



Imprint

Your Stories, Your Voice

April 2026
Volume 3 Issue 8

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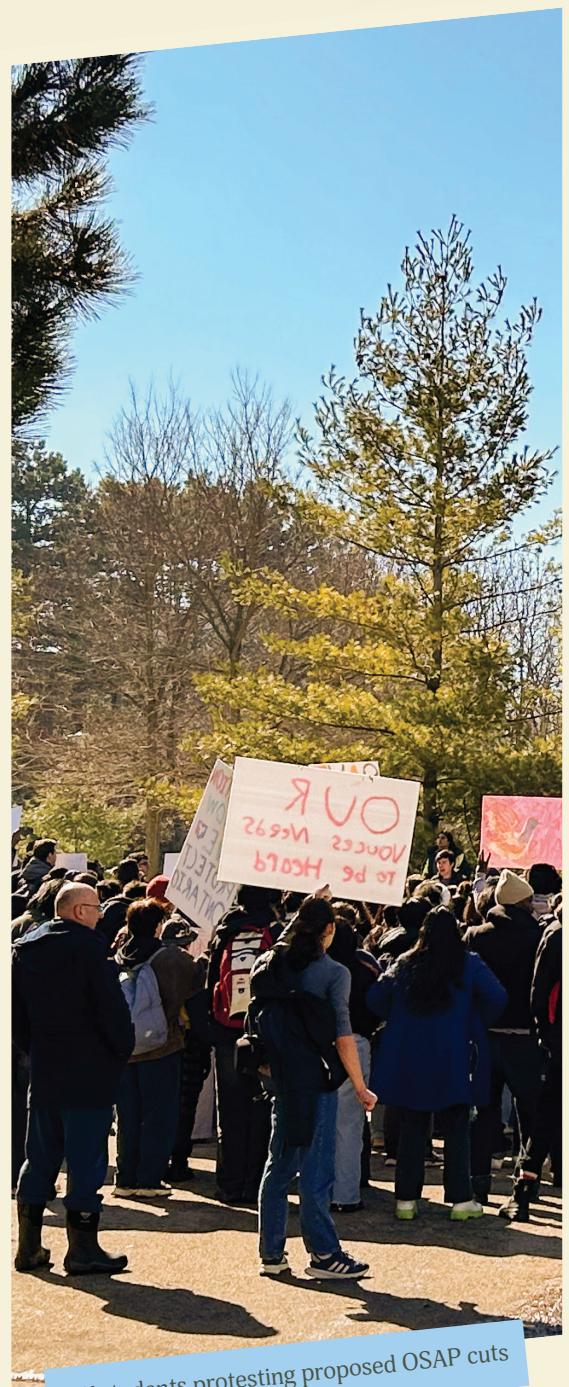
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Ford government proposed OSAP overhaul sparks province-wide backlash

Thea East, Senior Editor

Ontario Premier Doug Ford made an announcement on Feb. 12 regarding funding for education that has since sparked mass outrage from students and educators across the province, including here at UW. Along with a widely supported \$6.4 million boost to colleges and universities in Ontario, the Ford's government has proposed a drastic restructure to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), which would leave many students thousands of dollars more in debt once the changes come into effect in fall 2026. The response from all over the province has resoundingly been against these changes, with many claiming that Ford – and his government – are out of touch from the financial realities of being in post-secondary education, and beyond that, simply do not care about students at all.

OSAP is a financial aid program that provides grants and loans from the federal and provincial governments to help students in Ontario pay for postsecondary education. The amount which a student is awarded is based primarily on their household income, as well as other factors such as whether they are in full-time or part-time studies, and whether they have a disability. The exact formula for determining the amount a student receives is not shared publicly, however, the previous structure allowed for students to receive up to 85 per cent in grants they did not have to



UW students protesting proposed OSAP cuts

pay back, and 15 per cent in loans that had to be repaid. The proposed changes to the program almost completely flips the grant to loan ratio structure to cap the amount of provincial grants a student can receive at 25 per cent. This means, at the minimum, that a student using OSAP will have to pay back 75 per cent of the money they received from the Ontario government used to pay for their post-secondary education. Ford said in a press conference in February that these changes are needed to ensure the program remains sustainable, and to avoid students spending their OSAP money on non-education related purchases.

Quickly after these changes were announced, students mobilized across Ontario to make their voices heard on the issue by organizing a province-wide walk out and protest on March 4. UW has been no exception in this fight against the proposed OSAP cuts as WUSA organized and ensured students could participate in the walk-out at Dana Porter library. Over 1,000 students joined the protest on campus along with professors, WLU student representatives, and Waterloo MPP Catherine Fife. The protest was one of the biggest on a university campus across the province. At the demonstration, students such as Hannah Oommen, a current graduate student at UW, shared, “I’ve made it through undergrad and grad school on OSAP, and it was already quite hard with loans and things like that. So I think that it’s a personal fight for me and my siblings.” Ava Tinon, another UW student at the protest, felt that the proposed cuts are a part of a broader issue: “This is an attack on [the working] class as a whole. It’s not just the students, this is part of a wider austerity cut and it’s going to get worse. It’s going to impact wider sectors of Ontario, Canada, and the world. We are in a crisis of capitalism. The system is rotten and it has to be dealt with.”

Many professors were also in attendance on March 4, with others even letting their class go early to allow students to participate. Siobhan Sutherland, an assistant professor of psychology at St. Jerome’s University, was one of those instructors who supported their students in this way and stated that letting her students leave class to attend the protest, “seemed like the obvious choice,” to allow for them to make their voices heard about an issue that impacts them substantially. Sutherland added that other professors at UW share the student’s sentiments on the issue of cutting OSAP grants, as many faculty

members relied on the financial assistance program to get through their own education. Referring to the opinions of other professors at UW, Sutherland explained, “There is a general sense that education should be accessible — that in public institutions we want people from all backgrounds to get an education and not be financially impacted or set back because they accrued so much student debt.” Eric Lepp, an assistant professor of peace and conflict studies at Conrad Grebel University College, echoed these sentiments of accessibility during his attendance at the protest. Lepp also stated that he thinks the proposed cuts should be reversed but that, “institutions also need support, and I don’t think the answer is putting that on students.”

In a recent CBC article, it was reported that Alex Usher, president of Higher Education Strategy Associates in Toronto, responded to common concerns about the proposed cuts deterring high school students from attending university, by stating that it will not be younger students coming from high school who will be dissuaded from pursuing post-secondary education, but adult learners who have already left home and may have dependents themselves. However, *Imprint* spoke with WUSA president and vice-president, Damian Mikhail and Remington Zhi, after the protest, where they discussed what they have heard from students about how the OSAP cuts will affect their education plans. “We’ve already heard stories from our students telling us that they might not have come to university if the loan structure was like this, and that their younger siblings are now questioning if it’s the right choice,” Zhi explained. The vice-president added, “I do agree that the most impacted by [the OSAP cuts] are people who are not the demographic that are most likely to access higher education, but that includes young students who are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and marginalized communities.”

Not only have students been outraged by the proposed cuts to OSAP, but many have taken personal offence to the com-

“This is an attack on [the working] class as a whole. It’s not just the students, this is part of a wider austerity cut and it’s going to get worse. It’s going to impact wider sectors of Ontario, Canada, and the world. We are in a crisis of capitalism. The system is rotten and it has to be dealt with.”

— Ava Tinon, UW student attendee at OSAP protest

ments Ford made along with his announcement in defense of these changes. Ford commented on the proposed cuts by telling students to “stop taking basket-weaving courses” and encouraging them to go into a STEM related program as that is where the in-demand jobs are. Maddie Cranston, another grad student at UW, shared their response to this comment by saying, “I’d like to know where these high demand jobs are for anyone right now?”

Oommen added, “I don’t think it’s up to the government to decide what has value.” Amelia Suelzle, an environment student at UW, also shared their thoughts at the protest by saying that, “the arts are all traditionally typically female oriented programs and I think that’s a big reason that he doesn’t like those programs is because he’s sexist, on top of the fact that basket weaving is traditionally Indigenous.”

The Ontario NDP party, led by Marit Stiles, has also been quick to respond to the proposed cuts by publicly condemning the OSAP restructuring and demanding a reversal of the changes. As part of their response, the NDP party has

called out the insufficiency behind their reasoning for these changes. Catherine Fife, a member of the NDP party and Waterloo MPP, shared in an interview with *Imprint*: “The government’s own Blue Ribbon Panel Report recommended expanding OSAP grants and support for students to access post-secondary education.” The Blue Panel Ribbon Report, officially titled “Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector,” was a report commissioned by the Ontario government to provide advice on how to keep the post-secondary sector financially viable. Fife said, “The rationale for these cuts make no sense and run counter to the goals of improving economic outcomes and having students reach their potential in Ontario.” In response to the additional reasoning of students spending their OSAP money on non-education related purchases, Fife said, “Doug Ford doesn’t understand post-secondary education, and he doesn’t care, period. His comments were meant to gaslight and insult students — he doesn’t understand or doesn’t want to acknowl-

edge that we have the highest youth unemployment [rate] across Canada right now in Ontario. He doesn’t understand — he’s never had to make choices around, you know, paying rent or paying for groceries and tuition.”

In an effort to combat the proposed changes to the financial assistance program, Stiles put forward a motion to reverse the cuts to OSAP and eliminate all interest on student loans. The motion required 36 Conservative MPPs to break with Ford, however it was struck down in a vote on March 31. Stiles has commented on this loss by stating that this is a continued message from the current Ontario government that they do not care about students’ futures. The Ontario NDP leader went on to say in a post on Instagram that, “This is shameful. But this fight is far from over.”



Thea East

What are UW students doing after Graduation?

Angela Li, Staff Writer



With spring approaching, the graduating class of 2026 is preparing to step off campus for the final time. While the path ahead can be exciting, the current state of the economy and the world leaves others unsure of what the future holds. We caught up with some of them about their plans post-graduation, how they feel about their experience at UW, and any final words of wisdom they want to leave for the UW community.

Graeme Goodwin Berry

4B environment and business student Graeme Goodwin Berry will return to a previous co-op employer in Ottawa over the summer after finishing his degree this term. This fall, he will begin his MBA program at Wilfrid Laurier University, with concentrations in financial management for professionals and data-based business intelligence.

“I’ve always found the stock market and personal finance so fascinating,” Berry said in an interview with *Imprint*. During an eight-month co-op term two years ago at the Upper Grand District School Board in Guelph, Berry was deciding between studying finance and business for a master’s degree. A senior manager suggested he pursue an MBA, just as AI was growing in popularity. “I love business, AI is coming whether you like it or not, and [I’m also into] financial management. Laurier, I think, did a good job of connecting all three.”

Ultimately, Berry hopes to work

in the mining industry, where he sees opportunities for much-needed change: “I don’t think it’s going anywhere, and there are definitely ways to improve it in an environmental way and an efficient way.”

When it comes to the intersection of environment and business, Berry says, “The business side of things [is] still quite broad, [where] with a business-focused degree, you can still go down hundreds of paths... if AI takes two, I can go to the next three.” He credited the dedicated instructors of the environment faculty with tying together what may seem like two disparate fields and approaches. One of the most memorable courses for him was ENBUS 407: Corporate Sustainability Accounting and Reporting, taught by assistant professor Amr ElAlfy. “The professors did a really great job proving the business case ... on why the environment is important,” said Berry, which is typically “the toughest part to prove.” Sustainability, Berry added, has become a buzzword that is “thrown around now,” where some may be skeptical of its implementation in the market today. “They think that it’s kind of a fake motive that’s trying to be pushed, but there is truly a business case to it. I thought that was the neatest, coolest thing so far.”

All in all, Berry has enjoyed his experience in his program. “If I were 19 or 18, I would definitely do this program again,” he reflected. While some may

perceive a degree in environmental science as a “weakness”, he commented, “It can actually be a special skill, like an ability within certain companies where we can now prove how something that has never been really connected, like environment and business, [can] actually just make things stronger.”

Outside of academics, Berry is a player on the varsity squash team, where he’s found camaraderie with teammates across programs and faculties. “You’re able to do something fun and athletic with your peers [and] go out with the Waterloo logo still surrounding you ... I felt that was a really strong complement to my degree,” he said. “That really does just help you absorb the Waterloo experience more.” Berry added that finding and maintaining community can be particularly challenging at UW, especially given co-op streams. “People can be on such different rotations, so you won’t know if your friend will be there or not.” On that point, he hopes that UW leadership will do more to create a more open and social culture on campus, even with the need to uphold the university’s reputation as a top institution.

He cited how Western University holds regular concerts on campus grounds and larger events that bring students together. “I would like them to adopt more of the social lifestyle of Laurier ... I think that would do wonders to people’s mental health, and calmness and clarity. I don’t think that’s too

much to ask, but just let us be 19 and 20 and a little wild.”

To fellow students, he advises them to balance academics with other pursuits. “I know everyone says this, but you have to get engaged with the school besides going to office hours, making friends in class and learning the content,” he noted. Berry himself only became more involved in extracurriculars in his last year of his undergraduated studies and hopes that others won’t shy away from joining out of fear, especially when it comes to sports and team-based activities: “We’re not professionals; you don’t have to be incredibly good at something to join it.”



Joelah Etti

Joelah Etti is a third-year student in her communication arts degree, planning to complete her degree this December. Originally a math student when she came to UW in 2021, she switched majors after a family member’s cancer diagnosis and the additional stress from the program prompted her to re-think her choice.

“I was definitely exploring life and UW when I was in math, whereas here in communications, my identity is a lot more concrete,” she said about the transition into the arts faculty and her current major. Since the switch, she has found more freedom to pursue creative projects both in and outside of class. Etti has been freelancing in graphic design since high school, but has expanded her skillset in university to

create short films, YouTube videos, and a documentary currently in progress. That creative blossoming is one of the biggest points of pride in her time at UW. “One thing I’m really proud of, which is unrelated to school but based in school, is that I started doing a year-in-review magazine so I could review my entire year at UW,” Etti remarked. This year, she hopes to do a special edition documenting her personal top 10 things about Waterloo, spotlighting favorite eateries like Poppy’s Bagels and Oka Sushi. “I’m [also] really proud of my emergence as a writer, because I wouldn’t have been able to write a magazine if I didn’t start writing at mathNEWS,” she said. The low barrier to publication and free pizza on production nights, she recalled, helped get her foot in the door to writing. “Since then I’ve actually started to take my writing seriously,” she recounted.

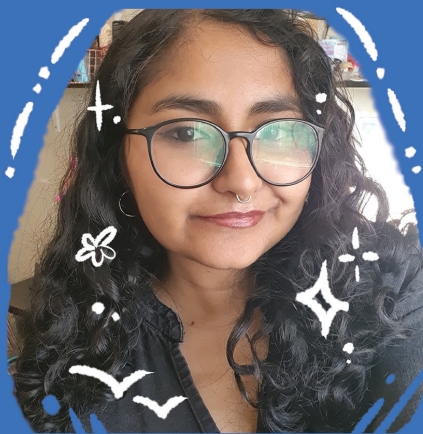
Aside from personal growth, Etti’s social connections, and misconnections, are also core memories in her time at UW. One of her early co-op terms was at the YW Thrift Boutique in Kitchener. “I owe a lot of who I am to them and I made a lot of friends there,” she said about her experience. She has also forged friendships with fellow members of the UW Film Club. At the same time, Etti won’t miss the stressful experiences from group assignments or the racism and sexism she’s encountered at UW: “If the campus was like 10 per cent less racist against black people, [that] would be great.”

While she hopes to continue working in graphic design after graduation, Etti feels that AI’s disruption of the arts and the poor job market in Canada have hung her future out to dry. “As a Canadian citizen, I feel very cheated at the job market and the economy at large, to the point where I’m considering [that]

maybe a move to the UK is actually kind of viable,” she said. Etti has family members in the UK who are willing to house her while she looks for a job, and feels that the graphic design industry across the pond has more opportunities thanks to its larger print industry. “It’s really sad, because I don’t hate Canada ... [but] can I even sustain a future here?”

This isn’t the first time Etti has had issues finding employment. Even after completing several co-op terms, she was removed from the co-op program for not being able to find one last co-op position to fulfill requirements. “UW makes itself out to be the ‘best co-op program in the world,’ and yet, students like me who literally just needed one more job opportunity ... we’re shafted,” she expressed. For now, Etti hopes to continue networking and building professional connections to find employment after graduation. “I feel really upset, but I also know that I’m gonna make it ... it’s not that bad, but no one should have to go through all this.”

In the end, Etti’s biggest takeaway from her time at UW is the confidence to follow her own North Star, even in the face of external adversity. “Not everyone is going to like you for whatever reason ... people are just jerks sometimes, but you just got to roll with it.” She also emphasized the importance of doing so even when feeling internal pressure to fit into a box. “You have to be yourself everywhere you go ... you can only be you, and life is a lot better once you fully recognize that,” she stressed. Last but not least, she encourages other students to make the most of their time at university outside of class: “Don’t live your life only focused on school. You’re only here for a short time ... [so] live your life to the fullest while you can.”



Soumya Menon

Fourth-year math student Soumya Menon will be finishing her degree in applied mathematics this term, with a specialization in scientific computing and scientific machine learning. She is considering graduate studies but is prioritizing the post-graduation job search, ideally a position in science-adjacent machine learning.

Menon started at UW as an honours physics student in the faculty of science, before changing her program to mathematical physics. She then switched faculties and entered the BMath mathematical physics program, staying for a year before finally landing in applied math in fall 2025. When Menon added her specialization to her degree, she had already taken most of the required courses out of interest. “I was changing my major quite a couple of times, but it was changing just the name ... I wasn’t changing what I was doing,” she clarified, having jumped across programs and faculties mostly when access to preferred courses was limited by her program and faculty.

Outside of the classroom, Menon has done co-ops in computational genomics, radiation science, and AI — the latter two were with the National Research Council Canada. “I think my co-ops really motivated me to want to get into industry, because I enjoy those environments. They showed me that there is an intersection of science, computer science, and technology that I can

work in and get paid a livable wage ... that was really meaningful to me.”

The work that she takes the greatest pride in, however, is community engagement, advocacy, and leadership. Menon was a member of SciSoc and FemPhys before helping organize PHYS10, a non-credit course with weekly seminars for science students. She has also designed logos, merchandise and marketing material for the Women of Waterloo events and Women in Mathematics (WiM)’s Navigating Your Career panel. Menon also co-led the NASA Space Apps hackathon last year, hoping to provide an avenue for science students interested in tech who wanted to challenge themselves.

“I’m proud of the people I’ve worked with [and] of the work I’ve put into things. But [those are] definitely not something I tie with the university name,” she clarified. New policies and changes in the past five years have deeply affected students and the campus community, she noted.

“It’s really hard to feel a sense of belonging to the institution when they’re so differently aligned in values from you ... that’s [a] strong reason why I was so much more active in finding community with people here than necessarily feeling a sense of pride.”

With that in mind, Menon believes that more should be done to bridge gaps between different faculties. “A criticism I have of the way we look at STEM in Waterloo ... [is that] we really don’t stress critical consumption of science and technology news and developments while also valuing the humanities and arts in our considerations here,” she commented. As someone with a foot in arts and STEM, she and other students with interdisciplinary interests see “[these] communities [set] against each other because of where development is

going in technology.”

Her studies are ending, but with the current job market, recent world events and the barriers she faces as an international student, the road ahead is unclear. “I don’t think I’ve been in a situation where I’m this uncertain about what the rest of the year will look like,” she confessed. Her co-op in AI research made her realize her disinterest and disillusionment in the current trajectory of AI and the tech industry at large, especially with large amounts of capital invested in said direction. “It seems like all of these paths in my life have their own agendas right now ... it’s not a nice feeling,” Menon commented. “At the same time, academia is also something I’m not really confident about.”

For students still grinding through school, she emphasized the need to be conscious of where they invest time and energy, especially in ways that align with their values. “[UW] is a place where your worth feels challenged constantly. And it’s true that there will never be enough time to do everything you want to do,” she stated. “Figuring out what works for you and not working against [yourself] is probably the best thing you could do at university.”

She encourages students to get involved with local advocacy and activist groups off campus: “It’s really important to make community there, because as we fight for things that are important to us, it’s really important that it’s sustainable for us as well.”

Lastly, Menon also puts out a call to action for students to make their voices and presence count, as UW continues to go through internal and external changes. “When students have shown up and made their voices heard, we have gotten actionable changes. It’s important that we continue to do that; our strength is in numbers at the end of the day.”

What is the UW refugee fee?

Radha Vyas , Contributor

University fees often feel routine; numbers to review, accept, or opt out of before moving on. Included in that list is the optional refugee fee at UW, which traces back to student-led conversations in 2006 and the arrival of its first sponsored student a year later.

The optional fee, set at \$5.66 in the fall and winter terms and \$5.53 in the spring term, is charged by default unless students opt out. It supports the Student Refugee Program (SRP) run by World University Service of Canada (WUSC), which works with universities across Canada to sponsor refugee students to study and resettle in the country. At UW, the program operates through a local committee. It works closely with the affiliated colleges of United College, Conrad Grebel University College, St. Jerome's University, and Renison University College to provide housing, community, and support. The program also aligns with broader national efforts to increase the number of refugee students able to access higher education, with over 150 students coming to Canada through the initiative across various campuses.

Third-year science student Janvi Ahir says she was initially unaware of the fee and had overlooked the detailed breakdown of her tuition. "Now that I know about it and where it's being used, I feel it's a good thing," Ahir says, noting that the amount is small and supports a meaningful cause. She further adds that she plans to pay closer attention to how the fee evolves in future terms.

Offering another perspective, Daniel Cheng, a first-year computer science student, says, "I've heard of the the fees, they were mentioned to me by my friend when we started school in September — the fee is around \$5 — I think there's no reason to not pay for this cause, especially when it has almost no impact on my overall tuition."

While student perspectives may offer insight into how the fee is viewed on campus, those working directly with the program can describe what it looks like in practice.

At St. Jerome's University, service learning coordinator Michelle Metzger explains that the program is supported through both staff and student leadership, with representatives from each affiliated college and UW working together

“Now that I know about it and where it’s being used, I feel it’s a good thing,”

- Third-year science student Janvi Ahir

to coordinate support for sponsored students. Metzger, who describes herself as “an international development professional and a social justice educator,” notes that the initiative stands out among similar programs she has seen. “The WUSC program is so relational and thorough in its efforts to do good work in a good way.” She also highlights the program’s scale, explaining that capacity is shaped by funding and resources. “We’re in a bit of a pattern of four students per year,” she says, pointing to the balance between expanding opportunities and maintaining sustainable support.

But beyond program structure and planning, the impact of the initiative is felt most clearly in the lives it touches. For Arakiza Alpha Benit Kanisa, president of the WUSC SRP local committee at UW, the program is deeply personal. Kanisa was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and fled with his family at age 12 due to war. He went to Uganda, where he lived in a refugee camp for about a decade, before eventually coming to Waterloo through the program. While studying in Uganda, he said there were about 300 students in his class preparing for national exams. Only two achieved grades high enough to continue, including himself. The other student later dropped out due to a lack of funding, leaving him as the only one to continue to university. Looking back, he says he hopes to dedicate his degree to the many classmates who never had the same opportunity, emphasizing how limited access to education can be in refugee contexts.

When he first learned he would be sponsored, Kanisa imagined that millionaires or billionaires were funding students like him. It was only later that he realized the support came largely from students themselves through small fees. That realization, he said, made the support feel even more meaningful. With that, arriving at Conrad Grebel became a defining moment for him. “It’s not just a college for me — it’s more of a home,” he said.

Furthermore, Kanisa explained that the SRP at UW began in 2009 with just one student. Over time, the university expanded its efforts, bringing two students in 2022 and four students in 2024, reflecting a growing commitment to supporting refugee education. According to Kanisa, the program

“It’s not just a college for me — it’s more of a home,”

- Arakiza Alpha Benit Kanisa, president of the WUSC SRP local committee at UW

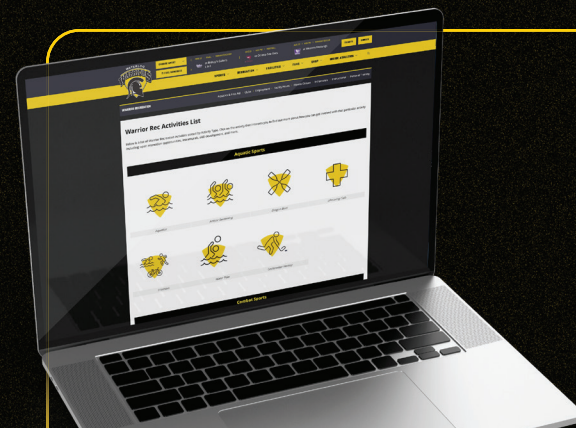
is not only about funding tuition, but also plays an important role in helping them settle and adjust. Since fall 2024, the local committee has been actively visiting sponsoring colleges and speaking with students to explain how their fees support the program. They often thank students directly, letting them know their contributions make sponsorship possible and sharing how collective support creates real change. He added that he would not be where he is today without the program and expressed gratitude to students who continue to support it, saying their contributions represent opportunity not only for current students but for future generations as well.

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CODA exhibition:

A showcase of the final works of UW fine arts students

Radha Vyas, Contributor

The 52nd Senior Undergraduate Exhibition ran from March 19 to April 4 at the University of Waterloo Art Gallery (UWAG). Presented annually by UW's fine arts department, the exhibition showcases the work of graduating students. The theme this year's exhibition was coda, which, according to a statement shared by the class, is "more than an end of a piece; it is an artistic, often emotional, final statement that acts as a bridge between the climax and the absolute resolution."

According to Ivan Jurakic, director and curator at UWAG, the exhibition featured work from 25 students in the fourth-

year studio class. "Some students presented multiple works, such as diptychs (artworks composed of two panels) or triptychs (artworks composed of three panels). Through multiple studio visits, I worked with students to refine how their work was presented, while keeping the process student-driven."

Beyond the curatorial process, the exhibition was deeply personal for many of the artists, with works rooted in identity, memory, and lived experience.



Framgments of Blonging

Amy Millar

"My piece is a story about my adoption and dealing with that throughout the years," Amy Millar shared. Her work brings together elements of her Chinese heritage and her upbringing, drawing inspiration from objects like a childhood T-shirt and items from her home. "The cloth itself tells a story about my thoughts on being adopted, how that affects me over the years, how others react growing up, and how I cope through accepting my culture and being raised by my parents," she explained, describing the piece as an exploration of self-discovery, identity, and connection to her culture.

Us

Jewel Hankey-Telesford

Jewel Hankey-Telesford noted her work is an expression of gratitude for being able to return to Grenada. “I grew up there, I was born and spent most of my life in Grenada, and last year I experienced domestic violence in my life, so my aunt bought us tickets to come home and just recuperate for a bit after that experience. So the work is being grateful to her for a home, and it’s situated in the landscape, showing our trip back home. On the left is my brother, in the middle is my aunt, and on the right is me. It was really important for me to capture the light and colours back home, hence the vibrancy.”



In addition to the exhibition, Fine Arts hosted an open house on March 28, primarily geared toward prospective undergraduate students and off-campus visitors interested in exploring the program and the exhibition.

“The exhibition is like a long-standing tradition, and it’s generally speaking one of the biggest shows of the year that we do. And then on top of that, because all the other classes are still engaged throughout the building, if you come to East Campus Hall and you walk through the hallways, you’ll see that the fine arts department will have artworks all over the building as well,” Jurakic explained.



UWAG passage, East Campus Hall

WUSA 2025-2026 wrapped

Sabrina Zhou, Staff Writer

With the one-year tenures of WUSA president Damian Mikhail and vice president (VP) Remington Zhi drawing to a close in May 2026, *Imprint* spoke with the departing student leaders to reflect on their accomplishments and future plans. Despite the year being marked by several crises affecting students across Ontario, WUSA was able to implement multiple key initiatives aimed at improving the campus experience at UW.

Before WUSA, Mikhail was best known for his work advocating for the reinstatement of the Grand River Transit's late night bus loop and stoppage of the ION cuts. Zhi has history with MathSoc but has been passionate about advocacy since childhood. "I've been showing up at protests since I was in elementary school. I've been organizing protests since middle school," they reminisced.

The two met through their involvement in transit advocacy and decided to run for presidency and vice presidency together, both under the Horizon party. They said WUSA's lack of ambition and initiative helped fuel their motivation to run. "I think there was a frustration where it felt like the problems that students were facing every day were not the ones that they were hearing WUSA talk about," Mikhail said. Zhi concurred, "WUSA [is] a platform that should be very useful for getting things done that hasn't been leveraged in a long time."

Students look to WUSA for an avenue to make their voices heard on issues that are important to them. "We've seen that in the past, sometimes it feels like it's up to a couple of students to come up with how to do things and then beg WUSA for support," Zhi said. For example, the push for night bus transit was



WUSA vice president Remington Zhi and president Damian Mikhail

organized entirely by students, who received no support from their student association.

At the start of their terms, both were caught off guard by the intensity of the job and the breadth of their responsibilities. Mikhail joked about the whiplash of constantly switching hats and Zhi recalled a nugget of wisdom passed on by an outgoing officer: “You’re going to be the best at your job on your last day.”

Highlights of Mikhail and Zhi’s election campaign include restructuring the governance system, developing a more effective financing model for clubs, working with local governments to address hate crimes, and advocating against program cuts amidst UW’s financial deficit.

Recognizing that WUSA officers were stretched thin, Mikhail prioritized governance reform early in his term. The initiative has been very successful, to the credit of WUSA Director and Governance Committee Chair Muhammad Kanji and his team. The creation of the new VP of Student Experience position and Advocacy Committee is expected to ease the workload for future boards, enabling officers to focus more deeply on their core responsibilities.

Campus culture has made a comeback this year thanks to two key social initiatives. Club funding was increased to \$200 per term, up from the \$75 per term clubs have received for over a decade. In response to this change, WUSA noticed a surge in new club applications and more active clubs. In addition, the former Bombshelter Pub reopened its doors in August 2025, six years after being shut down. Now called the Bomber, the space


has been fitted with a new sound system, lighting, and bar. Plans to begin serving alcoholic beverages are close to finalization.

Another initiative, the Pay-What-You-Can program, runs out of the Bomber and serves students nourishing meals while allowing them to pay full, partial, or no fee. Mikhail received positive feedback from students facing food insecurity, who credited the program with helping them “get through the next day” and “giving them a fighting chance.” A motion to increase WUSA membership fees by \$1 per term to continue funding the program was passed at the latest Annual Members’ Meeting.

Relaunched as a pilot in March after being discontinued in 2008, the WalkSafe program allows students to request volunteers to escort them across campus. The idea was born out of WUSA’s 2025 Change Engine competition, proposed by Katie Traynor in response to the Hagey Hall attack and growing safety concerns voiced by students.

WUSA has also been hard at work establishing a comprehensive course and degree planning system. This is something other universities have had for years, but UW has yet to catch up. “It should not be up to students to create spreadsheets and try and get a degree in course management before they can graduate,” Mikhail said.

“Many programs at Waterloo pride themselves on being flexible, being customizable, allowing you space to do interdisciplinary studies and research,” Zhi added, noting that while the possibility is there, a lot of students don’t take advantage of it or try to and end up delaying their graduation. “You can’t just offer



“I think there was a frustration where it felt like the problems that students were facing every day were not the ones that they were hearing WUSA talk about...WUSA [is] a platform that should be very useful for getting things done that hasn’t been leveraged in a long time.”



WUSA president Damian Mikhail



people the option without giving them the support to actually do it.”

In addition to being changemakers this past year, the WUSA officers also described themselves as part-time firefighters for their frequent crisis management and response. “I’m very proud of the fact that this year, though we were thrown more fires than we could have possibly imagined, we didn’t let that stop us from pushing for the actual change that we promised,” Mikhail reflected.

Two of WUSA’s most pressing crises this year stemmed from the Ontario government. Zhi, who focuses on external advocacy as VP, commented, “It’s been a year where the provincial government has been showing that students are not a priority for them.”

In October 2025, the government proposed Bill 33, the Supporting Children and Students Act, which includes a section giving students the ability to opt out of certain ancillary fees, including those charged on behalf of student associations. WUSA argued that student fees are decided upon using democratic processes and go toward supporting services students themselves consider essential. WUSA formally opposed the bill, submitting feedback to relevant institutions, having conversations with local politicians, speaking at a press conference in Queen’s Park, and forming the Coalition to Protect Student Services with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) and other post-secondary student unions. Despite these efforts, the bill was passed in November 2025.

Then in February 2026, the government proposed drastic cuts to OSAP funding. WUSA responded with a rally on March 4, voted on by an overwhelming majority of students. Over 1,000 students marched across campus to protest these changes.

“I heard stories from people across the province who were talking about the Waterloo rally,” Mikhail recalled. “That just goes to show that when students turn out and students show how serious they are about an issue, it does make an impact. It leaves an impact with students across the province and inspires them. It leaves an impact with the media and it leaves an impact with politicians who make these decisions.”

Zhi learned the importance of collaboration with other student groups through their work opposing Bill 33 and the OSAP changes. They remarked, “When the government threatens students, they’re threatening all of us, and they’re relying on those divisions in between us to make their fight easier.”

On the homefront, Mikhail detailed his successes and challenges dealing with the university on matters of internal advocacy. Despite getting along with many members of UW’s faculty and administration during his term, he admitted, “I’ve been struck by the fact that there were a

One year review

A new VP of Student Experience position was created

Club funding increased to \$200/term

The Pay-What-You-Can program launched

The WalkSafe program re-launched as a pilot program

WUSA and other student associations formed a coalition to oppose Bill 33

Over 1,000 students marched across campus to protest OSAP cuts

lot of decisions that were on the verge of being made that would have ripped away students' choice, student representation, and destroyed communities.”

One example is the university's decision to remove student representation from policy 70 petitions committees (research).

Nevertheless, WUSA has been successful in getting buy-in on many of their initiatives. “I can speak with a lot of confidence that a lot of the people at the very top of this university are behind us,” Mikhail asserted. However, despite his hard work and the university's enthusiasm, WUSA is “left with the slowest actor, which is the university, dictating [their] speed.”

As an example, The Bomber has already expanded its infrastructure to support serving alcoholic beverages, but contracts to do so remain stalled at the university level. “We are ready,” Mikhail emphasized. “But getting the university to finally make the decision and give us the space to improve the lives of students, that has been the biggest difficulty that we've faced.”

The WUSA president entered his role expecting UW's leadership to be more decisive in its commitments. He reflected, “I was honestly a little bit stunned by the plague of indecisiveness in

this university, which has slowed down things that students have called for for years.” Now graduated, Mikhail hopes his legacy inspires his successors to continue pushing for change, reminding students that the “status quo [is] not a wall that you can't get through.” He hopes for WUSA to become more independent from the university and calls on the university to “figure out who its own decision-makers are” and stop “deadlocking student progress every year.”

Zhi, who will be on WUSA's board of directors and MathSoc council again next year, hopes to see the system change in a way that fosters progress without requiring individuals to sacrifice huge amounts of their time and energy. They also hope to improve students' expectations for WUSA, which they describe as being “deeply low.”

Throughout their time in office, Mikhail and Zhi approached their roles with the mindset: “We're working our asses off. And if we can't come out of it on the other end... and feel that we [made] real change for students, then why are we doing this at all?” With their term nearly complete, they feel they have achieved the ambitious change they set out to deliver.

“When the government threatens students, they're threatening all of us, and they're relying on those divisions in between us to make their fight easier.”

WUSA vice president Remington Zhi



Who let the students out?

Music in Waterloo nightlife

Tiffany Wen, Staff Writer

Where do you choose to go on a Friday night? What goes into the decision making behind waiting in line for an hour, just to get in and leave after 15 minutes? For two spots right across from each other, why does one have a line down the street and the other recruit its bouncers to invite people off the street? Of course, there are underlying factors that people wouldn't even be consciously aware of like crowds, physical space, location, drink prices, and memories. McKenna Cummings, a first year kinesiology student at Laurier, talks about waiting in line for The Prohibition Warehouse. She attributes the draw to the cheap beers, sangria deals, the good lighting, coming as a big group of friends, and of course, the good music.

On the note of music, it seemingly is an undeniable factor in defining the energy of the night. The fact that students can listen to the same song three times in one night and still jump up and down every time. Or the fact that you can almost count on

hearing a song depending on where you choose to go for the night. What makes the difference in all the spots for Waterloo nightlife? What are students looking for? The different spots in Waterloo can be grouped together in many different ways. Grouped together by location, such as central spots on King Street, music type, demographic, and prices.

But they can also be grouped together just by general vibe. There's The Pub on King and The Prohibition Warehouse. These two spots have heavy student influence and demographic, open daily but packed with lines out the door by the weekend. When students talk about going out for the night or hoping to see their friends somewhere, these are the two likely spots.

Then there's the spots that align more with what would be considered a country theme: Kentucky and Dallas.

While Dallas has a mechanical bull and self-advertises as a nightclub, it's located further apart in Kitchener from the other spots in Waterloo. Ken-



tucky is a barbecue restaurant that turns into a student bar by night.

Rare, The Crown, and Empire also carry a large student demographic, operating more as what you might consider a nightclub. Melody Zhou, in her final term of biochemistry at UW, says that she likes Empire for their music, particularly 'Afrobeats.' The Crown also has DJs performing for the two days the venue is open.

And finally, McCabe's, Molly Blooms, and Morty's are more sit down, pub vibes, carrying a more diverse demographic of both Waterloo locals and older students. These are the spots you go to for different things like live music, having conversations with strangers, watching sports games, or to get a few appetizers and beers.

So how does music interweave itself into these spots? How does music impact the environment and maybe the culture that makes certain spots a go-to for a night out? Professor Simon Wood has a bachelor of music and a masters in music criticism. He lectures on various topics like Western popular music and has extensive experience with composing, playing the bass and producing. Wood provides a good basis to the prevalence of music and what it might mean to students and the nightlife in Waterloo.

Wood says that people like things that make them feel like a part of something bigger. With the nature of streaming services and binge watching now, there seems to be less of a community with TV, like when a new episode would release every Saturday night at 9 p.m. But what seems to persist is the community of music. For students leaving home for the first time, stressed from a long week of studying, or just trying to celebrate their last few months before they graduate, this sense of fun and community can really go a long way. Drinking and going out is heavily associated with the adolescent student population, something that distinguishes young adults from true adulthood. Wood describes the history of how the emergence of rock and roll music after World War II helped establish the identity of teenagers. Teenagers for the first time have a separate identity, a separate culture that distinguishes them from adults and children, filling in that in-between stage.

But when asked about how music can be used to draw students in and keep a crowd going, Wood says there's no formula. Drawing on his experience playing in a band, he talks about how there will always be the songs that everyone knows, that maybe a DJ or band doesn't necessarily want to play anymore. But he also

recognizes that what works one night might not work next summer or even the next weekend.

When asked about songs before the 2000's and why they still persist in the night scene today, Wood provides the analogy of an old T-shirt, stating, "It's like a really, really old comfy T-shirt that you've got in your drawer and, yeah, it's got a goofy logo, but you've had it your whole life and because you've always had it, it accrues memories."

So, when "Dancing Queen" comes on and every student turns to their friends to prepare to sing along, they're putting on that old T-shirt again and feeling the nostalgia of everything that came before that moment, while simultaneously creating a new memory to remember down the line. And after a huge exam, or a full schedule, a celebration of those memories with others going through the same thing can create a huge sense of relief. So, even if there is no set formula that can 100 per cent determine a good time for the crowd, there still is an underlying feeling that can translate into different nights.

Ryan Labrie is a regular DJ at Pub on King, consistently playing sets for large crowds of drunk students and creating that feeling of community for students in Waterloo. With over seven years of experience with Pub, his approach echoes the idea of how there really isn't a consistent formula. Labrie states, "What's interesting, at least how I approach it, is seeing who comes in. As much as I want every week to be the same, there is a difference each week. 9-10:30 p.m., it's figuring out who's coming in."

Labrie also recognizes the comfort aspect that Wood describes with the old T-shirt, stating, "Things were different [in previous years], people were big on the new wave. [In the] last couple of years things have changed. Maybe times are difficult and people want nostalgia and throwbacks. People are happy to hear Katy Perry or Flo Rida more than songs that are charting right now." While he feared being too safe with these songs, when he tries to play the brand new songs, they just don't have the same impact. He continues to recognize how this plays a role in understanding the crowd stating that, "Club culture has changed. Now, it feels more chill and low committal, so people can just leave [whenever they want]. For people to get out of their head, it's something comfortable to get them in the mood." And for those throwback songs, he describes it as bringing people back

to a time in their life.

He continues to describe his process of understanding which songs he can save for midnight, that no matter what, will for sure get the crowd going, like “Mr. Brightside.” He also recognizes that most of his job is actually people-reading, and that so much of what he does is paying attention to people’s reactions and the different crowds, “When people come in, [I can see] which people are antsy and enjoying it, [and] what people are more to themselves. I find where people’s comfort zones are and I live there for the night.”

The effort he puts into every single night seems to be drawn from his enjoyment of providing a comfortable space and fun time, “I think in general, the world’s just not in a good place, and I do like being able to provide spaces that give a good vibe. There’s a lot of places that are too pretentious and I don’t fuck with that. When I plug in, I just really like good vibes where everyone is connecting, and DJing is a good aspect of that.” For Labrie, he describes a change in the past few years and how he sees the night life space advancing in the near future, stating, “I think as time goes on, truthfully the state of the bar and pub industry is dying. I’m not sure what the next stage looks like but I think we’ll have more social house vibes that are more laid back for the next five years. Clubbing and bar hopping is shifting into something new and I’m curious to see how it lands. Places like The Crown are trying something different, building new spaces for a different kind of crowd.”

The UW DJ Club seeks to do just that, bringing something different to the space of night life, by introducing different music. Atul Sharma (@tooliebeats), is in his final term of kinesiology and is co-president of the club, along with Joel Bae, a fourth year statistics student, and Evan Ngyuen, in his second year of pharmacy. Sharma says, “Everyone here [UW DJ Club] is very obsessed with music; we think about it more than the regular person would.” The club holds events, seeking to introduce crowds to something more “elevated and cool.” As Sharma states, “We really try to bring something to people that they don’t normally get.”

Their events start with their weekly meetings every Wednesday, where the club has open decks, with upwards of 40 students coming in and out to learn how to DJ. From there, they find a way to spotlight the talent at UW, with different DJ’s doing one hour sets for a four hour event. For example, their ‘Heatwave’ event and the

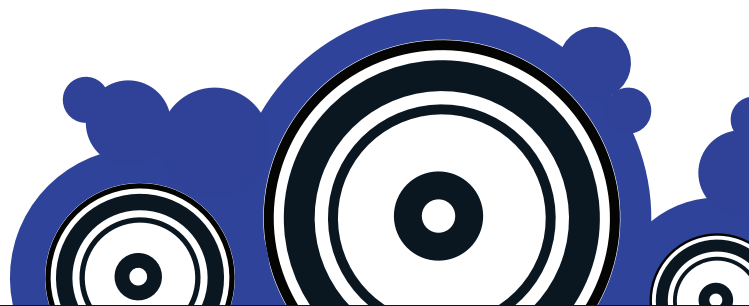
theme of a global club sound, combining music from a bunch of different cultures, like Brazilian funk, jersey club, and emphasis on Afro, Caribbean, and Latin music. With that being said, Sharma balances the novelty with Labrie’s sentiments in focusing on the energy of the crowd. He describes it as an energy flow: “People go out to have fun, they don’t think of it like a long distance run and pace themselves. You take care of them as a DJ in that sense. With crazy drops and jumps, you have to give them a bit of downtime in whatever way you can, like choosing a slower song. But you always want to return.” He also describes the enjoyment of connecting to people through music and showing people what they don’t know they want to hear yet.

Sure enough, as Sharma plays his planned out set at the event, he can clearly be seen having fun, listening to the music, and watching the crowd. The different DJ’s stay on theme while mixing in popular songs like “Low” by Flo Rida and “S&M” by Rihanna.

UW alumni, Johan Rodrigo, who DJs at The Crown, shares incredibly similar sentiments to Sharma and Labrie, expressing how he leads the crowd through the night and how playing for any university bar means making sure it’s fun for everyone.

Professor Aimée Morrison, a professor that teaches embodied humanities in the age of AI, considers Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence to understand the phenomena of dancing, jumping, and singing to music and what it might mean for students. Collective effervescence is that joy or energy that people feel when people engage in something together. She says that you can always listen to a song alone but dancing with others as a group activity is different. You’re not really exposing any of your personal tastes when the most popular songs come on, and there’s an emotional release in a crowd so you feel less alone.

It seems that no matter where people decide to go, with a good crowd guided by the care of DJ’s, there’s much value to the release of dancing with others in the community.



Chicken Caesar Wrap

Ingrid Au, Contributor



This recipe is inspired by the viral chicken caesar wrap from Vinny's Cafe in Boca Raton, Florida. It is a refreshing yet flavourful wrap, perfect for a mid-day lunch. The best part of this recipe is that you can meal prep the salad and make the wrap as needed.

Tools:

- A large mixing bowl
- Air fryer or oven
- Sheet pan
- Parchment paper

Ingredients:

- 1 large whole tortilla
- Pre-made Caesar salad mix (a standard bag should yield about 3-4 cups)
- 2-3 chicken tenders, sizes may vary
- 3 tbsp of freshly grated parmesan cheese
- Salt
- Black pepper
- Optional: Salted kettle chips for additional crunch

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F and bake the chicken tenders for about 18 minutes or until the tenders are golden and crispy. If your chicken tenders come with cooking instructions, follow them instead.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the salad mix and the dressing that comes with it.
3. Place the salad mix in the centre of the tortilla, but ensure that you do not overfill it. Each wrap should have about 1 cup of salad mix to avoid overfilling.
4. Carefully and slowly wrap the corners of the tortilla around the salad mixture. You may also lay an aluminium foil underneath the tortilla and then wrap it around the tortilla. This will make the overall process easier. Optionally, you may also add kettle chips for additional crunch.

There is a reason why this chicken caesar wrap went viral, and this recipe perfectly mimics the flavours and textures of the wrap. This recipe is especially convenient if your schedule requires you to be on campus all day. Enjoy!

April crossword

Joseph Cushman, Contributor

ACROSS

- 1 Yellowfin tuna
 4 Wyna of the *New York Times* game Connections
 7 ___/IP (computer communication system, abbreviated)
 10 Audacity or FL Studio (abbreviated)
 13 So-so
 14 Manitoban poet Sarah
 15 Guffaw syllable
 16 Cape Town's country (abbreviated)
 17 Church dignitary
 19 ___ to lovers (fanfiction trope)
 21 Correo ___ (Spanish airmail)
 22 Windows app for opening .txt files
 23 Cost-cutting measure currently in effect for UW (two words)
 26 Long-standing rival (two words)
 27 Elastic
 31 Soak flax
 32 Straight out of the oven
 34 Entices
 35 When doubled, a fish
 37 Places for valuables
 39 ___ sci (Arts faculty major, abbreviated)
 40 Actor Chris
 42 Aired again
 44 Powerful arms? (abbreviated)
 45 Plea to someone blocking the view (three words)
 47 Inferior
 49 As well as (three words)
 51 Suitability
 54 0.001 cubic metres
 55 Promise recipient
 56 Rashly (two words)
 59 Tailor's fastener
 60 Therapy technique that originated from B. F. Skinner (abbreviated)
 61 Lee Kum ___ (soy sauce brand)
 62 Game where someone's 'it'
 63 Complete collection
 64 Texting acronym used to reduce tension
 65 Blood test checking for inflammation (abbreviated)

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66 Phillipa of "Hamilton"

DOWN

- 1 Energize, with "up"
 2 That woman
 3 Retort to loud whisperers (three words)
 4 Find out about (two words)
 5 1 and 3, for two
 6 Make ___ (employ, two words)
 7 Play by Jennifer Haley performed by the UW THPERF program this term (two words)
 8 Paddle carrier
 9 Twisted dough treat
 10 Swag
 11 On the ocean
 12 Video game keyboard controls
 18 Viking Erikson
 20 Rendezvous
 23 Producer of Skippy peanut butter and Spam
 24 "Softly As ___ You" (Tony De Vita song, two words)

- 25 Source of blog updates (two words, abbreviated)
 28 Pirate lookout locations (two words)
 29 Gear worn by a knight or a biker
 30 San ___ (California-Mexico border crossing)
 33 Sea lion, for one (two words)
 36 Bear ___ (two words)
 38 Soup crackers
 41 Dakar is its capital
 43 ___ here nor there
 46 Japanese port near Nagasaki
 48 OpenAI video-generating tool
 50 Opening words to 'Candy Store' from Heathers (two words)
 51 Smartphone downloads
 52 Ballet move
 53 Camping shelter
 57 Yang of Dropout
 58 Sense of self, often inflated

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