015-16 season, the 'Pack finished sixth in the conference standings with a 12-12 record and a spot in the playoffs. Pakhomenko led the country with 425 kills and 4.67 per set. She was only the second athlete in Canada West history to achieve this in a single season. For her contributions that season, she was awarded Canada West First Team All-Star, Canada West Player of the Year, Canadian Interuniversity Sport First Team All-Canadian and CIS Player of the Year. She was also named Canada West Female Athlete of the Year, and is the only WolfPack athlete to have achieved the award across all conference sports. Finally, Pakhomenko was nominated for the Borden Lander Gervais Award, now the Lois and Doug Mitchell U Sports Athlete of the Year Award. Established in 1993, it honours the top university athletes and promotes graduate studies by awarding the winners a \$10,000 scholarship. The nomination ranked her among the top four female

student-athletes in Canada. She remains the only TRU athlete to be nominated.

During the 2016-17 season, and Pakhomenko's final year at TRU, the 'Pack finished with a 13-11 record and another spot in the postseason. Once again, she led the conference with 381 kills and 4.65 per set. That year, she became a three-time Canada West First Team All-Star. The Canada West Hall of Fame claims she is "one of the most impactful student-athletes to ever don a WolfPack uniform."

Those who have met Pakhomenko know that her success is largely attributed to her mindset and dedication. "I just think her ability to work was unmatched. She put in the most work, and she never made excuses. She just approached it very businesslike," Grimm said about what set her apart from other players. Joining the 'Pack after back-to-back disappointing seasons, she helped set the precedent for the rest of the team.

"At that time in our program, it was kind of struggling, and she started to set that standard of approaching it with a higher level of professionalism," Grimm said.

Since graduating from TRU, Pakhomenko has stayed close to the sport, now working alongside Grimm as assistant coach of the WolfPack women's volleyball team. Although the transition from player to

coach was slow, she found that her shared experience with the team of playing women's collegiate volleyball was her biggest asset.

"When I accepted Chad's proposal to be assistant coach, for me, it was important to find a way for them to communicate better and to find that transition between the head coach and the girls. I can be the middle point to help them have a better understanding of what coaches are trying to get from them and why they are doing what they are doing," she shared.

In 2025, she founded Ulavolley Academy, where she coaches youth volleyball for kids in grades four through seven. "Unfortunately, in our community, there's nothing for kids younger than grade eight in volleyball. I thought it would be a great idea to start them young, to teach them how to have fun and learn correct and basic volleyball skills that will help them grow," she said. Through coaching, she tries to instill her dedicated mindset in the next generation of players.

"If someone told you that you're not talented or you're not meant to be a player or part of a team, you should know that hard work, consistency and discipline always beat talent. No matter how talented you are, if you don't have that proper work ethic and goal in front of you that you want to reach, talent will not help you," she said.

WolfPack coach Iuliia Pakhomenko originally played for the team from 2014 to 2017.



Comfort on a plate

Often, our favourite meals don't simply nourish our bodies, but also our hearts

ELLEN KAZEMBE STAFF WRITER

When classes pile up and homesickness hits, comfort food becomes more than meager nourishment. For many TRU students, it is a way to feel close to home even while living far from it.

"My comfort food is sushi, but I also like ramen — honestly, just Japanese food in general," said Marvellous Fasan, an international student from Japan. "It reminds me of home. There's just something about the simpleness of Japanese food that really gets me warm."

Fasan said what she appreciates most is how uncomplicated it is. "There's no overly added sugar or spices. It's just simple ingredients of the food coming together to make a really delicious flavour."

Another student, Marvellous Ifezue, said his comfort food in Kamloops is less about tradition and more about what feels accessible. "Hatsuki Sushi," he said. "It's like lots of sushi, buffet-style and it is pretty cheap and really tasty."

Ifezue added that he also

turns to Costco hot dogs when he wants something familiar, tasty and affordable.

For Edison Chi, comfort food is deeply tied to culture, flavour reminiscent of tradition and security.

"My favourite would be rice and beans," Chi said. "It's a traditional food. I'm not sure if it's tradition exactly, but it's a food that comes from Belize, so that's one of my favourite foods."

He said he also loves tamales, which he connects to his Hispanic heritage.

"I love a mixture of Belizean and Mexican foods. That's what just takes my heart," Chi said.

"Anything that's very tasteful — anything that has a good mixture of flavours, that's what I love," he said. "Even Indian foods — everything is really amazing," he told The Omega.

Arsal Sheikh, who is from Pakistan, said comfort food is inseparable from home.

"My favourite food is nihari from Pakistan," Sheikh said. "It's my home country, so of course it has to be one of my favourite foods."

It's amazing. It's like a stew."

Stefan (Dohu) Chuong said his comfort food is tied to how he grew up eating.

"My favourite dish is a Vietnamese dish called com tam," he said. "The English translation is broken rice."

Chuong said what makes the dish special is its balance.

"I grew up eating it, and it's very balanced," he said. "You have a good portion of protein, good carbs and vegetables for fibre and vitamins."

Across cultures and cuisines, students described comfort food as more than taste; it was memory, routine and belonging. Whether it was "simple ingredients" that "come together to make a really delicious flavour," a stew from home, or something "really tasty and really cheap," each dish carried a sense of grounding. For students navigating a new country, busy schedules and the weight of being far from home, these meals offer something small but powerful: a familiar feeling in unfamiliar places.

Play that funky music

Although the Kamloops independent music scene is not as well known as others across our province, its popularity remains steady for good reason

BILLIE GLADUE STAFF WRITER

Under darkened lights, dancefloors become mosh pits and bars are filled with the aura of electricity that emanates from the music. Kamloops has a vibrant music scene that continues to grow, giving local musicians an opportunity to find an audience and fostering a safe environment where everyone is welcome.

Kamloops-based grunge band, *Creature*, thinks the city's love for local music grows when new groups start forming.

"Get out there. We need new bands. No matter how bad you are, be brave, be confident, do the thing you want to do," said guitarist Matt Rane.

"I like getting to talk to people after a show. It's not for the praise, but hearing people say, 'I want to start my own band, I'm really interested in this scene, I'm interested in the community.' I need to talk with younger people who want to involve themselves in the scene," said bassist Zoe Wilds on the best part of local shows.

For Kamloops' musicians, often a big challenge is getting people to attend shows. Although we think of social media as the best way to reach a wide audience, online promotion will usually only reach people who already attend shows.

Methods like posting posters in schools and high-traffic areas are common ways for bands to reach new audiences. According to *Creature*, many people in the scene spend a lot of time downtown and on the North Shore, so advertising in those areas is an easy way to garner an audience. Occasionally, a billboard on Mount Paul Way is used to advertise for both local and touring bands.

Creature also frequently uses word of mouth to advertise, with members doling out invites to people they meet on the city bus.

Many of the popular venues in

Kamloops are bars, such as Kami Inn and The Blue Grotto. However, multiple venues, such as Bridgeview Theatre, Pizza Pi and The Effie Arts Collective, commonly host all-ages shows, allowing younger audiences to get involved.

In *Creature's* case, two of their members are too young to enter bars, so having events that are accessible to all ages helps ensure the local community has a strong future.

The amount of money a band makes from performing varies

keep a percentage of ticket sales in addition to an upfront booking fee.

According to *Creature*, the amount of money varies from show to show. When they played at the Kamloops Christmas Market in December, they earned \$500, but for smaller Bridgeview shows, they struggled to break even. Although they aren't playing music to make money, some financial success is necessary to sustain the band and afford bookings, posters and new equipment.

Shows are often booked by a band, which then reaches out to other acts to perform alongside them. If a venue is planning the event, they're in charge of selecting and booking which bands will play. If a touring band is planning to perform in Kamloops, they'll often reach out to a local band to be their opener.

Tickets for shows or cover at the door, regardless of the venue, typically run from \$10 to \$25. Accessibility is a priority for Alex Ujiye, one of Bridgeview's partners.

"I'm trying to raise the quality of gigs, while keeping the price the same. I think when I first started, it was a little jarring to see anything with a price tag, but as time goes on, the price doesn't go up," Ujiye said.

What makes the Kamloops scene special is the community's welcoming nature. Ujiye says that a moment that made him want to get involved in local music happened when he first started attending metal shows.

"I was watching this mosh pit go down. It was pretty brutal in there," Ujiye said. "I watched this one guy go down pretty hard, and there was a super valiant effort to get this guy up and out of the pit as fast as they could. A lot of these people didn't know each other, and I think that sense of care and that sense of responsibility is just a small example of what music does for the community. It brings us together...It gives us a chance to have each other's backs."

“[Music] brings us together...It gives us a chance to have each other's backs.”

Alex Ujiye, local Kamloops musician

depending on the show's location and crowd turnout. Bridgeview Theatre, a venue many bands frequent, functions as a dance theatre day to day, which is how they make most of their income. They don't depend on booking the venue for live music or theatre performances. The simplest booking of Bridgeview for an evening costs \$300. They offer equipment rentals to musicians, though these will increase the booking cost. Bridgeview also has people who work in partnership under contracts to assist with the planning and production of larger events with multiple acts, helping things run smoothly. The money from ticket sales is divided among the bands that played. Some venues, such as the Paramount Theatre, will



During the Chinese (Lunar) New Year, many festivities and parades prominently feature Dragon Dancing.

Celebrating our spiritual similarities

How different cultures celebrate the end of winter and the beginning of spring

OLIVIA DEAN ARTS EDITOR

As winter gives way to spring, the world begins to awaken. Across countries and even continents, cultures celebrate fresh beginnings in their own individual ways; each beautiful and integral to the human experience. Why is this important? In an era of sociopolitical uncertainty, it is far more productive to highlight the commonalities shared rather than continue to polarize. Here are some of the cultural and religious events currently shared worldwide during the season.

Chinese (Lunar) New Year

From Feb. 17 to March. 3, about 1.5 billion people celebrate the turn of the new year with good fortune in mind. The celebration of the Chinese New Year is a tradition that centres on honouring family, often including dragon dancing, giving red envelopes (a lucky colour in Chinese tradition) with money and feasting amongst loved ones.

Within the tradition of Chinese New Year is the recognition of the 12 zodiac signs, each with its own distinct story and personality. 2026, specifically, is the year of the horse, which is characterized as energetic, loyal and independent.

Lent and Easter

The tradition of Lent is known in the Catholic community as a time for spiritual and personal reflection that lasts 40 days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and culminating on Easter Sunday. During this time, those who observe are prompted to give up luxuries and vices, which parallels the story of Jesus in the desert.

Now, you may be thinking, "Then where did the bunny and chocolate come from?" Don't worry, we were just as confused as you until we went down the aptly named proverbial "rabbit hole." Apparently, the Easter bunny has no relation to the crucifixion of Christ but is a secular creature from Germanic folklore. Easter is another example of how different cultures prepare for the beginning of spring, and the holiday's imagery, such as chicks, flowers and eggs, are all aspects of birth and fertility, much like the changing of the seasons.

Ramadan

For Muslims around the world, Ramadan marks a sacred month of fasting, prayer and reflection. From dawn until sunset, those observing abstain from food and drink, redirecting

their focus inward toward discipline, gratitude and spiritual growth. The fast is broken each evening with iftar, often shared with family, friends and community members, turning what could be an individual act into a deeply collective one.

But Ramadan is not simply about hunger. It is about intention. It asks participants to become more conscious of their habits, their words and their treatment of others. Many commit to increased prayer, reading the Qur'an and acts of charity, which are foundational to the five pillars of Islam. During this period, practitioners place a heightened emphasis on empathy, particularly for those who experience food insecurity not as a choice but as a reality.

The month concludes with Eid al-Fitr, a celebration marked by communal prayers, festive meals and giving. After weeks of reflection and restraint, Eid feels like exhaling. New clothes are worn, sweets are shared and gratitude takes center stage. As with the Chinese New Year, a tradition of Eid involves adults gifting money to children. Much like the shift from winter to spring,

Ramadan moves from quiet introspection to renewed joy, reminding us that growth often begins in stillness and blossoms in community.

Passover

In Jewish communities, Passover commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The holiday is centered around the Seder, a ritual meal where the story of Exodus is retold, symbolic foods are shared and questions are encouraged, especially from the youngest at the table.

Passover, too, is rooted in themes of renewal and freedom. It asks participants to remember hardship while celebrating resilience and liberation. It is historical, spiritual and deeply communal all at once.

As different as these traditions may appear on the surface, a common thread runs through them: reflection, community and hope. Whether through fasting, feasting, storytelling or dancing dragons through the streets, each celebration invites people to pause and begin again.

Spring does not discriminate in who it reaches. The thaw arrives for all of us. Perhaps the same can be said for renewal.



Ten Instagram accounts to satisfy your scrolling needs

Convert your doomscrolling to intentional scrolling with these content creators

DOMENICA RANDICH STAFF WRITER

Nowadays, scrolling through social media feels like getting stuck in a loop; after tapping through video after video, exhaustion and mental fog become even more evident once you finally pull yourself out. This state is what Gen Zers call brain rot. As social media platforms perfect their algorithms, younger generations have become increasingly dependent on the validation of the interwebs. To help reset Gen Z's—and everyone else's—sanity, The Omega has compiled a list of Instagram accounts that may help turn your doomscrolling into intentional scrolling. Same motion, but higher value.

With pages that decode fashion, break down books and films and boost critical thinking, The Omega's readers won't recognize their feeds by the end of 2026. It's time for a glow-up, not just physically, but digitally.

Fashion

How do fashion enthusiasts build outfits out of this world? The key is understanding the difference between two things that

often get mistaken for the same: taste and style. Taste is about admiring fashion; style is about filtering taste.

After diving into the chic side of Instagram and finding out which Disney princess has the best gown, The Omega found *InTheFashionFocus* posts and *SarahBelleKim* reels for developing a taste for fashion. These accounts unpack and teach fashion history, exhibitions, trends and more. On the other hand, when it comes to exploring style, two fashion enthusiasts do it best. On their Instagram page, *HamajiNeo* often shares masculine options and plays with textures and colors to achieve an elevated look, while *JustMacrose* often mixes feminine, gender-neutral and masculine pieces that can give minimalist outfits a new edge. But remember, style is a product of taste. If these influencers' looks aren't for you, Instagram offers a plethora of other creators that might lead you to unique discoveries.

Books and Films

As hobbies go, reading and watching movies or

television shows remain popular options to pass the time. With the accounts The Omega discovered, one scroll might actually lead a viewer into a book or film. At least, it's not doomscrolling!

For books, *ClassicallyClare* reviews old and new literature and shares insights on how to choose the perfect fit. Like in *Cinderella*, but swap the shoe for a book.

Meanwhile, serving 'cool history teacher' energy, *Culture_Dumper's* posts feel like a short, sharp lecture; mainly on genres and movements, not only in books, but across other media too.

For movies, *FilmsYouShouldBeWatching* fills feeds with eye-catching moments from TV shows or movies, then drops a review that invites discussion in the caption. For audiences seeking a more personal vibe, *FlorenceRose-Film* is a special find that somehow feels candid, warm and cozy. It's like having an express, one-on-one digital film club.

Critical thinking boost

For this section, passive

watching isn't accepted. The whole point is to actually engage and do the work. Even if TED Talks are part of some of our morning routines, The Omega challenges you to answer a very simple question: how often do you actually stop to not only consume the information you hear, but also digest it, process it and critically evaluate what you've learned? For busy university students, the answer is probably "not a lot." We encourage you to change that.

To restore critical thinking weakened by brain rot, following accounts that provide rich, informational content is key. Content creator *RubysStudio* not only invites real-life reflection on philosophical teachings, similar to *OntaPhilosophy*, but also discusses essays, organization strategies and journal entries. With creators like these, some more advanced content, like that you'd find with *BrainChanges*, starts making more sense little by little. And if not? At least research won't feel like a handful.

We're missing your voice.
Come write for us.

the
omega



Email editor@theomeganews or visit theomeganews/work