

THE SOPHIAN

The Campus Use Plan: Shaping Smith for the Next Generation

NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25
NEWS EDITOR

With meandering walking paths between classic red brick buildings, a botanic garden spanning 127 acres, and the glistening Paradise Pond, the Smith College campus has been home to student life for 150 years. Landscape and architectural design luminaries from Fredrick Law Olmstead to Maya Lin have contributed to its beauty and functionality.

Yet, the Smith campus also faces challenges with changing social, academic and environmental needs on campus. From student requests for more outdoor seating and late night study spaces to managing the immense project of converting campus to geothermal energy, the Campus

Use Plan is looking at how the Smith community uses its campus and what changes could be made to guide campus use in the coming years.

On Dec. 16, 2024, Smith College President Sarah Willie-LeBreton announced the creation of a Campus Use Plan aligned with ongoing strategic planning at the college in a letter to the community. The Campus Use Plan (CUP) will aim to “provide guidance on how we utilize our buildings and open spaces to better support our mission,” according to a Jan. 19, 2025 email announcing the start of the Campus Use Plan process.

“We’re excited about this, it’s an opportunity to think about how to define the next, at least, ten years of planning at the college,” said David

DeSwert, Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration who is a member of the CUP Steering Committee.

The CUP will look at how stakeholders — students, faculty, staff — interact with the built environment on campus and create a plan for what the next decade will look like on Smith’s campus. This project is still in its early stages, with most work focused on data collection and gathering input from stakeholders. The project is being led by Erinn McGurn '94, Interim Associate Vice President for Sustainable Capital Programs and the Campus Planning team. The CUP Steering Committee, composed of trustees, faculty, staff and a student, oversees the process.

Smith College has hired Sasaki, an interdisciplinary planning and design firm based in Boston, to conduct a 10-month study of the campus. The first phase of the plan has included pop-up listening events in the Campus Center and Compass Cafe for students to provide feedback on how they use Smith’s campus. Additionally, the “MyCampus” survey allowed students to explain how they use spaces on campus on an interactive map and answer questions on residence life, social spaces on campus, and academic needs.

“Once you understand how [the physical environment] is being used and what the issues are, what works well and what doesn’t, then you can create the Campus Use Plan, which will be, to my understanding, guidelines about how we use the spaces on campus, and short and long term goals,” said AC Manning '25, the campus planning intern, who helps facilitate student engagement in the CUP process as part of her position. “For example, an aspect of the physical environment at Smith that people are asking for is outdoor seating,” said Manning. “Short term, maybe we can get some *continued on page 6*



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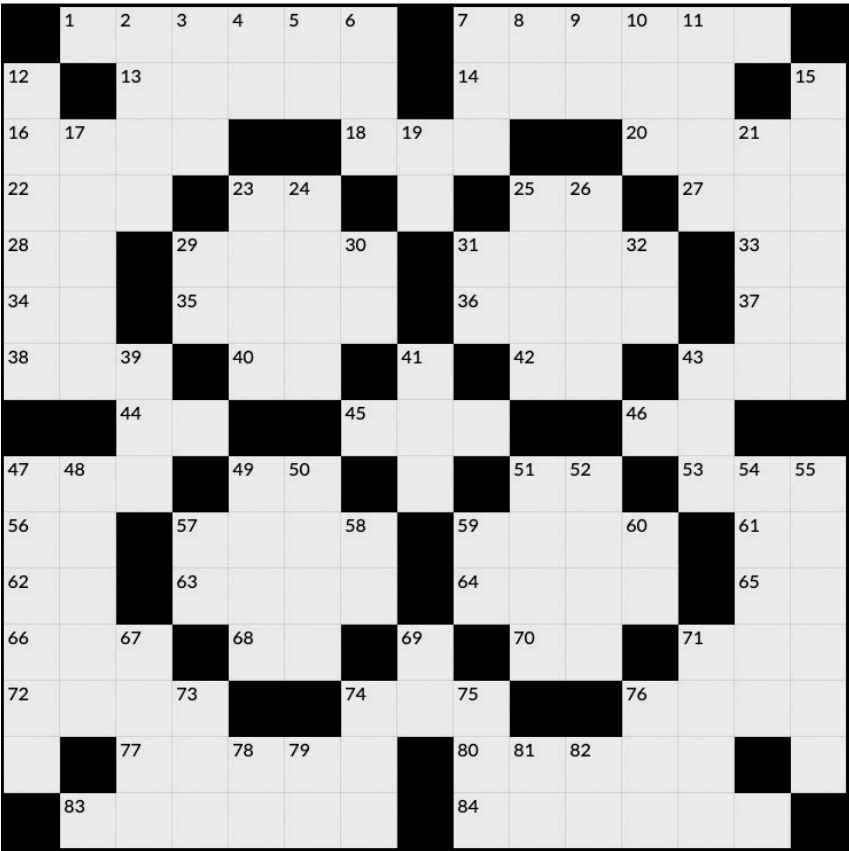
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March Crossword

POORVI SARKAR '27
CROSSWORD & GAMES EDITOR

- Across**

 - 1. Vegetable that might be good for your eyes
 - 7. Delay that might cause you to ask, “What’s the ____?”
 - 13. Four might indicate this
 - 14. This month’s theme color
 - 16. Too much
 - 18. Last month’s theme color
 - 20. Mid-March’s warning, in reference to Caesar’s death
 - 22. Toast option
 - 23. Nobelium abbreviation on Periodic Table
 - 25. “__ the change you wish to see in the world”
 - 27. Where you might go to get accommodations at Smith
 - 28. DJ
 - 29. Where you might find a pig
 - 31. What facts are
 - 33. Indian Ocean domain ending
 - 34. Fake existence, abbr.
 - 35. Desire
 - 36. Skin-related prefix
 - 37. Teddy Bear’s namesake initials
 - 38. Mode of transportation
 - 40. Partner, abbr.
 - 42. “I” in Mandarin (pinyin)
 - 43. UAE time zone, abbr
 - 44. Gold on Periodic Table
 - 45. “We are Young” band
 - 46. Alternative medical degree to PhD
- 47. Jerry’s archnemesi
 - 49. Casual greeting
 - 51. Bad Bunny’s home, abbr.
 - 53. Mysterious thing seen in the sky, abbr
 - 56. “__ rah rah” New Jersey school’s slogan
 - 57. “The __ Lock-er,” war movie
 - 59. Hold
 - 61. “You are” in text slang
 - 62. Location preposition
 - 63. Some may say he is truly America’s president
 - 64. NPR allows musicians to perform at a small one of these
 - 65. Those who watch over college residents, abbr
 - 66. To do a close examination of
 - 68. 1000 Newtons, unit
 - 70. “You know” in text slang
 - 71. Where you might find soup
 - 72. “__ Brockovich” movie about an unlikely lawyer



- 74. Inverse, in math terms
 - 76. A sharp feeling in the chest
 - 77. Hit drama series, “The White ____”
 - 80. Solidified resin
 - 83. These creatures often hold hands while sleeping
 - 84. Close
- Down**

 - 2. Soothing plant
 - 3. One might get stuck in one of these
 - 4. Traditional religion, abbr
 - 5. “All good”
 - 6. Norse god of war and justice
 - 7. Wishing a decent 24 hours, abbr.
 - 8. The Beaver State, abbr.
 - 9. Masculine “the” in French
 - 10. One of Trump’s many formidable opponents, policy-wise
 - 11. Ctrl-Z action
 - 12. Plane local
 - 15. To organize
 - 17. Spandex
 - 19. Paramedic’s destination
 - 21. Changes, in terms of writing
 - 23. Makeup company
 - 24. Tough science class in college, abbr.
 - 25. Alternative name for beer or kind of coffee
 - 26. EU currency
 - 29. This phrase repeated refers to a West African doughy carb
- 30. You
 - 31. Football goal, abbr.
 - 32. Kind of long dash
 - 39. Los Angeles football team mascot
 - 41. To smack one’s tongue at someone
 - 43. Dog in mandarin (pinyin)
 - 47. To explore
 - 48. Far from the center
 - 49. Strong green superhero
 - 50. Strong red superhero
 - 51. Victim, animalistically
 - 52. A chance
 - 54. Flammable liquid in many plastics and solvents
 - 55. Both a color and a fruit
 - 57. Helium on the Periodic Table
 - 58. Non-immigrant visa
 - 59. Expletive, abbr.
 - 60. Last resort soccer tie-breaker, abbr.
 - 67. The Earth’s axis has one
 - 69. Younger of the same name, abbr.
 - 71. Pasta and bread are an example of this
 - 73. Isn’t
 - 74. Donkey, colloquially
 - 75. Ability to do
 - 76. Each
 - 78. “You” in both Latin and Spanish
 - 79. Prefix meaning earliest
 - 81. The Pine Tree State, abbr.
 - 82. What most Smithies are pursuing

Editorial Statement

To the readers of The Sophian:

It is bittersweet to be addressing you in our final Editorial Statement as the leaders of this publication. We are so proud of all we have accomplished during our tenure and are excited to watch the next Editorial Board of The Sophian thrive. Being a member of The Sophian Editorial Board is a major commitment, as we know better than most, but every Board member has continued to show up, work hard and never waver in their enthusiasm to further the tradition of student journalism at Smith College.

It is our hope that, under the leadership of the 2025–2026 Editorial Board, journalism at Smith will continue to prosper. It has been a wonderful journey, since our first year at Smith, to participate in the growing fervor for journalism on our

campus. Whether it’s reporting on the continued success of Smith’s basketball team, photographing Smith’s lush botanical gardens, sitting in The Sophian office, late at night, arranging items in InDesign or being an avid player of our monthly crossword, there is something for everyone in journalism at Smith.

While it is difficult to be leaving a publication that has been an enormous part of both of our experiences at Smith, we leave with the assurance that The Sophian is in capable hands, knowing that we couldn’t be prouder of what it has become in the four years we’ve been here. Thank you for reading.

With immense gratitude,

Isabel Birge, Editor-in-Chief
Brooke Chandler, Managing Editor

Where Do We Go from Here?

First Reproductive Justice Futurisms Think Tank Held at Smith

HILLARY CONNOR '26 From March 12 to March 14, Smith College hosted the first Reproductive Justice Futurisms Think Tank convening in the Smith College Conference Center, gathering Reproductive Justice scholars from all across the country to present their work and plan next steps for the movement.

The Think Tank was co-organized by associate Smith College professor, author-activist and founding member of Reproductive Justice movement Loretta Ross and Amherst College professor Dr. Jallicia Jolly. The team set up a learning library for people to continue reading about the concept following the event. Recordings of the livestream of the convening are all available on Loretta Ross' YouTube channel for students and scholars to watch or refer back to.

But what are Reproductive Justice Futurisms exactly? Ross answered this question in her opening statement at the conference: "Reproductive justice futurisms are about hope. It's always about our belief in the future and our belief that things will be better in the future, way beyond our dreams. It is what we can do now to make these dreams of tomorrow possible and how we can make it not only better for ourselves but for our descendants."

Ross and Jolly invited several influential speakers to dive deeper into how these dreams can become reality. The convening included names like Byllye Avery, founder of the Black Women's Health Imperative, Paris Hatcher, founder of Black Feminist Future, writer and poet Alexis Pauline Gumbs and many more.

The speakers presented at one of seven "plenaries" or panels with topics ranging from broad questions like "Why is Reproductive Justice necessary from the past to the future?" to more specific and scientific talks like "the state of AI, genomic and reproductive technologies." After the panels, the participants had open discussions with the presenters and brainstormed next steps for the movement.

Smith students from Ross' classes and students doing research in the field gathered to share

their findings in the classroom and learn from the founders of the movement. Senior Amelie Horn '25 presented her medical research on the implications of the use of the drug diethylstilbestrol to prevent miscarriages. Smith graduates Robynne Lucas '22 and Fhrynée Lambert '24 presented on the fear mongering tactics of the Trump administration, diving into the question, "Do we freak out now, later or nah?"

The conference began with a "Libation Altar" led by Terri Bailey from the Bailey Learning and Arts Collective (BLAAC). At the ceremony, Bailey watered a small tree to symbolically bring "life affirming" energy into the space. She invited participants to give thanks to their ancestors who began the fight for Reproductive Justice and to set their intentions for the next few days of the Think Tank.

Bailey finished with a call and response of Àse (pronounced Ah-shay), a word used widely in the African diaspora to mean "energy" or "life force." Sounds of "Àse" echoed throughout the rest of the convening whenever participants or speakers felt a deep resonance with the words of a speaker, regardless of whether that person was a founder of the movement or a student who was new to this work.

Ross spoke about the importance of recognizing both this past and current scholarship and activist work in the movement of Reproductive Justice and Futurisms. "The chain of free-

dom stretches back to your ancestors who we just called into the room," she said. "And it stretches forward towards your descendants for whom we're working to build a brighter future for. Your only job right now is to make sure that chain doesn't break at your link."

"‘The chain of freedom stretches back to your ancestors who we just called into the room,’ she said. ‘And it stretches forward towards your descendants for whom we’re working to build a brighter future for. Your only job right now is to make sure that chain doesn’t break at your link.’"

Despite the uncertainty and fear participants expressed throughout the convening, the conference leaders were focused on uplifting their community. Bailey guided participants through a meditation on what had been learned and a reflection on how to move forward.

Dázon Dixon Diallo, founder of Sister-Love, began by reflecting on what the movement and the conference meant to her. "When someone asks me what Reproductive Justice Futurism is, what I want it to look and feel like, it's right now," she said.

"That we're in solidarity. That we're in reflection. That we are together. That we are in gratitude. And that we are in motion because we are moving. Because we have somewhere to go and we're gonna get there. Together. Àse." Diallo was met with a chorus of "Àse" in response and one lone cry of, "It ain't over."

One participant brought the conversation back to the heart of the convening: hope for the future. "Hope is beautiful because regardless of my current situation, it whispers there is more and more. So for us, there is more and more."



PHOTO FROM LORETTA ROSS'S INSTAGRAM

As Smith College Prospers, Schacht Center Union Fights for Better Resources

CASSANDRA LOPEZ-WAREN '27 *Disclaimer:* CONTRIBUTING WRITER *this article was originally written for ENG 136: Journalism Principles & Practices in the fall of 2024. The names of employees in this article have been withheld for safety/privacy purposes.*

During the 2023-24 academic year, over 40% of the Smith community visited the Schacht Center for mental or physical care — double the amount seen in previous years. Yet, as more students seek the services of the Schacht Center, its small but dedicated team of nurses and therapists have expressed difficulty to meet this increasing demand. In ongoing contract negotiations, the Schacht Center union — recently having add-

ed its therapists to its ranks — is asking that the college ensure both students and staff receive the extra support they need.

New waves of union organizing have hit the Smith campus in the last year, first with student dining workers, followed by Residence Life student workers, library staff and pre-school teachers at Smith's Fort Hill Early Childhood Education Center. Over the summer, therapists at the Schacht Center filed for union recognition alongside the registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) which were already unionized.

Similar to other unionization pursuits at the college, the administration refused to volun-

tarily recognize the union, as reported by the Massachusetts Nurses Association in June (MNA). Following a protracted process of seeking recognition from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), therapists at the Schacht Center are now unionized under the MNA.

On Nov. 20, the MNA and the Western Mass Area Labor Federation (WMALF) hosted a panel in the Campus Center for students to learn about the Schacht Center's current contract negotiations. In attendance were students with the ResLife union, the dining workers union, faculty, members of the Smith Young Communist League, a representative from the office of Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa (D) and representatives from



PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

the full-time dining hall union (SEIU Local 211) and UFCW Local 1459.

“This is the longest contract negotiation we’ve been in,” said an NP on the panel. The union has gone over half a year without a new contract. The panelists said that Smith has rejected all of the union’s major proposals, such as providing wage increases consistent with Massachusetts cost-of-living inflation, overtime pay and

“I chose to come to Smith because I thought I would be working in an environment that shared my values of providing the highest quality care. The negotiations have led me to believe that our work at the Schacht Center is not valued by the administration.”

paid on-call time for therapists, paid time off that is consistent with other college staff, paid interns, higher staffing or updated technology.

The administration countered only with a wage increase of “less than half of a percent,” which amounts to “a bonus of about \$200 a year.”

“My wage is about 25-50% less than I would make in the community,” one psychiatric nurse said, who has been working in their field for over 25 years. “I chose to come to Smith because I thought I would be working in an environment that shared my values of providing the highest quality care. The negotiations have led me to believe that our work at the Schacht Center is not valued by the administration.”

Another panelist pointed out that Smith’s finances are in great condition as of 2023 — the college made \$9 million in profit last year, on top of its \$2.5 billion endowment and \$3.6 billion in assets. Despite such apparent abundance in resources, the Schacht Center has faced cuts in therapist and RN positions, hour cuts from 40 to 35 per week and stagnant wages — all within the context of soaring rates of mental health crises among young people and the election of a president who has vowed to gut reproductive rights and gender-affirming healthcare nationwide. With students coming to Smith from all over the

country and the world, the role of the Schacht Center is now more vital than ever.

Instead, the panelist said the college has centered its fiscal priorities around capital projects such as the Kathleen McCartney building and the recently renovated Neilson Library. Meanwhile, the Schacht Center is forced to grapple with the loss of one of the two full-time RNs, the loss of one part-time therapist and an increase in unpaid interns who are expected to do the same amount of work as full-time therapists.

Nursing is a practice “historically undervalued as ‘women’s work,’” they continued. They added that one of the contract proposals the college has rejected is, ironically, to provide stipends for Schacht Center workers to pursue higher levels of education or attend conferences where they may gain access to new and improved medical knowledge.

Students at the panel expressed concerns that the issues they have faced in accessing healthcare on campus — long waitlists, rescheduling conflicts and less personalized care — will only be exacerbated with the actions of the new Trump administration. The number of students being checked into the hospital or requesting medical withdrawals is already on the rise, a trend which is expected to continue. The RNs, NPs and therapists at the panel expressed a dread that they might have to turn students away or provide insufficient care due to the strain on staff and resources.

“According to a panelist, at their bargaining session on Nov. 8, the Dean of Students Julie Ohotnicky said that Schacht Center workers were ‘manipulating the moment’ when they expressed their concerns about not being able to meet the needs of students following the certification of the election results without the allocation of more resources from the college.”

According to a panelist, at their bargaining session on Nov. 8, the Dean of Students Julie Ohotnicky said that Schacht Center workers were “manipulating the moment” when they expressed their concerns about not being able to meet the needs of students following the certification of the election results without the allocation of more resources from the college.

“Smith College is committed to fostering positive work environments for all employees,” said the Dean’s office in response to a request for comment. “We are abiding by the NLRB protocol and out of respect for the formal process associated with collective bargaining, we do not have further comment at this time.”

“Student workers, full-time staff and members of the WMALF in attendance at the panel expressed feelings of solidarity with the Schacht Center workers on behalf of their unions — many of whom have faced similar snubs and shaming in their own contract negotiations with the college.”

However, the union is not backing down on its demands for adequate raises and better working conditions. Student workers, full-time staff and members of the WMALF in attendance at the panel expressed feelings of solidarity with the Schacht Center workers on behalf of their unions — many of whom have faced similar snubs and shaming in their own contract negotiations with the college.

Despite their frustrations with the college administration, a nurse at the Schacht Center emphasized, “I love my job, love the Smith students, and just want everyone to thrive.”

The MNA created a petition for Smith community members to express their support for the Schacht Center’s contract negotiations, which they said they would deliver to the HR department sometime this semester. The Sophian has yet to receive a response from the MNA with a status update of the petition.

The Campus Use Plan: Shaping Smith for the Next Generation

NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25
NEWS EDITOR

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It's much more actionable than, perhaps we need another dorm. But that's sort of the scale, from a chair to a dorm, that's being thought about."

Students have been able to identify concerns with the physical campus and campus life during engagement sessions. Frustration with the Campus Center has been a reoccurring point, with students saying it feels like wasted space.

Other issues that have been identified are the lack of 24-hour study spaces besides the Alumni Gym, a lack of spaces for social gatherings and dining halls. Students have mentioned that they would like another dining hall on Green Street, and many have asked for Cushing/Emerson dining hall to be brought back. Some students have expressed interest in centralized dining, while others support Smith's current decentralized dining. The CUP aims to help the Smith administration consider pros and cons for these questions and provide a framework for the future of how campus space is used and organized.

The Campus Use Plan is aligned with Smith's Strategic Planning Process, led by Well-spring Consulting, which began in 2024. The CUP will "provide a framework for the development of the built environment at Smith, including infrastructure, facilities and land use, to support and enable the strategic plan goals." Previous campus planning is also a part of the CUP; in 2022, Smith completed their Landscape Master Plan which was developed over 4 years and is supposed to be included and incorporated into the Campus Use Plan.

"Having been part of the original landscape Master Plan process, it was one of the most comprehensively community engaged projects that Smith's ever done," said Reid Bertone-Johnson, lecturer in landscape studies, who is on the CUP Steering Committee.

"We have a plan that we like a lot, but most of what [Sasaki] asked us to do on the map and in the mapping survey is duplicating work done

when we created the landscape master plan, and it's already codified in the landscape master plan and all the documents there. So I'm a little bit concerned that it may not get incorporated enough."

The Landscape Master Plan created a 20-year plan for how Smith's landscape can evolve and proposed many projects for moving towards an adaptable, inclusive, educational and connected campus. Pilot projects, which were meant to be completed quickly after the plan's completion and test transformation of spaces that herald longer-term initiatives, included putting in a meadow of native plants and taller grasses at the main entrance gate at the intersection of College Lane and Elm Street, and a pop-up plaza with outdoor gathering space and seating replacing the roundabout and parking in front of Sage Hall. Longer term proposals included converting College Lane into a pedestrian walkway, a courtyard and outdoor classroom in the space in front of Davis Ballroom and an accessible woodland walk to the Mill River from the Paradise Road side of Emerson House.

Currently, a design concept for the restoration of the geothermal well field site next to Comstock House, guided by the Landscape Master Plan, is under consideration, according to McGurn. One possibility is the creation of a paved patio for outdoor dining at the Comstock/Haynes dining hall.

"This will be the most dramatic change to the landscape and campus over the next seven years, as we're finishing geothermal. The campus has the chance to dynamically shift quickly towards what we hope should be more friendly, and social, and environmentally sound," said Bertone-Johnson.

Students have been able to participate in the planning process through listening sessions and the MyCampus Survey, but only one student currently sits on the Steering Committee. Salma Baksh '28 was nominated to the committee in January based on work she has done on SGA as a Senator.

"It's huge. It's like re-envisioning the

buildings, the spaces, the green space that's all around us," said Baksh. "I think that really what's on my mind the most is social gathering spaces. And I think hopefully that this committee will be insistent on that, and so perhaps not students in this graduating class or the next four, but students who are coming in years from now can expect a more social Smith.

Baksh has been a part of discussions about social spaces on campus, including on how the Neilson Library is a central place for socializing on campus, while the Campus Center is not. In Oct. 2023, the Campus Center architectural programming and conceptual design plan outlined a multi-year plan to make changes to the Campus Center, including to make it more student focused and build more gathering spaces. However, only phase one, involving making the lower level more student focused, was implemented, while subsequent phases, including a planned phase two for the summer of 2024, were not completed. According to McGurn, the plan is now being evaluated and incorporated into the comprehensive planning process.

"I hope [the Campus Use Plan] will prioritize student agency over space and set that forward, with actionable goals to attain it and what student agency every space would look like. Maybe it looks like more 24 hour spaces. Maybe it looks like a Student Union," said Manning.

The last time Smith made a similar comprehensive campus use plan was in the 1990s. Technology and student use of space has evolved rapidly since the start of the 21st century, with one example being mail services. With the prevalence of online shopping and services like Amazon, Smith College Mail Services handle far more packages today than they would have in the 90s. The new Campus Use Plan aims to create a framework and guidelines for projects that will help campus respond to student, staff and faculty needs into the next decade.

"I would love to encourage other students to find ways to get involved or make their voice heard about all these things," said Baksh. "We can complain about X, Y and Z things and how they're affecting our lives, but if we aren't telling anyone or the right people that these are problems that we're facing and that they're intersecting with these other problems, then they're not going to get solved."

CQ Quintana's 'Scissoring': A Theatrical Journey of Religious Guilt and Self-Acceptance

GRYFFYN MAY '27

ASST. ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR

When I walked into the Hallie Flanagan Studio Theater to an announcement cheerily telling me to "Enjoy Scissoring," I didn't quite know what to expect.

The stage was set with two separated areas: to the right was a cozy living room scene with a couch, armchair, coatrack and an artist's easel in the back, while on the left was an ominous-looking circular stained-glass window above an office desk with a cross hanging on the wall.

The story follows school teacher Abigail Bouer, played by Stevie Ordway '25, who has just started her new teaching job at a Catholic school, and the events that unravel as she navigates conflict with her girlfriend, confronting her religious guilt and the strange hallucinations she begins seeing as her stress grows. The first scene opened with a dramatic mardi-gras celebration, where Abigail is partying with her girlfriend Josie (Maya Delmont '25) when her new Catholic school boss, Elaine Dufoe (Kendra Burford '28) shows up. A conflict occurs when Josie picks up on Abigail's apprehension at having her Catholic boss meet her artist girlfriend, and Josie storms out.

This scene sets up the main plotline, the internal and external struggles that Abigail undertakes as she begins a new job that pressures her to conceal her sexuality and, as such, her partner. Abigail quickly finds comfort in a friend and coworker, Celia, played by Gabriella Rosenberg '27, whom she eventually confides in about her secret. But Celia is not the only one helping her through her problems — Abigail also starts seeing hallucinations of former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt (Aria Ramanathan '25) and her partner, Lorena Hickock (Kimberly Estrada '25), who seem to want to help guide Abigail towards making the right choices. Eventually, the conflict between Abigail and Josie comes to a head when Josie decides to move out, unable to support her girlfriend in sacrificing a part of her identity for the sake of her job.

When the plot twist kiss between Abigail and Celia happened around two-thirds of the way

into the show, the audience gasped in disbelief. I was surprised that so few people seemed to have seen it coming — I, for one, caught on with Celia's early line, "You can trust me, Abby," accompanied by a suspiciously intimate touch of their hands. I watched in amusement as two audience members turned to slowly look at each other, eyebrows raised, as Celia pranced off the stage after that line. But when the time came, it still seemed to shock the vast majority of the people around me.

This moment was when the resolution began to unfold, and by this point, the progression of the story has a clear trajectory. Yet although we get to see Abigail finally going after what she really wants, I found it less interesting than the build-up of the rest of the play. To me, it felt more like tying up loose ends of the plotline than the earlier focus of providing the audience with laughable dialogue or intriguing interactions. Similarly, the ending, while there was nothing inherently wrong with it, was underwhelming to me.

This isn't to say anything negative about

the production of the play. My issue lies more with the original writing of the play, not the quality of the production itself. Mainly, although I found the plotline a bit hard to follow at the beginning, the storyline did improve in clarity as it progressed. The set production, timing, sound and costumes were all very well done, and the Theater Department's cast and crew made it into an enjoyable, humorous production with lots of positive feedback from the Smith community.

One of the things I appreciated most about the story and the actors was that they did a great job of using moments of humor to undercut what would have otherwise been some rather overwhelmingly tense subject matter; namely, religious trauma and internalized homophobia. This created a humorous and entertaining yet also thought-provoking production tackling relevant issues that felt right at home on Smith's campus. Without such a comical nature, the show would have felt much heavier, and probably would have needed to come with a trigger warning (beyond the already arguably telling title).



PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHEN TEXEIRA

Magical Realism Will Save America

KAREN COLMÁN MARTÍNEZ '26
OPINIONS EDITOR

One of my favorite accounts on X (formerly Twitter) is @AssLatam, better known as “Crazy Ass Moments in LatAm Politics.” It describes itself as “a catalogue of eccentric political moments from the world’s wackiest yet peaceful region.” The media tab is a feast of surreal political absurdities — from Argentine President Javier Milei brandishing a chainsaw as a budget-cutting metaphor, to Brazil’s National Geographic Institute proudly situating Brazil at the literal center of the world map. With over 100 thousand followers, the account regularly produces viral hits. Recently, a particularly striking video showed an army of “papa smurfs” storming Colombia’s Congress, demanding President Gustavo Petro’s resignation. American audiences often express shocked disbelief, while Latin Americans simply shrug with a knowing smile. This phenomenon begs for a witty label, but of course, it already has one.

Magical realism, as defined by Mariano Siskind — Argentine literary critic and professor at Harvard — is a genre born specifically from Latin America’s historical and cultural idiosyncrasies. Think Gabriel García Márquez or Isabel Allende; magical realism is infused “one foot in reality and one in the fantastic” to depict the “lived absurdities” of Latin America. Even though it originated as a local aesthetic movement, Siskind points out an important and ironic transformation — magical realism, originally used to articulate the complexities of Latin American societies, evolved into a global literary phenomenon. The genre became, paradoxically, both a celebrated hallmark of Latin American uniqueness and a commercialized “global literary currency,” representing postcolonial, hybrid or marginalized identities far beyond its roots.

This is where the fascination with the X account “Crazy Ass Moments in LatAm Politics” originates. Historically, this global popularity coincided with (and perhaps reinforced) the exoticizing of Latin America’s “surreal” politics — perceived through an imagined cultural essence or regional otherness. Yet, today this supposed surrealism is undeniably universal. The once comfortably exoticized “otherness” now seems closer than ever, challenging first-world no-

tions of stable rationality. This shift leaves many Americans bewildered, routinely exclaiming disbelief at their own country’s “third-world” political absurdities, apparently oblivious to the irony.

“Recognizing the global reach of absurdity prompts a deeper question: how should American literature and art respond to our acknowledged surreal condition? After the disorienting chaos of the 2016 election, American cultural responses ranged from earnest outrage to blunt realism, but perhaps this earnestness has reached its limits.”

Consider recent American examples: Rep. Kevin McCarthy enduring a humiliating fifteen-round vote to become Speaker of the House, only to be dramatically ousted by his own party shortly thereafter; Rep. George Santos, whose elaborate fictional biography — from invented Wall Street credentials to fabricated athletic achievements — transformed Congressional proceedings into farce; former President Donald Trump actively campaigning for president while facing 91 felony charges, a scenario many would previously have imagined possible only in so-called “banana republics.” Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, British politics descended into self-parody when Prime Minister Liz Truss’s term was infamously shorter than the lifespan of a grocery-store lettuce — a surreal spectacle broadcast live to amused and bewildered audiences.

If you’ve read “One Hundred Years of Solitude,” you know Macondo has always been everywhere. Current events have merely forced us to finally acknowledge it. García Márquez portrayed absurdity as inevitable, mundane and seemingly fated — a mirror held to societies accustomed to chaos. Today, our political reality increasingly

resembles the narrative logic of magical realism. The absurd is now ordinary: conspiracy theories dominate mainstream discourse; bizarre political theatrics are no longer surprising; and once unimaginable breaches of decorum — such as mobs storming the U.S. Capitol or representatives brandishing explicit images during official hearings — are becoming commonplace.

Recognizing the global reach of absurdity prompts a deeper question: how should American literature and art respond to our acknowledged surreal condition? After the disorienting chaos of the 2016 election, American cultural responses ranged from earnest outrage to blunt realism, but perhaps this earnestness has reached its limits. Mariano Siskind’s critique of magical realism’s commodification highlights the pitfalls of turning absurdity into mere spectacle. Rather than simply reproducing superficial satirical tropes or passive bewilderment, a contemporary American magical realism could offer deeper possibilities — narrative forms that explore, rather than exoticize, our surreal political conditions.

Such a literary shift could help us grapple not just with our political absurdities, but also with the unsettling truth that these absurdities were never exclusive to the “other.” Magical realism, reinvented and thoughtfully embraced in America, might finally dismantle outdated binaries of rationality versus irrationality, first-world versus third-world, self versus other. Rather than merely coping through caricature, a new literary movement could critically reexamine what we have too comfortably labeled as surreal. By confronting our political landscape through the lens of magical realism, American writers and artists can challenge audiences to reconsider their own complicity in maintaining illusions of rationality and stability.

Perhaps this is precisely how magical realism, with its roots deeply embedded in the complex absurdities of Latin American life, can indeed save America — not by simplifying our strange reality, but by forcing us to confront it. In embracing a literary tradition that once exposed the complexities of a misunderstood region, Americans might finally find the tools needed to illuminate — and navigate — the surreal landscape we all now inhabit.