

A RETURN TO ROUTINE

SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2025

As School Doors Reopen,
Growth, Connection, and Global
Tensions Follow Students Into
the Classroom.



THE MINARET



Alyssa Cortes
Editor-in-Chief



Franchesca Murrugarra
Managing Editor



Ariana Fromm
Head Copy Editor



Nick Mezzacella
Copy Editor



Marissa-Bell Johnson
Copy Editor



Alexis Damiano
Copy Editor



Faith Montalvo
News Editor



Jaide Edwards
Arts & Entertainment Editor



Emily McLaughlin
Opinion Editor



Terry Hunsicker
Sports Editor



Gloria Falach
Campus Life Editor



Kailey Aiken
Feature Editor



Hayden Randolph
Science & Technology Editor



Steven Ifantis
Podcast Host



Lexi Smith
Head Photographer



Hannah Walls
Photographer



Tyler Witkowski
Photographer



Samantha Linares
Head Graphic Designer



Aleandra Austin
Graphic Designer



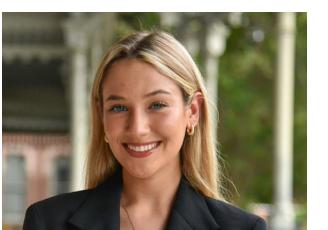
Isabella Alicea
Graphic Designer



Ciara Grad
Graphic Designer &
Web Designer



Ana Ortiz
Marketing Manager



Grace Vasaturo
Social Media Director



Genesis Muckle
Events Coordinator



Luka Rasevic
Student Government Rep.

MEET OUR STAFF!

CONTENTS

SEPT 16TH, 2025 | THEMINARET.ORG

EDITORS



04 | Letter from Editors

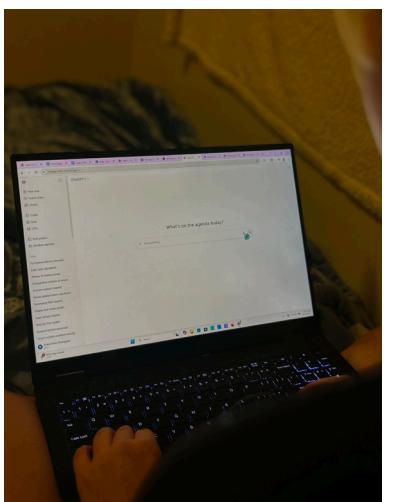
NEWS



06 | Charlie Kirk
Assassinated at Utah
Valley University



10 | Go Greek or Go Home?



11 | AI Has
Become the
New Norm,
and This
Needs To Be
Talked About

07 | 9/11 Memorial Workout



SPORTS



12 | Men's Soccer,
Tampa vs. West
Florida

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



08 | Sabrina
Doesn't Beg for
Success -- She
was Built to Be
on Top



14 | Booking the
Conclusion of the John
Cena Retirement Tour

15 | UTampa Places First in Swan City Cross Country Classic



CAMPUS LIFE



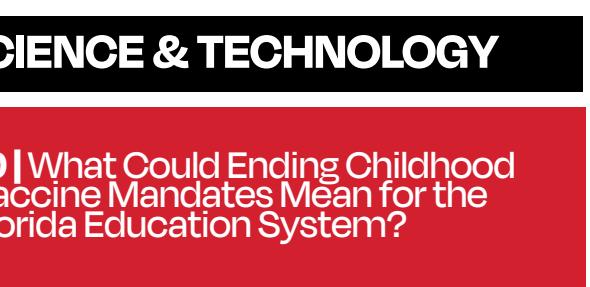
16 | Four New
Dining Spots
Open in Morsani
Hall, Bringing
Fresh Options to
Campus



17 | Week of
Welcome:
From
Move-in to
Involvement
Fair



18 | Behind the Shield: Sparty's Role at UTampa



19 | What Could Ending Childhood
Vaccine Mandates Mean for the
Florida Education System?



20 | Fishing is Killing Sharks. Here's why



LETTER FROM EDITORS

Editor-in-Chief
Alyssa Cortes

Managing Editor
Franchesca Murrugarra

Dear UTampa community,

Every generation changes history. For almost a century, The Minaret has been a place where students can make their voices heard, and we will continue to do so in a time within our nation where that is becoming a rarity. When not only student journalism but more importantly, student livelihoods and lives are threatened, we feel it is our responsibility to do our best with the platform we're given.

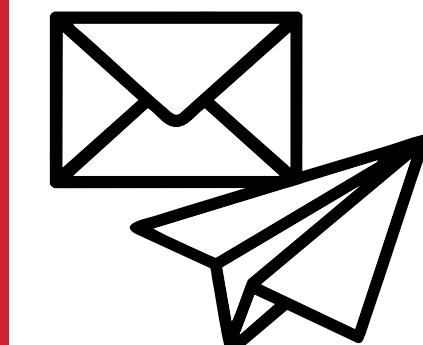
This year, we plan to make changes, some of which include our new Science & Technology, Photography, and Podcast sections in our paper, with a website and print redesign to follow. With these changes, we hope to involve more of our UTampa community than ever before.

We are the next generation of leaders, journalists, educators, doctors, lawyers, and so much more. Never forget we are in a privileged position to have the opportunity to receive an education, so take advantage of all the opportunities it offers. Remember your voice, your stories, and most importantly, YOU matter.

Welcome to another year of The Minaret.

Your,
Editor-in-Chief & Managing Editor
Alyssa Cortes *Franchesca Murrugarra*

WRITE TO THE EDITORS!



We value your thoughts and ideas. Your voice helps shape meaningful conversations in our pages.

We want to hear from you!

Share your letter with us at
401 W Kennedy Blvd #3P
Tampa, FL 33606-1450
alyssa.cortes@spartans.ut.edu

Charlie Kirk Assassinated at Utah Valley University

By Faith Montalvo

Tampa, Fla. -- Charlie Kirk, founder of right-wing youth organization Turning Point USA (TPUSA), was killed Wednesday, Sept. 10, while speaking at Utah Valley University during his "American Comeback" tour.

Kirk, 31, was responding to questions from an audience member about mass shootings and gun control when a single shot was fired. Kirk was shot in the neck and transported to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. His wife and two children were among the 3,000 people present at the event.

22-year-old Utah resident Tyler Robinson was arrested as the suspect. He is a registered voter with no party affiliation and is an inactive voter. Utah Governor Spencer Cox said in a press conference that investigators analyzed security footage, interviewed Robinson's family, and reviewed online messages between Robinson and his roommate.

Cox said authorities found a Mauser 98 .30-06 caliber bolt-action rifle near the university campus in conditions that match Robinson's messages, with casings that had engraved anti-fascist inscriptions.

Both Republicans and Democrats condemned the violence on social media. This included Cox, who said in a post on X, formerly Twitter, that there is no place for political violence.

"Americans of every political persuasion must unite in condemning this act," wrote Cox, "Our prayers are with Charlie, his family, and all those affected."

President Donald Trump announced on Thursday that he will posthumously award Kirk the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Kirk was known for traveling to college and university campuses across the country, where he openly debated students about politics. He co-founded TPUSA in 2012 when he was 18, and the organization has over 800 campus chapters nationwide, including The University of Tampa. The organization aims to equip young conservatives to defend their values and prompt political dialogue, according to TPUSA's website.

The TPUSA Chapter at UTampa has been directed not to provide comments or interviews.

The UTampa College Republicans shared a statement by the Florida Federation of College Republicans.

The Florida Federation of College

Republicans stands united in prayer for Charlie Kirk in the wake of the tragic events at Utah Valley University," the statement said. "Charlie has been a steadfast leader, mentor, and voice for young conservatives nationwide, and his impact on our movement is immeasurable."

Samuel Ponce, assistant director of Campus Safety at UTampa, said the department takes these events seriously.

"Our thoughts and prayers go out to Charlie Kirk, his family, and those impacted by the shooting at Utah Valley University," said Ponce.

"The safety of our students, faculty, staff, and guests at UTampa remains our number one priority," said Ponce. "Which fosters a campus environment that encourages and supports open discussions and perspectives that ensure mutual respect and support for our campus community."

UTampa has had few incidents involving weapons on campus in 2024 and this year, according to Campus Safety's Daily Report Log. Of the 1,100 incidents that occurred on campus, ranging from parking to student conduct violations, three were firearm-related. This year, there have been three out of the 700 incidents since January. University policy states that weapons and other dangerous objects are prohibited.

The UTampa Student Government released a statement on Instagram shortly after the assassination and shared the contact information for Wellness Services, Counseling Services, and Campus Safety.

Tampa Student Government recognizes that news of the tragic shootings that occurred across the country today may be deeply distressing and affect members of our community in different ways," said the statement. "We acknowledge that events like these can be difficult and distressing. If you are in need of support, the University offers a variety of resources."

Utah Valley University is closed until September 15, according to the university's emergency information page.

If you or anyone you know is in need of support, these resources are available to students at UTampa.

Wellness Services: (813) 257-1877

Counseling Services: (813) 253-6250

counseling@ut.edu

Campus Safety: (813) 257-7777

campussafety@ut.edu

In an emergency, always dial 911.



Photo courtesy of Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

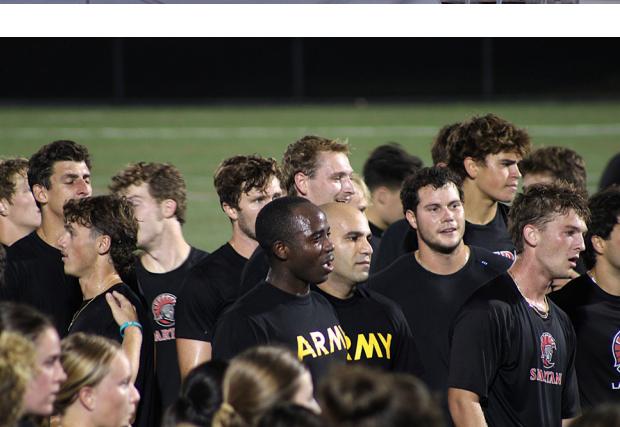
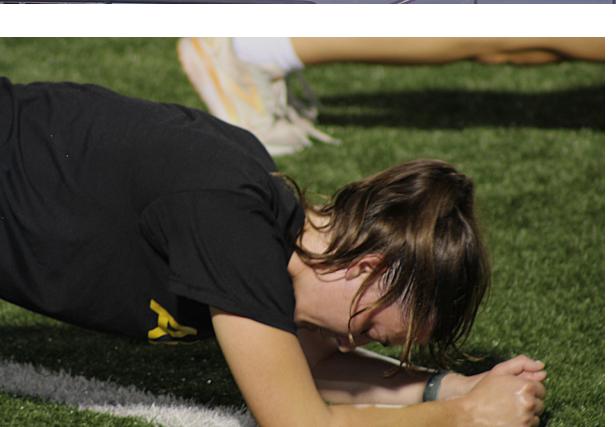
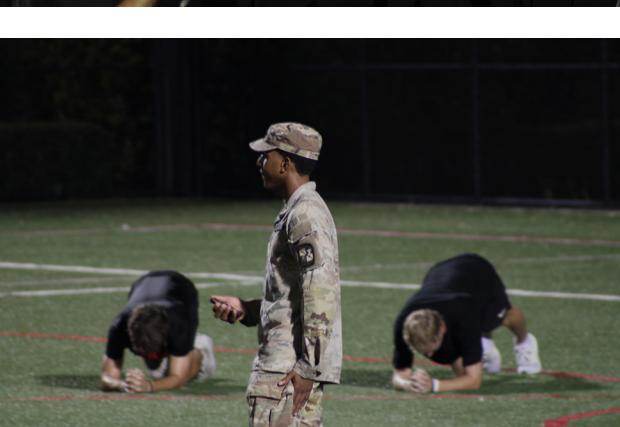
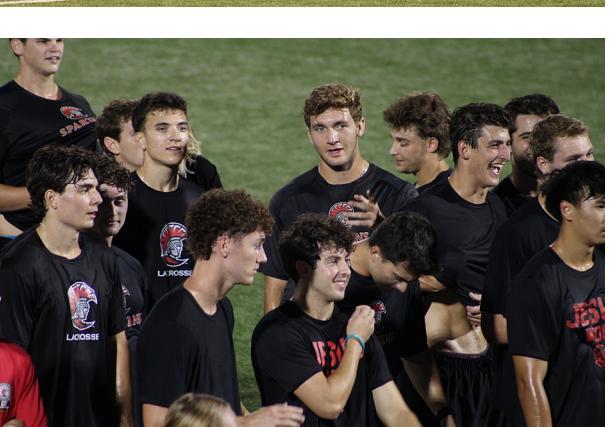


Photo courtesy of Lexi Smith

Sabrina Doesn't Beg for Success — She Was Built to Be on Top

By Logan Mullins



Photo courtesy of Sabrina's Official Website

Love her or hate her, you can't deny her: Sabrina Carpenter's new album *Man's Best Friend* is shattering records. As of Sept. 5, *Man's Best Friend* had the second-largest daily debut on Spotify in 2025, with 64.4 million streams.

Man's Best Friend surpasses Short n' Sweet's debut of 57 million first-day streams in 2024, making this Sabrina's best-performing album yet.

Not only is this Sabrina's biggest success, but she outperformed established players in her industry: Lady Gaga's 2025 album *Mayhem* opened to 45.7 million streams, and Ariana Grande's 2024 album *Eternal Sunshine* opened to 58.2 million streams. Sabrina's newest debut outpaces popstar pioneers by millions of streams — a once-niche artist now at the forefront of the industry.

But this success isn't a coincidence — it's by design. Carpenter shows how to succeed in the new age of music through shorter songs, unique songwriting, and calculated controversy. In a streaming economy, attention is currency, and Sabrina Carpenter has crafted the "perf" transaction.

Sabrina has crafted songs with incredibly catchy beats meant for Instagram and TikTok — songs meant to steal the listener's attention. One viral hook from a catchy song on a social media's

Carpenter keeps it *Short n' Sweet*

With each passing decade, songs are reverting to their radio roots and becoming shorter. In the 1980s and 1990s, the average song would last upwards of four minutes. Danny Wright at VICE reported that the average song today is only three minutes long.

Dr. Ian Chapman, a music researcher at the University of Otago, told RNZ (Radio New Zealand) that the shortening of songs is due to streaming.

"It's all about streaming... artists only earn a royalty on a song if the listener keeps listening for at least 30 seconds," said Chapman. "So there's a big temptation to eliminate or shorten the introductions and get straight into the hooks and the choruses that will keep the listener on board."

The average runtime of the songs on *Man's Best Friend* is three minutes and thirteen seconds — the perfect pace for the streaming platforms and their retention metrics.

Three songs — "Tears," "When Did You Get Hot," and "House Tour" — run under three minutes; not only are these songs concise, but they are also perfectly suited for short-form content.

In an era of ever-decreasing attention spans, short-form content becomes increasingly addictive. Low runtime songs have less material to comb through, making it easier to select a catchy segment. Both "Tears" and "House Tour" are among the top 50 trending audios on Instagram, with the former being #2 and the latter being #21 on the date of publication. This level of traction on social media turns influencers into free marketers, as it gives the attention of their fans to Carpenter.

Sabrina has crafted songs with incredibly catchy beats meant for Instagram and TikTok — songs meant to steal the listener's attention. One viral hook from a catchy song on a social media's

For You page can turn a casual scroller into a devoted fan — and Carpenter knows it.

Nobody does pop like Sabrina

In 1941, his essay "On Popular Music," German musicologist Theodor Adorno describes popular music as substitutable.

"The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization," said Adorno.

Even 84 years later, that criticism holds, as Luca von Burkersroda describes modern pop as "formulaic sound."

Pop songs tend to cover similar topics and frequently receive criticism for not conveying anything meaningful. Sabrina breaks the mold and crafts her own. While *Man's Best Friend* is a breakup album, the most popular theme for pop music, she covers aspects of a modern breakup that musicians overlook, and with a level of wit and wordplay rarely seen elsewhere.

Consider "We Almost Broke Up Again Last Night" as Carpenter describes a toxic, cyclical relationship — one where both know they should be apart, but they cannot stand being alone. She cuts deep into her own heart to tear at her listeners' souls. She doesn't sing about love or a breakup; she sings about being mutually trapped. Few lyrics better echo the pain of such an addictive relationship than the words of the bridge: "Big deal, we've been here before, and we'll be here tomorrow." This blend of cynical despair with such casual wordplay distinguishes Carpenter from her peers, giving her somber music a distinctive sound.

Take "House Tour," for instance: on the surface, Sabrina sings about taking her date on a tour of her house, backdropped by a classic 80s and 90s synth. But the lyrics carry a double entendre: Sabrina is singing about sex. Lines such as "the first, second, third floor" and "be a little reckless cause it's insured" give the song an intense sexual innuendo: first, second, and third base, as well as being on birth control. It's these little innuendos that are often special to Sabrina's songs; wordplay rarely matched in mainstream pop. If a listener can't get it anywhere else, they'll turn to her.

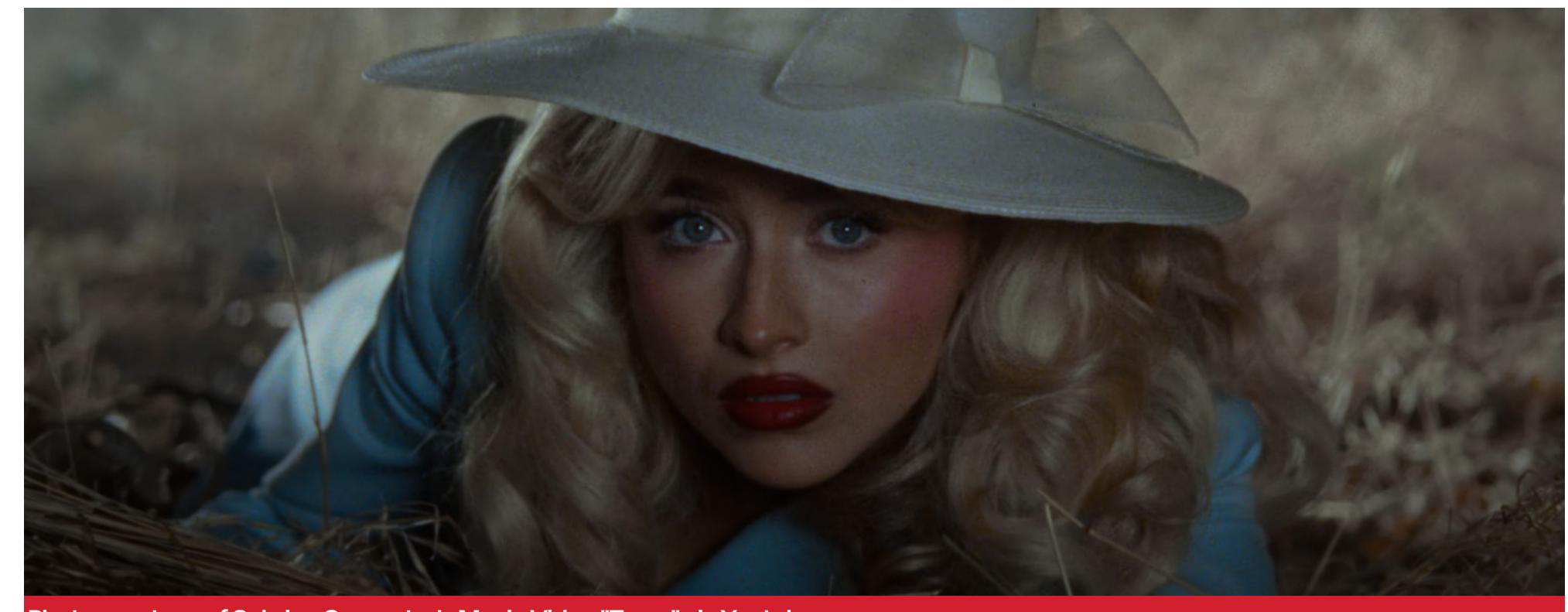


Photo courtesy of Sabrina Carpenter's Music Video "Tears" via Youtube

Controversy makes money

In nearly every industry, scandal is bad for business; in music, it is business. Take one of the most influential figures in the music industry: Elvis Presley. According to Alan Hanson's *Elvis History Blog*, Reverend Carl Elgrena described Presley as "morally insane" and "leading other young people to the same end" to his 1956 Iowa congregation. Presley's manager, Tom Parker, sold "I Hate Elvis" pins to capitalize on his controversy. Yet, all of the controversy helped Elvis rise to become the best-selling solo artist of all time, with over 500 million record sales.

The same principle applies today, with algorithms pushing outrage content because it gains more attention. The cover album for *Man's Best Friend* features Carpenter on all fours with a man pulling her hair, which is an intentionally provocative image. The image sparked immense backlash as thousands rushed to X within the first few days to post that the cover "reinforces" a misogynistic stereotype. Some even claimed that Sabrina attempted to profit from "domestic violence." Fans defended her, with one X user framing the image as "obvious commentary" rather than exploitation.

But Sabrina didn't stop there; she fueled the outcry even further when she had a "funeral party" after the release of the album, celebrating her "killing men" in her music videos.

Critics see exploitation and marginalization, while fans see metaphors and satire.

Even those who despise Sabrina still have to engage with her content. To bash a song, one must play it. For the hater, it's spite; for Sabrina, it's just another stream.

Such hot-button issues have sparked intense debate across all social media platforms about sexualization and stereotypes surrounding women in music, creating a cultural firestorm about gender, power, and performance in pop music. At the center of it all: Sabrina Carpenter.

Her formula works

Carpenter's musical reign isn't accidental — it's a model of intent. Rising to stardom in 2023 and topping charts in 2024, Sabrina's calculated mastery of algorithm-driven music, clever wordplay, and controversy cemented her at the top. Most artists focus on one lane. Sabrina owns them all by design.



Photo courtesy of Sabrina Carpenter's Music Video "My Man on Willpower" via Youtube

Go Greek or Go Home?

By Amber Louis

Tampa, Fla. – College Panhellenic Association (CPA) recruitment for the fall semester takes place annually at the University of Tampa, accepting new members into 13 sorority chapters offered.

Despite a lack of on-campus sorority housing for students, Greek life remains blatantly popular, especially this season. There are 955 potential new members (PNMs) this fall, according to Denise Curran, an admin of the UTampa Parents of Greeks Facebook page.

Given that UTampa has yet again accepted another record-breaking number of freshmen to the institution – 3,400 according to a recent ut.edu article – this rise of recruits is not too much of a surprise. However, the question arises: Is rushing this season just a trend?

“Rushtok” is a side of the internet that showcases and promotes the CPA recruitment process. It highlights precisely themed outfits, dance routines, and has even tied digital marketing to companies like Sephora and Poppi with partnered giveaways and sponsorship deals with the chapters.

“Girls will see Rushtok, and they want to rush, but they have no idea what they’re getting into.” Arya Vyas, a freshman at UTampa who dropped out of her recruitment process, said.

SEC schools such as the University of Alabama, the University of Tennessee Knoxville, and the University of Mississippi tend to be the most popular among TikTok videos featuring various Panhellenic houses dolled up and decorated in themes to the women’s outfits.

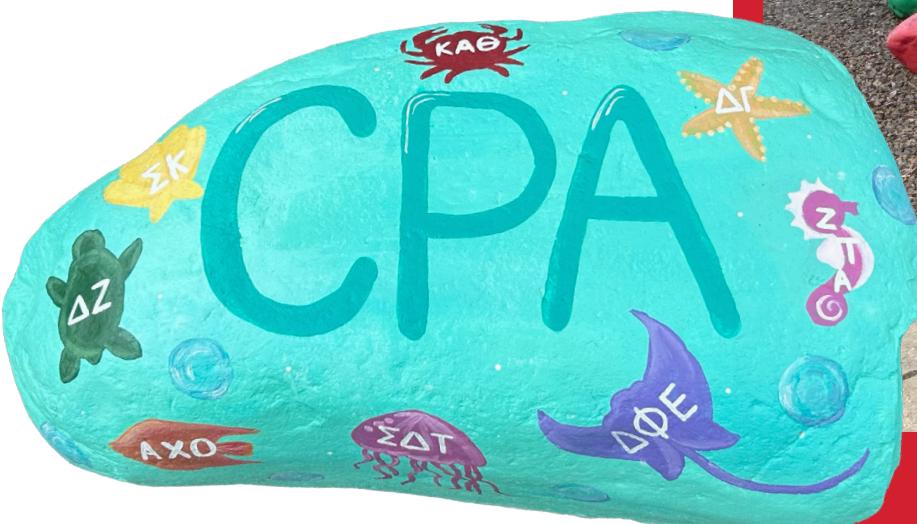


Photo courtesy of Lexi Smith



Photo courtesy of Lexi Smith

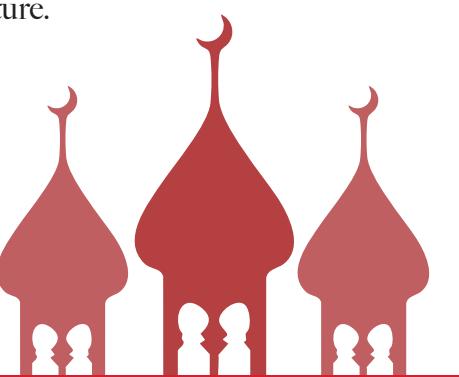
These schools have been notorious for their students' dedication to Greek life, which has become more prominent in schools across the country.

“Rushtok” also tends to be the side of the internet that unveils a PNM’s heartbreak when they were not offered a bid to their desired chapter.

Lately, the recruitment process has seemed to shift from the idea of philanthropy and the establishment of sisterhood and turn to a new face of fashion frenzy, competitions, and Instagram posts that might ‘blow up.’

The dominance of social media’s influence on the recruitment process this year seems to be tied to UTampa’s student body. Between the buzz in elevator rides and new friend introductions, the status of a freshman student’s thoughts on their recruitment process typically revolves around the short phrases ‘I’m exhausted’ or ‘I dropped.’

Discrepancy in Panhellenic values arises from what seems to be buried under the expectations of a TikTok trend and a For You Page feature.



AI Has Become the New Norm, and This Needs To Be Talked About

By Emily McLaughlin

Tampa, Fla. – Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the most crucial way technology is used today. AI promotes innovation, efficiency, and solutions to problems humans want to find answers for. However, behind all the optimism, the truth of the matter is that AI is causing more harm than good, and it will only get worse as future generations rely more heavily on it.

Recent data show that AI has really grown over the past years and is continuously growing. For example, the global AI market will soar from \$189 billion in 2023 to \$4.8 trillion by 2033, a 25-fold increase in just a decade, according to a UNCTAD report.

Sure, the benefits of AI are really nice. For students, it helps write papers, answer those annoying math problems, and generate ideas to lengthen papers. But, as students use AI in schools, there can be a high risk of dulling human creativity. Generative tools such as AI can churn out essays, music, and artwork just within seconds, which used to require imagination, skill, and effort.

According to a 2024 report from Harvard University, young people aged 14-22 mostly use AI for information (53%) and brainstorming (51%).

If the younger generation grows up relying on AI to create and complete their assignments for them, students' spark and curiosity for learning will disintegrate. The best type of learning is through trial and error, working through the process of thinking through a problem. But replacing that with AI shortcuts causes a big risk for original thought as the rising generations become more prominent in today's world.

Now, looking into the broader societal danger, AI is already distorting the public with misinformation. People are often asking themselves nowadays, “Is this video AI?” when watching videos on the internet. Deepfakes and automated propaganda often make it harder to tell facts from fiction.

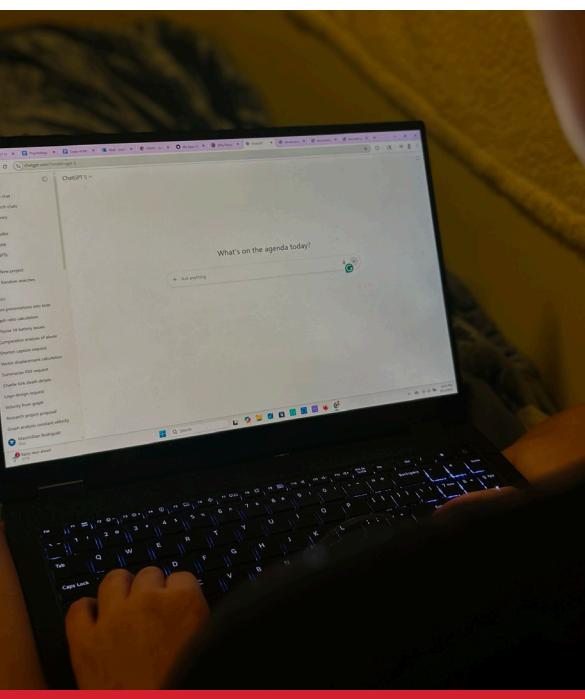
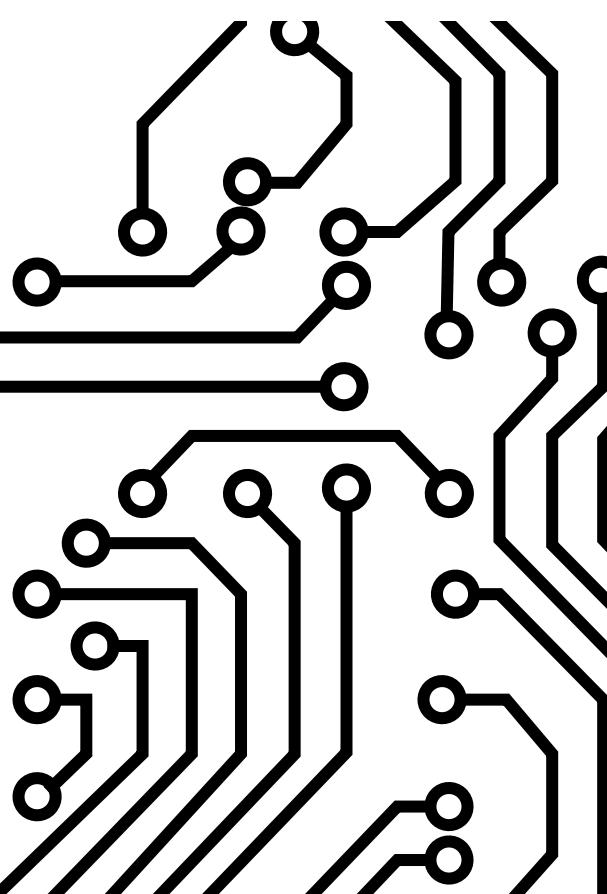


Photo courtesy of Lexi Smith

truth of these machines and what they are capable of.

The answer is not to stop using AI altogether but rather to set boundaries. AI needs to be only a tool, not a replacement for learning. Ways to lessen the use of AI could be by completing the assignment first and then using AI to see if there is anything else to add to what has already been created. Another way is just using AI to help start assignments and then work from there as well.

AI's rapid ascent brings a real threat to creativity, increased dependence on technology, and weakened learning foundations. AI may offer shortcuts for students, but there also needs to be understanding that shortcuts sometimes aren't the best call to action.



On Sept. 4, 2025 the Tampa Spartans kicked off their season with a commanding 3-1 victory over the West Florida Argonauts. Goals from Felix Poschmann, Rodrigo Lopes, and Oscar Warne helped secure their first win at Pepin Stadium.



Booking the Conclusion of the John Cena Retirement Tour

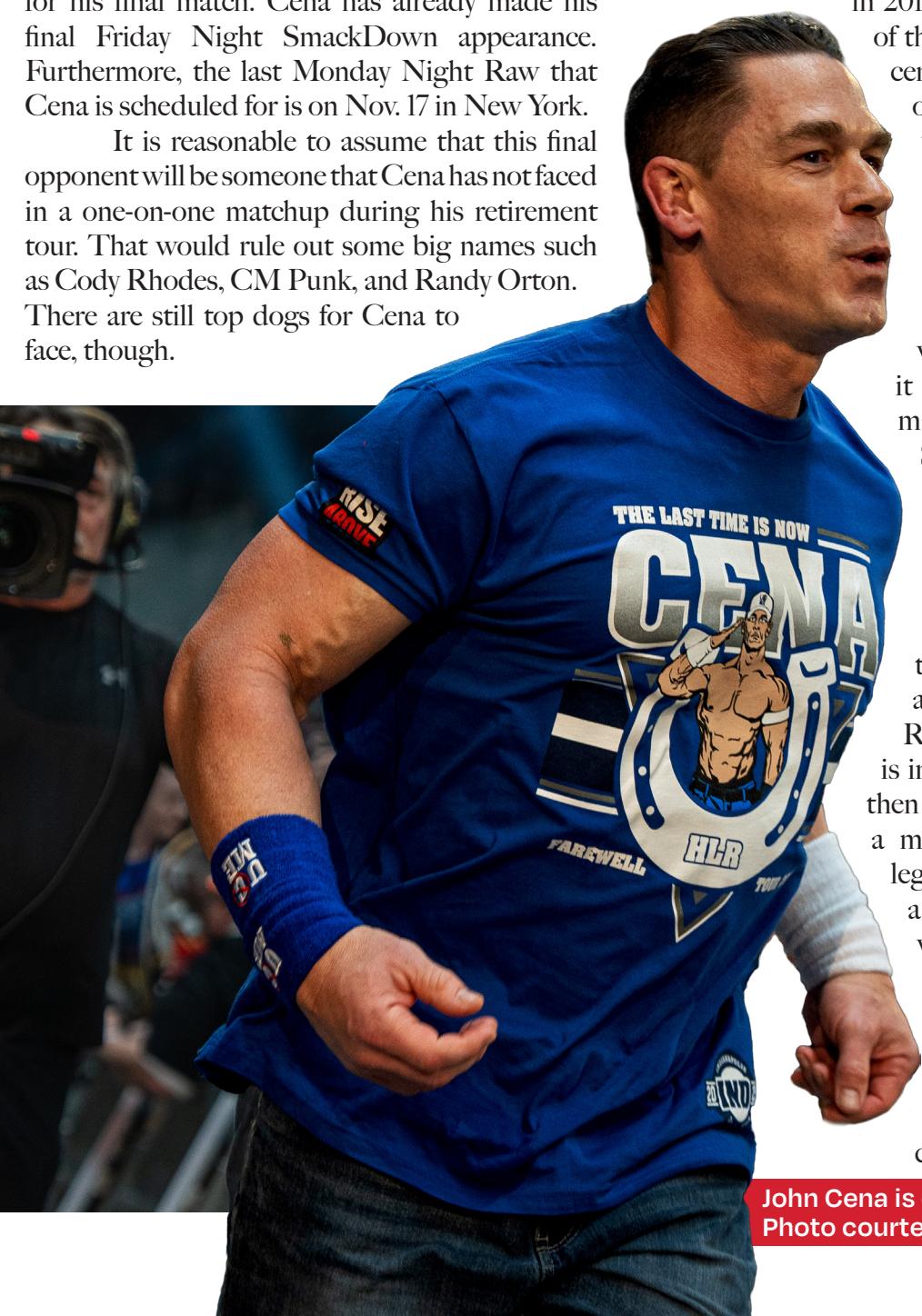
By Ben Rosen

Tampa, Fla. -- John Cena will compete in his final WWE match on Dec. 13 at a to-be-announced location during the Saturday Night's Main Event show, which will air exclusively on Peacock. This will mark the end of Cena's yearlong retirement tour and his storied wrestling career.

For one last time, "The Time Is Now" will come on, and Cena will make his trademark entrance with a motivational speech to cameraman Stu. The crowd will acknowledge the presence of the greatest wrestler of all time for the last time.

Based on Cena's remaining scheduled appearances, he will be facing a mystery opponent, likely in an open challenge format, for his final match. Cena has already made his final Friday Night SmackDown appearance. Furthermore, the last Monday Night Raw that Cena is scheduled for is on Nov. 17 in New York.

It is reasonable to assume that this final opponent will be someone that Cena has not faced in a one-on-one matchup during his retirement tour. That would rule out some big names such as Cody Rhodes, CM Punk, and Randy Orton. There are still top dogs for Cena to face, though.



John Cena is entering the first match in his retirement tour.
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

One option is to have Cena face a rising star, like Dominik Mysterio, Bron Breakker, or even Carmelo Hayes, and have Cena elevate someone on his way out. Alternatively, Cena could face a familiar foe and rehash an old rivalry for one final time.

The latter option is the more intriguing route to go. While having Cena put over a new star is not out of the question, there are some veterans that he has not faced yet during this run that he probably should.

Of the potential opponents in that group, AJ Styles has a compelling case to be Cena's last opponent. When Styles first arrived in the WWE in 2016, he and Cena had one of the greatest rivalries of the century. Styles and Cena one last time would be very intriguing.

However, WWE does not seem to be lining up Styles to be the last opponent for Cena. Regardless, it will be a big match, and it will presumably be the main event of the show.

Styles should be the pick, but there are other interesting stories out there if they choose other options.

They could choose to go for the shock factor and have Cena face The Rock for the third time. If it is indeed an open challenge, then this would create quite a moment for WWE. Two legends in a match to break a 1-1 tie. However, Rock would actually have to show up for this to happen.

By process of elimination, to some extent, there is one clear choice for Cena's

final opponent. A fellow babyface, who is a former rival of Cena's, would allow for a handshake for the ages at the end. This would create a full circle moment as well.

There is one former rival of Cena that stands out among the rest to be his final opponent. Two men who were babyfaces that were rejected by the crowd at points in their careers. Two men who have been the face of WWE. This mystery opponent, Roman Reigns.

It would be a fitting end to Cena's career to face Reigns. During a previous feud in 2017, Cena told Reigns in a promo that he still wrestled because people like Reigns were bad at their jobs. Cena exposed Reigns on the microphone, telling Reigns what a promo is that night.

Then, Reigns was despised by the crowd. Now Reigns is beloved. Then, Reigns was the "Big Dog" and hated by the crowd. Now, Reigns is "The Tribal Chief" and a megastar who is one of the best of this era. Reigns ending Cena's career would be long-term storytelling at its finest.

While Reigns and Cena did face off at SummerSlam in 2021, there was a different vibe to the match. That was during the peak of Reigns' 1,316-day world title reign as a heel. There was no post-match handshake or embrace.

This is also a different Reigns than Cena has faced before. Reigns is now a babyface that is accepted by the crowd and has evolved as a character. There would be more of a mutual respect and admiration than in previous feuds. Two legends facing off for one last time.

A back-and-forth match between the two, where Cena empties the tank and gives everything he has left, but Reigns ultimately prevails. Cena puts Reigns over and rides off into the sunset, and Reigns solidifies himself as a wrestling Mount Rushmore candidate and a fan favorite.

Cena then gets the microphone and gives his retirement speech. Regardless of who the match is against, the crowd in the arena and the audience at home should soak it all in. No one will likely ever match Cena as the greatest wrestler of all time. Thank you, Cena.

UTampa Places First in Swan City Cross Country Classic

By Olivia Gehm

Tampa, Fla. -- The University of Tampa's women's cross-country team competed in the Swan City Classic on Saturday, Sept. 6, 2025, at 7:50 a.m. Five runners from the Spartans placed in the top 15, accumulating 34 points for the team and helping UTampa secure a strong finish on the course. Florida Southern University trailed behind with 55 points, and Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, which had the first-place runner in junior Taylor Roth, finished with a score of 67.

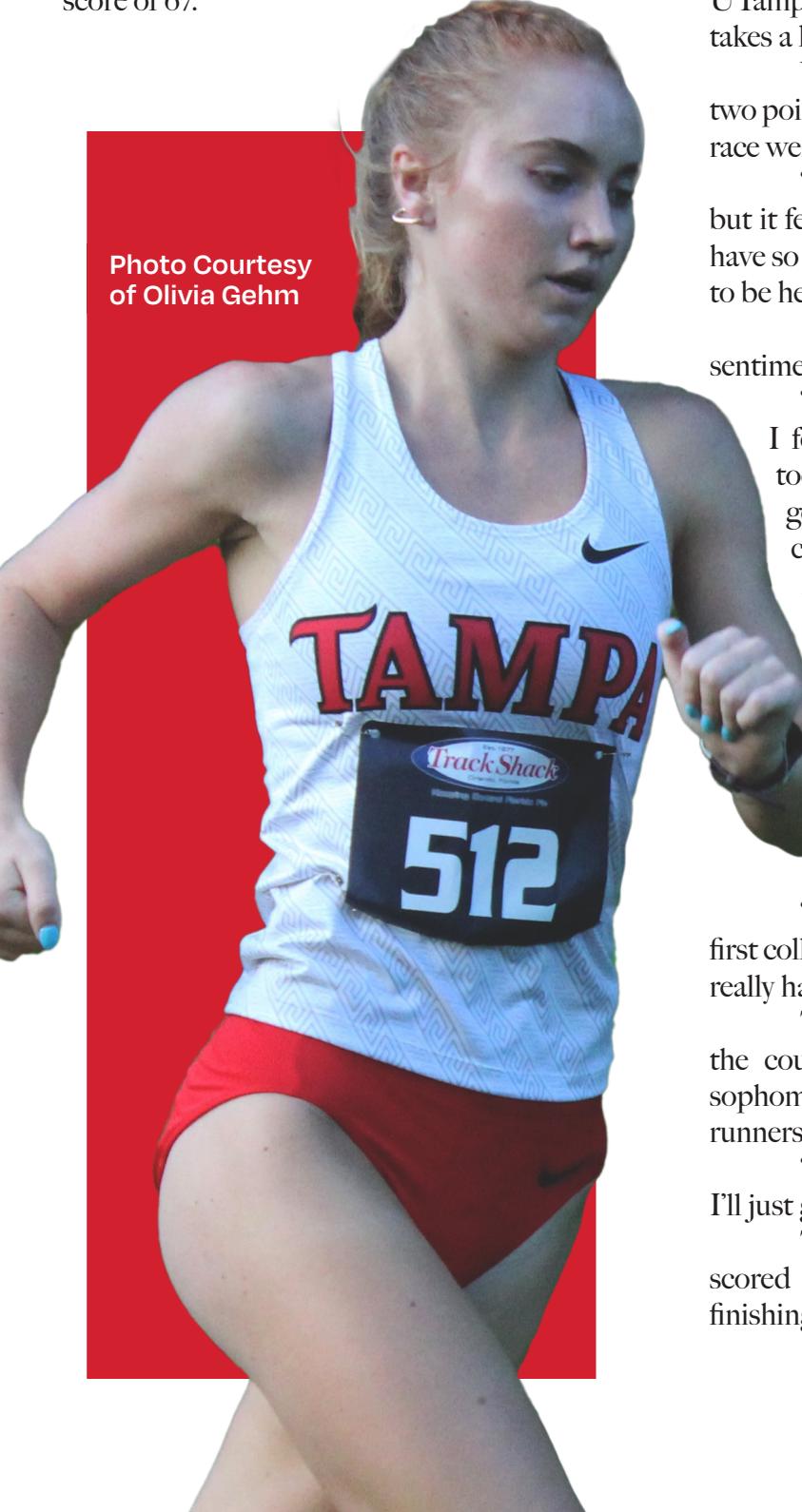


Photo Courtesy of Olivia Gehm

The four-kilometer race kicked off UTampa's season and served as an opportunity for new and returning runners to get a feel for what the next several months will look like. The Spartans rested their top seven athletes for the Swan City Classic to keep them fresher for races later in the season. The course, which wound its way through Holloway Park, featured varied terrain and elevation changes unusual for Florida.

When asked to describe the course, UTampa junior Alaina Williams said, "Tough. It takes a lot out of you."

Williams placed second overall, scoring two points with a time of 14:16.9. She said that the race went better than she expected.

"I didn't really come out with expectations, but it felt good," she said. "I love all the girls. We have so much fun together, so it's just - I'm happy to be here."

Senior Kendra Krueger shared Williams' sentiments about the course and team dynamic.

"We'll be racing conference here, and I feel like our team had such good energy today," said Krueger. "I feel like we're in good shape, and for that, and I feel like this course helped that, too."

Freshman Abby Tudeen also had a productive race, placing sixth in her first-ever collegiate cross-country meet with a time of 14:29.4, scoring six points for the Spartans. Head Coach Logan Wells said that he was impressed with Tudeen's ambitious racing strategy, as she led the race at the halfway point.

"To put herself out there up front in her first collegiate race takes a lot of guts, which I was really happy with," said Wells.

Tudeen said her decision to attack the course was mainly due to her teammate, sophomore Kara Bergeron, separating from other runners.

"I saw Kara go, and I was like, well, I guess I'll just go with her," Tudeen said.

The remainder of the Spartans' points were scored by Krueger and junior Molly DeMarzo, finishing in 14:39.4 and 14:51.5, respectively.

Overall, the team had a successful first meet, taking the top spot and setting the tone for the 2025 season. Coach Wells said that he was pleased with the team's first-place finish without their top seven runners.



The team huddles near the start line before the race begins. Photo courtesy of Olivia Gehm

"I think it gives these ladies a lot of confidence, and it gives the ladies who didn't run today a lot of confidence because they're doing the same training," said Wells. "And so when they see their teammates run well, they know they can run well. So it's a great start to the season to give us some momentum."

Wells said the team - the largest in school history - has a great energy and work ethic and is making a "concerted effort not to focus on outcomes this season, but more on the process of reaching [their] full potential."

The Spartans will compete in their next meet at the Hoka Nights of Thunder in Tallahassee on Friday, Sept. 12.

Four New Dining Spots Open in Morsani Hall, Bringing Fresh Options to Campus

By Steve Ifantis

Tampa, Fla. – The University of Tampa's dining scene has a fresh look this semester with four new concepts opening in Morsani Hall. The additions – Pressed, Sips, Swirl, and Bowlful – replace Dairy Queen and offer healthier, customizable choices.

Student-Driven Changes

Bailey Parker, the marketing manager for UTampa Dining, emphasized that the updates reflect what students asked for.

"The new concepts were directly inspired by the feedback we've received from the campus community," said Parker. "Students, faculty, and staff asked for fresher, customizable, and health-forward options, and these four concepts were designed to deliver exactly that."

Pressed serves hot paninis, Sips offers fruit-based juices, Swirl focuses on açai bowls, and Bowlful provides a variety of greens, grains, and proteins. Parker added that each location was built with dietary needs in mind.

"Bowlful offers plant-based proteins and gluten-free bases, Swirl is naturally vegetarian-friendly with vegan options, Sips features all-fruit blends, and Pressed includes vegetarian paninis and gluten-free bread options," said Parker, providing examples.

Student Reactions

Students have already begun sampling the new spots. Sunra Thomas, a junior at UTampa, tried Bowlful and enjoyed the experience.

"It was pretty good. I got a brown rice

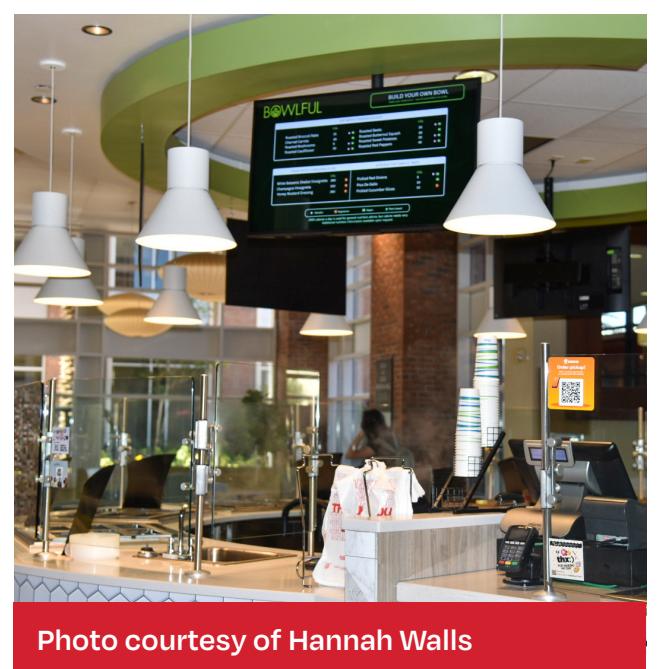


Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls

bowl with a little bit of arugula and chicken," she said.

While Thomas does miss having late-night ice cream runs at Dairy Queen, she called the switch a positive one.

"Honestly, now that I'm off campus, I do have to grab dinner sometimes," she said. "I think it is a good addition just because it seems to be providing more options, like healthier options in a sense, or they're trying to make an effort to do that."

William Cacace, a junior, echoed that sentiment after visiting Bowlful and Swirl.

"I enjoy both of them. I've gone to both a lot ... but I do believe it was a better change," he said. "I think it's a lot healthier, and more people kind of wanted those healthier options. The dining service has really helped with that. They listened to the students, and I really liked it, and I appreciate the updates."

Cacace also welcomed the idea of seasonal specials. "I think that would be a good addition. As long as they still offer the same base ones... I feel like that'd be good," he said.

Beyond Dairy Queen

The decision to replace Dairy Queen was intentional.

"The previous concepts had a more limited menu and weren't as adaptable to today's dining preferences," said Parker. "With the new locations, students have more flexibility, healthier options, and a greater ability to personalize their meals." Thomas agreed.

"The stuff that they advertised wasn't like... I remember asking for something and they didn't even have it," she said, recalling past frustrations with the older spots.

Enhancing Campus Life

Dining has long been a hub for student life, and UTampa Dining hopes these new concepts expand that role.

"They provide students with more variety, healthier options, and spaces that encourage connection over meals," said Parker. "It's about fueling both their academic success and their campus life."

Thomas also noted the potential for smoother operations.

"Last year, I do remember Salsa Rico having massive long lines... now, since we have more dining locations, do I think that will alleviate some of the lines? ... I think it's a good addition for campus just because it is providing newer students more variety," she said.

Cacace summed it up: "I think it'll make students healthier as there's just more options to be healthier on campus."

Looking Forward

The dining team plans to keep menus fresh with seasonal rotations and monitor student feedback.

"Success for us is when students feel these spaces truly meet their needs," said Parker.

For many on campus, that goal seems within reach. As Thomas put it: "It is a good attempt to try to get healthier foods or just more variety of options... just more accessible."



Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls

Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls



On Aug. 20, 2025, freshmen began moving into their dorms on campus with help from the Week of Welcome move-in team. A week later, on Aug. 27, Week of Welcome continued with the Involvement Fair, where freshmen explored student-run organizations on campus, including The Minaret.

Behind the Shield: Sparty's Role at UTampa

By Amber Louis

Tampa, Fla. — “Being Spartacus was more than a role; it was an honor that made me feel forever tied to the Spartan spirit,” said Praanshu Adiga, Class of ‘24 alum and international student, who took on the role of Spartacus, the University of Tampa’s mascot, typically known as Sparty.

Whether you’re moving in on your first day as a freshman, watching the 2024 NCAA championship-winning baseball team, or just attending a campus event, Spartacus — more often known as Sparty — is around to take pictures, give high-fives, and uplift school spirit. But behind the mascot is a student-led commitment that most may be unaware of.



Photo courtesy of Praanshu Adiga

In 1930, UTampa adopted the Spartan as its mascot, as its biggest rival at the time was the St. Petersburg College Trojans, according to tampaspartans.com. As of March 2016, UTampa updated a series of logos and took on a new look for Spartacus.

“We tabled for mascot tryouts during the Week of Welcome, where we asked students if they were interested in being Sparty,” said Ariana Brianstiter, director of sports marketing and promotions.

In the audition process, certain qualities are evaluated in applicants interested in being Sparty.



Photo courtesy of Chloe Reganato

“Someone who has a lot of energy, someone who is more fun and outgoing with personality, someone who can dance, and someone with a lot of school spirit,” Brianstiter said, would make a student well-suited for the role.

Students who take on the job of being Sparty are required to follow two cardinal rules: keep the job a secret and stay quiet while in the suit.

“Keeping my identity as Spartacus a secret was definitely one of the hardest parts. It was such a cool honor, and naturally, I wanted to tell people. But I understood it was part of the job to remain anonymous, so I kept it to myself,” said Adiga.

“Students can be themselves because no one knows who they are,” said Sofia Marcus, a freshman sports marketing major and member of the swim club. The anonymous component of the job captures the essence of Sparty’s character, as the student is independent of the mascot.

“The moment I put on the suit, I wasn’t Praanshu anymore; I was Spartacus. I couldn’t speak or act like myself; I had to embody a strong, assertive Spartan full of energy and love for our community. Interacting with students never felt difficult because, in that role, I was treated like a campus celebrity. Everyone embraced Spartacus

“All students want to take a picture — they get excited, and it brings happiness to students to see Sparty,” said Brianstiter.

with excitement and joy,” said Adiga.

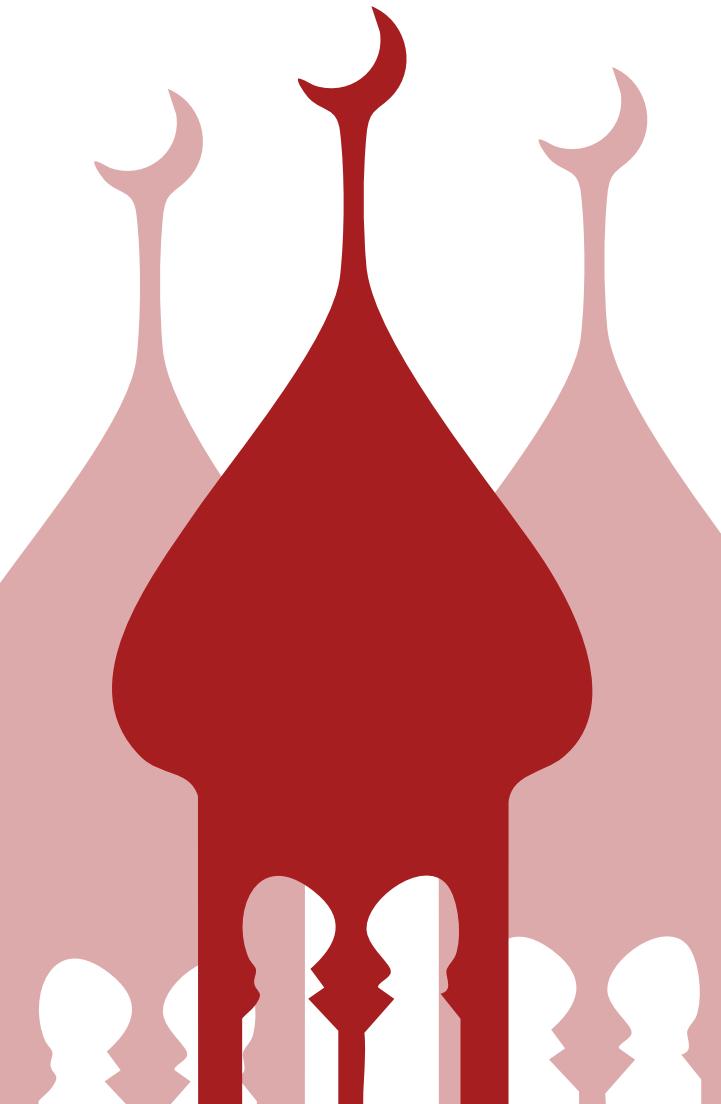
Having Sparty appear at more campus events was part of President Dahlberg’s recent UT to UTampa initiative, along with the creation of UTampa’s chant and hand gesture, to bring school spirit levels up and boost involvement.

Sparty is available at an hourly rate for campus and off-campus events. Athletic marketing asks interested parties to fill out a request form at tampaspartans.com under the “Spartacus Request” tab. Students who take on the paid position of Sparty rotate between scheduled events along with their coworkers.

“Out of all the things I was involved with during my three years at UTampa, Spartacus was my absolute favorite,” said Adiga.

“It was exciting, fun, and deeply meaningful to connect with students, spread positivity, and share our school spirit. The love and energy I received in return made every moment worth it.”

For more information about where to find Sparty and what he’s up to, check out the official TikTok and Instagram, [@spartacus_utampa](https://www.instagram.com/@spartacus_utampa).



What Could Ending Childhood Vaccine Mandates Mean for the Florida Education System?

By Hayden Randolph

Tampa, Fla. — In a speech on Sept. 3, 2025, Florida’s Surgeon General, Dr. Joseph A. Ladapo, announced that Florida plans to end all childhood vaccine mandates. The decision comes as several measles outbreaks occur in multiple states around the country.

The announcement aligns with Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the health secretary in the Trump administration’s anti-vaccine approach to running the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

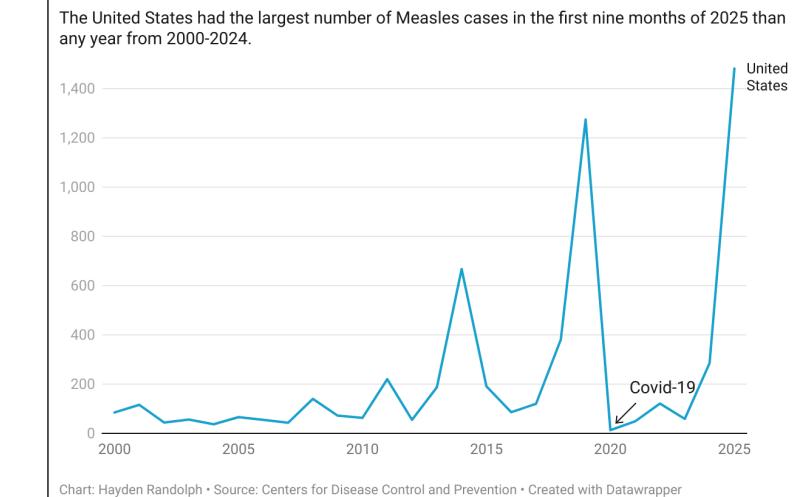
Dr. Shanda Vereen of the University of Tampa explains the function of vaccinations.

“They are there to prevent adverse health outcomes,” she said. “The vaccine for the measles is there to prevent people from getting the measles.”

Understanding the purpose of vaccines, Vereen explains what happens when the portion of the population who are vaccinated declines.

“Whenever we have vaccine rates that are below what we call the level for herd immunity, then we start to see higher levels of outbreaks.”

Measles cases in the United States from 2000-2025



Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health writes that 2025 has reported more cases — a disease labeled eradicated in 2000 — than any other year this century.

Dr. Olivia Bullock of the University of Florida explains why measles is spreading in some areas around the country.

“The reason that measles is starting to spread is because we previously had vaccination thresholds of higher than 95%,” she said. “In some geographic areas, there still is a high vaccination threshold, but what happens is when you have vaccination rates that are slipping below that, then you start to see disease reemerge.”

A report titled “Public Health and Economic Consequences of Vaccine Hesitancy for Measles in the United States” found that vaccine hesitancy not only has dire public health consequences, but economic ones as well. The study found that just a 5% reduction in the portion of children who get the measles vaccination results in a threefold increase in measles cases, as well as a \$2.1 million increase in the costs for the public sector.

Rob Kriete, president of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, explains that the reactions of teachers to this announcement regarding vaccine mandates are one of dismay.

“The reactions I have received from teachers and more professionals in the field is one of outrage, concern, and anxiety,” he said. “It feels like it goes against science.”

While Kriete recognizes that this decision is concerning to public school teachers, he conveys their resilience.

“The Florida public school teachers are resilient. They work in a state where they are paid 50th in the nation,” he added. “Public education has been treated more as a doormat than as an asset to our communities.”

According to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, vaccinations are safe, effective, and could save lives as well as protect families from the spread of disease. Vereen agrees that a vaccine mandate does not just keep a single vaccinated child safe, but keeps everyone around that child safe, too.

“Whenever we are mandating vaccines, it makes it less likely for these children to be exposed to those health outcomes while they are in school,” she said. “That means that all those

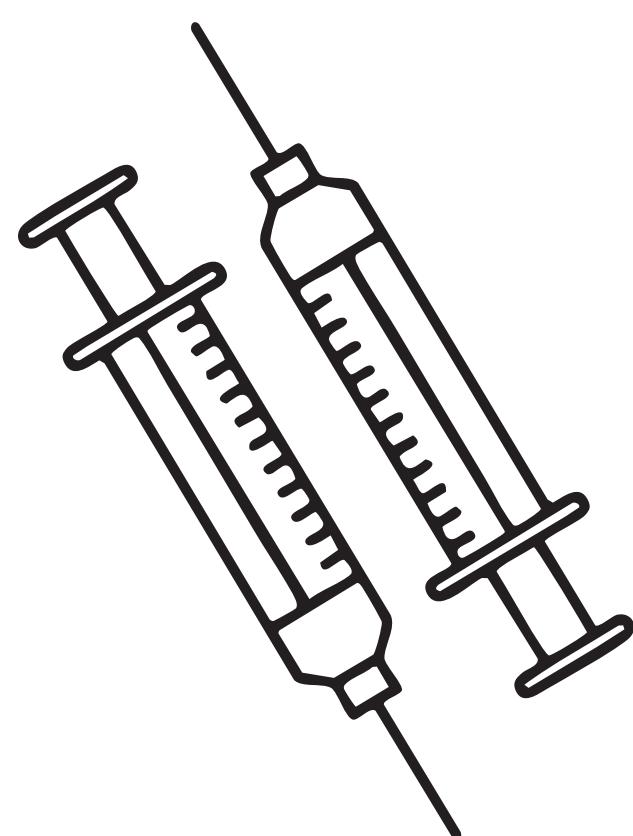
people who are around those vaccinated kids (parents, teachers, principals) are less likely to be exposed when that mandate is there.”

There are many people involved in the process of creating a safe and health-driven learning environment. Bullock recommends that everyone be involved in this process.

States with the lowest average teacher's salaries	
Florida ranks 50 out of 51 in average salary of teachers amongst states including the District of Columbia.	
Mississippi	53,704
Florida	54,875
Missouri	55,132
West Virginia	55,516
Louisiana	55,911
South Dakota	56,328
Montana	57,556
Kansas	58,146
North Carolina	58,292
Kentucky	58,325

Chart: Hayden Randolph • Source: National Education Association • Created with Datawrapper

“The end goal for all of this is this goal that parents and doctors and healthcare experts and government organizations all share which is stopping the spread of communicable diseases.”



Fishing is killing sharks. Here's why.

By Hayden Randolph

Tampa, Fla. -- A great hammerhead shark was found dead off the coast of Southeast Florida with only a hook in its mouth to explain. An endangered species, the 11-foot, 4-inch predator seemed to die from a system of catch-and-release or sport fishing.

However, Dr. Cameron Ainsworth, who teaches at the University of South Florida College of Marine Science, does not believe that this animal was targeted.

"I find it hard to believe that anyone is targeting Hammerhead sharks intentionally," he said. "I imagine what happened, is that it was caught incidentally."

Dr. Lori McRae, who teaches in the biology department at the University of Tampa, agrees with this notion.

"Most likely, the folks that hooked the great hammerhead originally were not trying to hook a Great Hammerhead," she said.

However, she brings up a different issue with recreational fishing and this vulnerable species.

"Hammerheads are notoriously poor survivors after being hooked," she added. "Whether it's on a long line commercial scenario or it's by a hook and line recreational angler."

Although this is just one example of a shark affected by recreational fishing, the threat to shark species globally is widespread.

While a report titled Catch Evaluation of Shark Fishery of South-eastern Australia mentions that hook size and shape could affect catch, the practice of trawling presents a larger issue through by-catch.

Dr. Daniel Huber, chair of the environmental studies department at the University of Tampa, explains what by-catch is.

"By-catch is the process through which a fishery targets a particular species because it has some economic value, but then incidentally catches other nontarget species," he said.

Shark by-catch by species

Atlantic sharpnose sharks are caught and kept as by-catch disproportionately compared to other shark species.

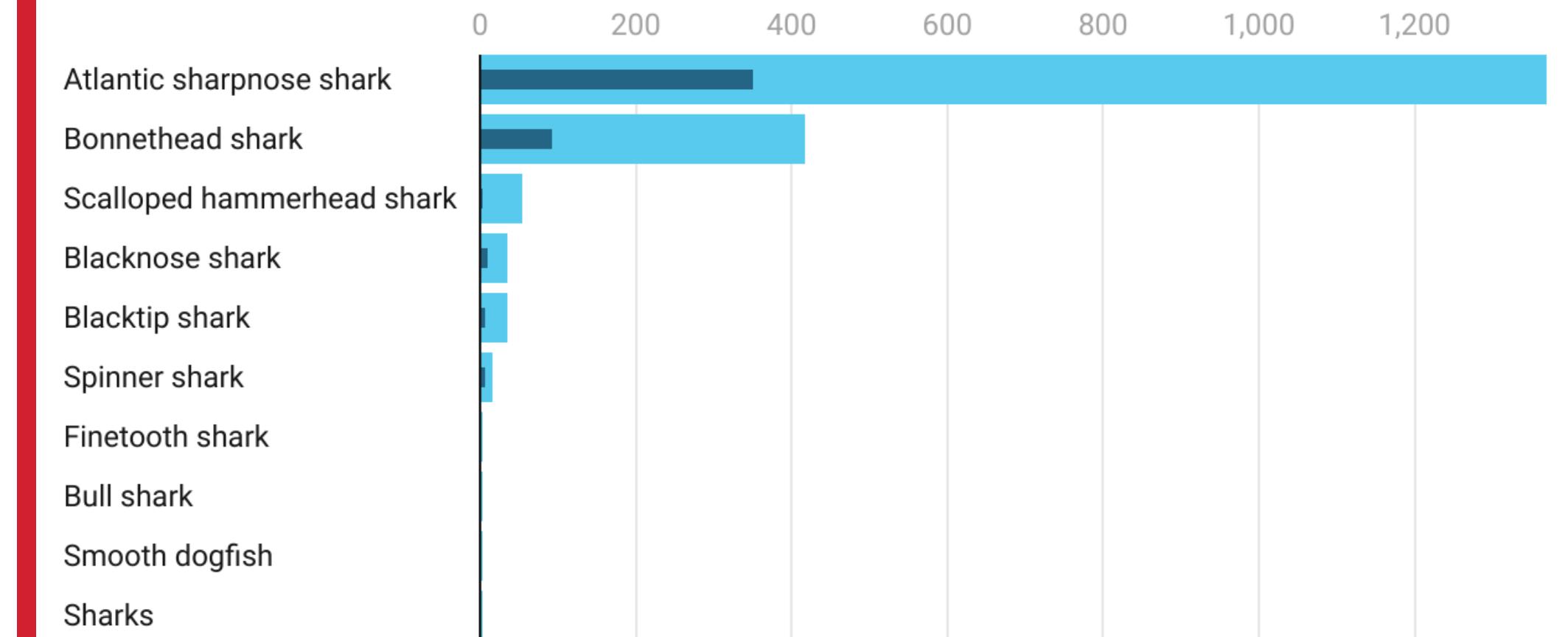


Chart: Hayden Randolph • Source: NOAA Fisheries Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation Report • Created with Datawrapper

species.

A study from the ICES Journal of Marine Science details the reasons why this practice threatens sharks.

"They have been a historically favored species in the finning trade because their fins are so large," she said.

The report says that several shark species are seen as valuable for their fins. Consequently, when sharks are caught in industrial fishing lines, they are ultimately used because they are seen as profitable.

The Shark Research Institute writes that shark finning by way of longline fishing is responsible for the largest number of shark losses globally. However, there have been legislative attempts to fix this issue.

Ainsworth agrees that this problem exists for several shark species.

"There are directed fisheries on sharks, but not in the United States. It's more in Mexico," he said. "It could even be the same population we share with Mexico."

McRae explains that this problem may pose a disproportional risk to hammerhead

The Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act of 2019 would have made it illegal to sell, possess, or purchase a shark fin in the United States. While the bill passed in the House and failed in the

Senate, it was later passed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, according to NOAA Fisheries.

Undoubtedly, shark finning poses the largest threat to shark species. However, Huber explains that catch-and-release fishing is not without risk.

"You get up in the north and, pretty much, everything that is caught is released and survives," he said. "Down here, you're lucky if it's 50/50."

However, he continues to speak on why there is no simple solution to this problem.

"Interacting with any type of biodiversity facilitates an appreciation for that biodiversity," he said. "You never want to say don't go fishing."

The advice he gave was to follow fishing regulations, including size, catch, and season limits. When asked what people can do to help sharks, Huber gave a simple answer.

"Don't eat shark fin soup."



The Minaret is UTampa's official student newspaper since 1933, covering campus news, sports, entertainment, and student perspectives. We give students a voice and a platform to share stories that matter.

DON'T JUST READ THE NEWS, CREATE IT!



**BE SEEN
BE HEARD
BE THE MINARET**

Whether you're passionate about journalism, love storytelling, or want to build your portfolio, there's a place for you here. Open to all majors! Learn, grow, and make your voice heard. We can't wait to have you on the team!

Join our WhatsApp Community, and then go to "Minaret Open Chat" We meet every Monday at 6:30 pm.



SHAPING TOMORROW'S JOURNALISTS WITH INTEGRITY, SKILL, AND PROFESSIONALISM

