



Student hospitalized from mold exposure

Columns editorial staff

A Fairmont State student-athlete was hospitalized last semester for what medical personnel diagnosed as exposure to mold after living in on-campus housing.

Breanna Blot, a sophomore volleyball player with a double major in national security and political science, suffered from a mold-related illness according to medical documents she provided to The Columns. That required her to miss class time from Oct. 2 to Dec. 14 and take a medical redshirt as an athlete. Blot said in an interview.

The diagnosis was confirmed by two certified physicians' assistants (PA-C) and a doctor, her medical documents showed. A PA-C is empowered to make diagnoses and prescribe medications under the supervision of a practicing physician, according to West Virginia state code 30-3E-1, and can testify to such diagnoses in court.

"This pt [patient] has urticaria (hives) likely due to mold in her dormitory," said Kristin Barberio Smucker of Mountain State Medical Specialties and Mountain State Dermatology of Clarksburg, West Virginia, in a document dated Aug. 14, 2014. "It is my recommendation that she live off campus until testing can be performed on 9/8/14 to confirm mold allergies."

Stachybotrys chartarum, a form of potentially toxic mold, was found in Prichard Hall through independent testing by The Columns. Individual reactions to mold exposure can vary because of individual tolerances. Blot last year lived in the section of Prichard where the positive test was obtained.

Blot, who stayed in College Park for five days starting July 26, 2014, for a volleyball camp, began having health issues the same day, she said



PHOTO BY LOGAN MOORE

Breanna Blot, a sophomore who plays on FSU's volleyball team, missed more than two months of school due to illness.

in an interview. Her first visit to Fairmont General Hospital regarding her problems was July 30, records showed. She officially moved into her apartment Aug. 1 and had a doctor's appointment the following day.

Every day she stayed in her apartment she had problems such as hives and swelling of the throat, eyes and mouth. She found out that she had potentially been exposed to mold after consulting with Barberio Smucker in Clarksburg.

The following few days included progressively worsening reactions until she went to the Fairmont General Hospital emergency room to figure out what was going on, she said. Blot realized she could not stay in her apartment any longer and moved in with her boyfriend in another College Park building. Her symptoms persisted and she moved in

with a friend off campus, she said.

Blot said she went to Marah Fluharty, the residence director of College Park, on Aug. 1 with her concerns. Fluharty said that she would speak to Alicia Moore, FSU's housing director, and get back to Blot, Blot said.

However, Blot said Fluharty never got back to her, adding that she was told by university officials at the Turley Center that housing director Alicia Moore would not be available for two weeks when she sought an appointment with Moore.

"With this particular incident I do feel like at the beginning of the year we did act pretty promptly," Moore said in an interview. "I remember this particular issue and I feel that I was very timely. Whether or not the student feels that I was timely, I'm not sure.



PHOTO BY LOGAN MOORE

The College Park apartments are being replaced by the new \$30 million University Terrace.

What I can tell you is that the information presented to me in totality does not completely align with information that you have.

"Once we were given all of the information in total we did act accordingly. We do have a process for release requests and we have many students who request for release. We have many students who request releases and there is a process that they have to follow. You can't just simply come in and ask to meet with me and ask for a release."

The release was eventually granted. However, Blot said it took getting the athletic department involved and the threat of legal action before being compensated for her housing charges and deposit.

"I basically had to go through every clause in our housing contract to get that back because they didn't understand," said Blot. "I offered to show them pictures, the documentation from the doctors, but they didn't even want to see it. It took the athletic department standing behind me to get her to give

back my money."

The athletic department declined to comment for this story.

The reaction time by the housing department could have meant life or death for Blot because of the severity of her condition. She said doctors told her the mold from the apartment began reproducing in her system. This included two instances where she had to be rushed to the hospital because her throat was closing, once in Fairmont and another near her home in Miami.

Despite being removed from her living situation in College Park, Blot is still suffering from issues as a result of her exposure to mold in her apartment. Doctors have told her the mold could take as long as a year to exit her system, Blot said.

"I haven't been able to fully partake in school and there are certain classrooms where I can't really stand to be in because heat and humidity causes me to break out into hives more," Blot said. "A raise in temperature causes me to have if I'm in a particu-

lar environment. At points I'll have to leave class and go to the hospital."

Blot was undergoing treatments to have the mold removed from her body but had to stop because of the cost, she said. The medical personnel performing the treatments wanted Blot to have two sessions each week. However, each treatment cost almost \$200 and Blot said she did not have the money to continue them, she said.

Blot said she asked Moore about the possibility of being reimbursed for her medical expenses. Moore said Blot couldn't be compensated because it wasn't something FSU typically does, Blot said. Her parents are out as much as \$30,000 as a result of her health issues, Blot said.

The incidents and health issues have caused Blot to reflect on her experience at Fairmont State and the nature of the responses she received.

"I'd say look at my life the past seven months," Blot said. "Then tell me it's not a big deal. There's nothing else to say."

Students and their rights must be respected

The editorial staff of The Columns published a story April 13 about a form of black mold being found in student housing. Throughout the process of reporting, writing and vetting a lot was learned about journalism and the proper way to balance a story, present evidence and facts and rely on experts to back them up. We thought it would be evident that the article was a solid piece of well-researched journalism that both those involved in creating it and the school could be proud of.

We expected the story to be met with some criticism at first but that it would end up being praised by administrators for portraying the newspaper and the journalism program it represents in a good light. That has not been the case. The Columns has been the subject of skepticism, threats and outright bullying from university administrators since the story appeared.

While the issue of having mold in student housing was not positive for Fairmont State, the story nonetheless shed light on a health-related situation. In our estimation this gave the university the opportunity to hold up its hand, discuss the problem and do what was necessary to fix it.

However, administrators met the story with criticism before it came out. One recommended that we not print the article because university officials would not appreciate us showing a negative side of campus life. It was frustrating - to say the least - to find faculty members and administrators who were not supportive of further developing academic programs and student publications.

We did not seek out the story. It came to us through a raft of student complaints and anecdotes. We did not report the story because it was negative. We reported it because it was news that directly affected the student body. That is the job of a student newspaper. Faculty and students alike have taken it upon themselves to congratulate and thank us for a job well done. Comments about the story on social media have been almost universally positive.

EDITORIAL

Let us not be apathetic about our situation. Let us care about the world around us and the world that directly impacts us. Let us not be silent.

If problems such as mold in student housing had been properly addressed and remediated there would have been no mold story. Instead we are being criticized for printing the news. The focus should be on those who allowed this condition to occur and persist.

We are not begging for compliments. Nor are we asking administrators to love what we do. We are asking to be respected and supported as a group of students striving to report the news as it affects students. We feel it is important for FSU officials to stand behind us and recognize the positive impact the article has had.

This publication's job is not to set the university on a pedestal and polish its rims. It is to report the news in an unbiased way to give the students what they deserve - the truth. We attacked no one in the story. We simply printed the facts as we knew them. The Columns is disappointed in the administrators of this university for putting their personal agendas and well-being ahead of students and academics.

To top things off, this year has included a bit of a shake-up in the political atmosphere on campus as new administrators took up their jobs in some departments. In some instances their directives and policies led students to take part in a form of

activism not seen in several years, including a petition to save Raja the cat in December. Raja still resides in Prichard Hall and continues to draw a crowd of admirers.

There's a point in that story - student activism effected change on the campus. A total of 162 students banded together in a common cause. While that number represents just 4 percent of the approximately 4,000 FSU students, they managed to have an impact on decision-making. That says something. The point was further illustrated after a meeting in Prichard in February led to a new housing visitation policy.

Students have the right to exercise their rights. When they get together because they see something they don't agree with, good things tend to happen even if those things make the lives of those in charge a little more difficult. Those people should know that comes with the territory.

Students of Fairmont State University and Pierpont Community and Technical College should take this lesson to heart. There are a lot of problems on this campus. If we want to affect change for the betterment of our experience here, we need to take a greater role in righting the wrongs we see.

We're paying to go to school here. We have a right to help determine what sort of experience we get. We should make whatever effort is necessary to ensure that our rights - as consumers, student-workers and citizens - are respected.

The generation of Americans which - ironically - is now largely in positions of authority across the U.S. mostly grew up in the '60s and '70s, a period of protest. Students of that time stood up for what they thought was right. However, when students today stand up against things we don't agree with, those very people try to muzzle and stifle us.

Let us not be apathetic about our situation. Let us care about the world around us and the world that directly impacts us. Let us not be silent. Let the coming academic year be one of change for the betterment of students' lives at this university.

The Word:



George Wilmore, men's basketball graduate assistant coach

"That's fine. It would bring more opportunities for food for the students."



Audrey Sweeney, sophomore business major

"That'd be pretty awesome! I would totally go to the farmers' market."



Eric Floyd, junior office administration major

"That'd be pretty cool, I would go to it!"

Baltimore becomes Ferguson after death in police custody

Sarah Eacho

The six officers allegedly involved in Freddie Gray's arrest were charged by the Maryland State Attorney May 1 with a raft of offenses including second-degree murder, manslaughter, assault, false imprisonment and misconduct of office.

Gray, 25, was initially arrested April 12 for allegedly carrying an illegal switchblade. He fell into a coma and died April 19 after being transported in a police detention van. Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake said in a press conference that five of the six officers were in police custody.

"No one in our city is above the law," Blake was cited by WBAL-TV in Baltimore as saying in the press conference. "Justice must apply to us all equally."

Maryland state prosecutor Marilyn Mosby said in a press conference that the death of the 25-year-old Gray was a homicide and that his arrest was illegal, WBAL said. After the announcement motorists honked horns and people took to the streets in celebration, CNN reported.

The driver of the police van in which Gray rode, 45-year-old Caesar Goodson Jr., was charged with second-degree murder, the most serious charge in the list with a possible 30-year prison sentence. Others faced charges ranging from manslaughter to assault.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.WASHINGTONTIMES.COM

Protesters lined the streets of Baltimore to voice their opinions about Freddie Gray's death and address their civil rights concerns in lieu of local police being brought up on criminal charges.

A conviction on involuntary manslaughter or second-degree assault charges carries a 10-year prison term.

"To the people of Baltimore and the demonstrators across America, I heard your call for 'no justice, no peace,'" Mosby was cited by WBAL as saying during the press conference. "Your peace is sincerely needed, as I work to deliver justice on behalf of this young man."

In the wake of Gray's death communities began to protest, in some cases violently. Media reports tended to concen-

trate on the riots and burning buildings while in many cases ignoring more peaceful demonstrations. In response to the violence many Baltimoreans were supportive of what happened, even if they didn't necessarily agree with the way it was handled.

"If it wasn't for the fact that those 14-, 15- and 16-year-olds expressed themselves the way they did, we wouldn't have gotten as much attention," local resident Michael Mfume told the Baltimore Sun in an interview. "Now No. 44, President Obama himself, is

talking about it."

After the violence on April 27, the city of Baltimore declared a curfew that was eventually lifted May 3. After a request from the mayor, Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan declared a state of emergency in Baltimore, sending some 2,000 National Guardsmen to supplement the city's 5,000-strong civilian police force.

News of the riots and peaceful protests were discussed among FSU students. Some felt as the situation was out of hand.



PHOTO COURTESY OF TIME.COM

"They messed up their own community, it should have been handled differently," said Sociology sophomore C.J. Venable in an interview. "Violence doesn't solve violence."

Other students thought the protests were the right idea

but had been mishandled by the demonstrators who had turned their city on its head.

"It was ridiculous," said Luxon Louis, an exercise science junior, in an interview. "I think it should have been handled better, done more peacefully."

Police killings in U.S. under study

Daphne Beckwith

News headlines in the United States are full of police violence of late. There is a reason for that. As of April 27 there were 382 deaths by officers in the U.S. so far this year.

Those who died in police custody included 362 males, 19 females and one unknown gender, according to killed-by-police.net.

Races were broken down to show 142 white, 103 black, 54 Latino, nine others and 73 not listed, the website said. In contrast, the number of police killed in the line of duty by civilians is 38, the officer down memorial page website said.

The 2014 U.S. census indicated that while 13.2 percent of the total U.S. population is black, 28 percent of the deaths were black, more than twice their representation. The U.S. population consists of 77.5 percent whites and only 37.5 percent of the 381 killed were white, less than half their representation.

"We should not let the violence perpetrated by a few become an excuse to ignore the underlying problem: that millions of Americans feel powerless in the face of a system that is rigged against them," Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nevada) was cited by the National Journal as saying. "In a nation that prides itself on being a land of opportunity, millions of our fellow citizens live every day with little hope of building a better future, no matter how hard they try."

A breakdown of people killed by police shows one death every eight hours, The Free Thought Project said on its website. There is no government tracking system for such deaths, the site said. This has led private organizations, such as Killed by Police, to track the incidents, the website said. Riots have become commonplace in response to police brutality.

By comparison, in Canada 14 citizens were killed by police in 2014, 78 times less than in the United States, the website said. Its population is about 35 million, or about 12 percent of the American number. In the United Kingdom in the same year only one person was killed by officers, the website said; its population is about 64 million, or about 20 percent of the U.S. total. China reported 12 officer-related



COURTESY OF WWW.NBCNEWS.COM

Even though officers need protective gear for riots, the look portrays an intimidating presence.

deaths in 2014 even though it has several times more citizens than the U.S., the website said. Iceland has had one police-related fatality since it declared its independence in 1944, the website said.

"Right now unfortunately we are seeing too many instances where people just do not have confidence that folks are being treated fairly. In some cases those may be misconceptions but it some cases that's reality," President Barack Obama was cited by the Talking Points Memo as saying at the 2014 White House Tribal Nations Conference. "It is incumbent upon all of us as Americans, regardless of race, region, faith, that we recognize that is an American problem and not just a black problem or a brown problem. When anyone in this county is not being treated under the law that's a problem and it's my job as president to help solve it."

The problem with officer related deaths is not a racial problem like the media has

"We should not let the violence perpetrated by a few become an excuse to ignore the underlying problem."

- Sen. Harry Reid

been stating, but rather an American problem. The issue falls on the conduct of the police force and how they interact with their society, the brucewilder.blogspot website said. There are many whites joining in the protests because they are voicing their anger and resentment for a problem that affects everyone, not just the black community, the website said.

The Exam Jam

A DUCK AND BEE CARTOON

By Eric Skinner



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More technology options to be available in the classroom

Brittany Mullins

Fairmont State's IT department is working to offer a wider range of technologies in the classroom. For example, Moodle is just one of the new technologies that will be available in the fall.

Moodle is a system much like Blackboard but it is more cost efficient and accessible from any device. It is also supported internationally and has over 65 million users according to the Moodle website. Some other technology options available to professors are Lib-guides, which offers faculty an opportunity to communicate with students online, Office 365, which can be used for video conferencing, Web 2.0 tools and Livestream.

"We do not necessarily limit faculty to one product," said John Lympny, FSU's vice president and chief information officer, in an interview. "In the past there was more of a desire to do that, but today we don't really have one LMS (learning management system). Faculty are free to use what they feel they need to as a part of academic freedom. They're looking to use products that will be best for the content and discipline to help the students succeed."

However, it's not just faculty who can use new IT offerings. Some students say that they would like to see more technology options available in the classroom.

"I have not had any problems with Blackboard," said Peyton Konchesky, a freshman criminal justice major, in an interview. "I like Blackboard but I would like to see more technology options

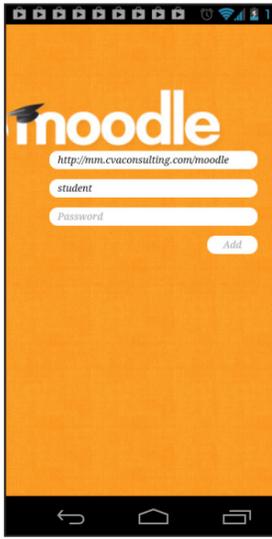


PHOTO COURTESY OF TRACKER.MOODLE.ORG

One of the perks of Moodle is its mobile-friendly platform, which may be easier to use for students than Blackboard.

available. I do enjoy all the online assignments and when they do use technology."

Both students and faculty members have reported problems with Blackboard in the past. Twelve outages have been reported on the IT website since November, which led some students to believe the current system should be fixed before new offerings were available.

"I use Blackboard and I always have some type of problem," said Janayla Byrd, a sophomore engineering major, in an interview. "I would not really like to see a new program. Instead they need to fix the problems."

Blackboard, warts and all, costs the university \$80,000 a year, Lympny said. He suggested saving this money and redirecting it to other ac-

tivities. Moodle, which has many of the same features as Blackboard, would be free to the university and carries no licensing fees.

"The question is: Is Blackboard so good that it is worth not investing in any other technologies that might support students?" said Lympny. "Is it that good that we want to spend that much there that the other tools are not available or supported?"

Moodle is an open source program that promotes free access, so it is easier to use than Blackboard. It has a simpler design while incorporating many of the same features as Blackboard and can be accessed on any computer or smartphone without having to download an app.

A select group of faculty will begin to explore Moodle over the summer. If all goes well some professors will begin using the new system for classes in the fall. It will be the professor's decision as to which program they use and some classes may permanently remain on Blackboard.

"The way it works is that Blackboard is charged per section, so if we could move half the sections over to Moodle we'll be able to achieve some savings from Blackboard and we can relocate that towards other technology projects," said Shane Jordan, the manager of web and media systems, in an interview.

"I cannot say if all classes will switch over. It depends on if all the features used on Blackboard are available on Moodle. However if Blackboard is better suited for the course than it would be best to leave it on Blackboard."

Visitation policy revised due to SGA, RAC joint effort

Jillian Amos

The student housing visitation policy has been revised after cooperation between the Student Government Association and the university housing office.

The new policy states that dorm residents can have overnight guests seven nights a week instead of only Friday and Saturday nights. Each dorm will be able to decide whether the guest can be of the same sex or of the opposite sex.

The change goes into effect this fall and not all dorms will be affected at once as the policy will be rolled out one dorm at a time. It was not known which dorm will be granted access to the policy first. Students expressed enthusiasm about the move.

"This is exciting," said Contrara Huffman, a sophomore physical therapy assistant major. "It finally feels like the voice of the little people was heard. I won't be in the dorms next year but I'm happy my input could help students in the future."

The SGA met with students in each dorm in February to discuss concerns about the visitation policy. SGA president Mitch Moore, the Resident Advisors Committee (RAC) and SGA members hosted the meetings and encouraged discussion about a new policy. Students had the opportunity to discuss the aspects of on-campus housing that they enjoyed, those they wanted to see altered and specific changes they would like to see implemented.

When the meetings were held in February, the visitation policy stated that all



PHOTO COURTESY OF @MITCHFSU

Student body President Mitch Moore helped coordinate the policy drafting effort.

guests had to sign in at the desk upon entering the dorm, that they must be escorted everywhere they went inside the building, that they must leave the building by midnight, and they can only stay overnight if it is Friday or Saturday after the appropriate paperwork was filled out.

There were several ideas suggested as to how to improve the policy, one of them being the so-called "roommate agreement," a negotiable contract that roommates would create with their RA at the beginning of the school year. It could include things like visitation hours for guests, a time for lights out and things that would help a roommate relationship run smoothly. If problems ever arose, the RA could refer back to the agreement and settle the dispute.

After doing extensive research on visitation policies at other schools, Moore and several SGA and RAC members drafted three proposals. They then spoke with Alicia Moore, the university's housing director, who met with other university officials and

changed the policy. Some students said the feeling of participation in real change was a real eye-opener.

"It feels like a huge feat," said Jordan Losh, a freshman secondary biology education major, in an interview. "I've only been on campus for two semesters and I've already experienced a student-led change in a university policy. It's awesome, really. It shows that the school actually does put emphasis on addressing student concerns."

Alicia Moore agreed that making students feel as though they are being heard was making a difference.

"I think the policy change continues to show that we are listening to our students," she said in an email. "We are doing our best to meet the needs of the overall community."

SGA's Moore said the experience should make students feel more involved in what was going on at FSU and could help build momentum as more changes are sought.

"I want everybody to take this change as an example," he said. "Students can look forward to more things coming. I am currently working with some other campus administration on a couple different aspects of campus life and it should help with making things more accessible and affordable."

Students are urged to talk to the SGA regarding any concerns or ideas. SGA president Moore can be contacted via email at mitchfsusga@gmail.com or by his cell phone at 304.815.2131. Students can also visit the SGA office on the second floor of the Falcon Center.

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BOG policies help to ensure student rights

Online tools include FSU handbook

Tyler Wilson
Anna DeLong

The majority of students attending Fairmont State are U.S. citizens, which grants them certain rights they can choose to exercise. However, there is an additional set of rights and responsibilities assigned to the student body derived from the policies implemented by FSU's Board of Governors (BOG).

The principal BOG policy that outlines student rights is Policy 17, which can be found on the FSU website along with the other BOG rules and guidelines. Students can also better ascertain what the school expects them to do and what they are entitled to do through reviewing the student handbook, which can be found using the search feature on the university's website.

Students on campus reserve the right to voice their opinions about issues they disagree with as they pertain

to the campus community or not. Some students have a firm grasp of their constitutional protections and what they should expect from FSU.

"Being a student paying for school, I have the right to be offered a quality education, to study freely without discrimination and to be treated as an adult," said Jamie Paletta, a freshman secondary education and English major, in an interview. "I believe students do practice their rights while others may choose to go with the flow and do as they are told no matter if it is right or wrong."

The BOG explicitly states within Policy 17 that students have a right to what Paletta refers to. Section 4 of that policy says students have the right to have access to campus resources and facilities; to espouse causes; to inquire, discuss and evaluate; and to have a free and independent student press which adheres to the canons of responsible journalism.

The Student Press Law Center (SPLC), a legal resource for student publications, describes what rights they should expect on cam-



PHOTO BY CAROLYN NOLAN

Those attending Fairmont State are covered by Board of Governors rules including the right to a free press.

puses across the country and describes what is considered protected speech. For in-

'Being a student paying for school, I have the right to be offered a quality education, to study freely without discrimination and to be treated as an adult.'

- Jamie Paletta

school, according to the SPLC website. However, those publications cannot perpetrate the errors of others or expect phrases such as "in my opinion" or "alleged" to shield them from legal action, the site said.

As for how students perceive the way their rights are protected on campus, there are a variety of opinions. Some are supportive of the university.

"It seems Fairmont does a good job of trying to make sure everyone's right are taken seriously," said Bryan Carroll, a senior electronics engineering technology major, via Facebook. "I have seen many cases where students have been upset over a pressing matter, voiced their opinions to make a difference and actions were taken in a positive

manner."

However, some students were critical of the university administration while being supportive of the faculty. "I feel that my rights as a student in the classroom are respected," said Christina Satterfield, a junior English education major, said via Facebook. "I have wonderful professors that have taught me a great deal about life and the content I'm studying. Do I feel respected by the institution? No. I feel that they care mostly about money not the students themselves."

There are entities that help students who feel their rights are being restricted or limited through aiding in working through the legal system and by promoting awareness of what student rights are. One is the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). It has a library of works that explain an individual's rights on college campuses across the U.S. It also fights court cases across the country at the behest of those suffering an alleged infringement of their rights by those in positions of authority. See thefire.org for details.

Free Comic Book Day highlights culture, history

Eliza Cercone

The first Saturday of May doesn't just mark Kentucky Derby day. It also means Superman, Hulk and Spiderman day as Free Comic Book Day was celebrated by many comic book specialty shops.

The event was created in 2002 to boost interest in the comic community. Comic books were popularized during the late 1930s and are considered an American art form, according to the Free Comic Book Day website. Comics vary in genre and form, ranging from Asian manga to science fiction and graphic novels, said the website.

"Well, before WWII comics existed, but during the war they turned into mainstream propaganda to increase moral of the public and inspire young men to join the army, mainly through Superman and Captain America," said Erika Johnson, a senior theatre major, in a Facebook message. "Both of them have beaten up Hitler and, due to these comics, there was a spike in enlistment."

The most common comic characters are superheroes, often considered to be modern mythology, said the website. Manga, a genre now being popularized in the U.S., has many subcategories and is often read right to left due to being translated from Japanese. Graphic novels are il-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SPOTWELLNESS.COM

Vintage editions of works such as Superman are coming back in to style via the big screen.

lustrated books with different subcategories. Popular books such as the Harry Potter series are often reprinted as graphic novels, according to Bloomsbury Publishing Plc's website.

Superman, the first superhero, was featured in Action Comics #1, a copy of which recently sold for \$3.2 million according to The Guardian's website. Action Comics was

owned by Detective Comics Inc. before becoming DC Comics, according to their website.

For free comic book day at Long Island's Fourth World Comics, a special DC Comics: Divergence was released for the event. "Batman" writer Scott Snyder was there to meet fans and sign books along with writers for "Bat-

man Eternal" and "Earth 2: World's End," according to the DC website.

Marvel comics was founded five years after DC in 1939, according to the Marvel website. Their first superhero was the Human Torch and the villain Namor the Submariner. Despite the debate on which company is better, Marvel is the more successful. The new

'People like the movies because they are lazy and would rather sit and watch a movie over actually opening a book and reading.'

- Kent Daniels

Avengers movie, "The Age of Ultron," was the second-biggest movie opening in history according to entertainment website Variety.com.

"People like the movies because they are lazy and would rather sit and watch a movie over actually opening a book and reading," said junior theatre and theatre education major Kent Daniels in a Facebook message. "Also, comic books have a reputation as being 'nerdy' or 'lame' and are put off as uninteresting because of that stereotype."

Marvel debuted special editions for free comic book day including "Secret Wars" and "All-new, All-Different Avengers." The Secret Wars comic is a prologue to the new series, with the first official edition released a week after Free Comic Book Day, said the event's site. The comic will also feature an Avengers and Attack on Titan crossover that has never been released in the United States before.

Three local locations participated in this year's event. The festivities at Four Horsemen Comics and Gaming in Morgantown included a free Star Wars comic book to anyone who dressed up in that theme, according to its Facebook page.

The shop is the largest comic and gaming shop in the tri-state area and features tournaments and daily events, according to its site.

Both locations of Comic Paradise Plus participated in the event as well. The first location in Fairmont has been in operation for 34 years and is the oldest comic book shop in the tri-state area, according to their website. It featured Steve Totin, an artist from Pittsburgh, according to the shop's Facebook page. The company's Westover shop had special guest Chad Cicconi, a published comic book artist, according to Cicconi's squarespace page.

United States begins Syrian rebel training initiative

Tyler Wilson

The U.S. military has begun a long-awaited initiative designed to train a small force of Syrian rebels with the intent on having them take the fight to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which controls parts of Syria.

Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter said that approximately 90 people were being funded by the U.S. government to undergo training at a secure location, the Washington Post reported May 7. The location of the first training site is in Jordan according to CBS News.

U.S. support is principally taking the form of basic military gear, vehicles, small arms, ammunition, and funding, according to the Washington Post. However, there is concern over whether the regime will interfere with the U.S.-backed moderate rebels' efforts.

"If they are contested by the regime, again, we would have some responsibility to help them," Carter was cited by the Post as saying. "We

have not decided yet in detail how we would exercise that responsibility."

The training program would eventually incorporate more people and expand to sites in the region including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Turkish officials announced that training would begin there the weekend of May 8, according to CBS News. However, Jordanian government spokesman Mohammad Momani told The Associated Press that the program actually launched in Jordan earlier than what was announced by the Pentagon, CBS News said.

Almost 4,000 fighters applied to join the program but only 400 were accepted after a rigorous vetting program, a report cited by the BBC said. The reason behind the intense background checks, according to CBS News, was to ensure that extremists and enemy combatants were removed from those who would partake in the program.

The ultimate goal of the program is to reach a point in



PHOTO COURTESY OF CBSNEWS.COM

The U.S. military has provided funding, equipment and instruction to forces opposing Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. The program accepted 400 combatants according to the BBC.

which it is training approximately 5,400 Syrians a year across the Middle East, the

Post said.

After completion of the training program, the rebel fighters will be deployed into

Syria with the explicit aim of tackling ISIL fighters and will be backed by a U.S.-led coalition in their efforts against

ISIL.

The training initiative is designed to provide the rebels who cycle through the program with knowledge in basic military tactics, the Post said.

However, the exact time the rebels will be ready to hit the battlefield was not disclosed by the Pentagon, the BBC said. Officials cited by the Washington Post claimed it will be weeks to months before the rebels are ready.

The Bashar al-Assad regime has been fighting a multi-faceted civil war since the Arab Spring of 2011. The fighting in Syria is between ISIL, regime forces, Jabhat al-Nusra (the regional al-Qaida affiliate), Kurdish peoples and the secular U.S.-backed Free Syrian Army.

After four years of intense fighting there has been more than 300,000 casualties, according to CNN. More than 7.5 million people have been designated as internally displaced persons and almost 4 million have fled the country all together, according to the BBC.

Head baseball coach fired after eight years

Tommy Retton

Fairmont State baseball coach George Yanchak has been fired after eight seasons and the search for a new coach is officially underway.

"As of this week, and with the conclusion of the recent baseball season, Fairmont State University is making a change in leadership in the position of head baseball coach," said athletic director Timothy McNeely in an email interview. "We really appreciate Yanchak's service and contributions to FSU over the years and wish him well in his future endeavors."

Yanchak was 120-249 during his tenure. FSU went 9-34 this season including a 8-32 mark in Mountain East Conference (MEC) play. His 2010 squad posted a FSU-worst record of 6-42.

There were some positives during Yanchak's term despite all the negatives. He helped coach Zac Campbell to West Virginia Intercollegiate Athletic Conference pitcher of the year in 2008 and won WVIAC coach of the year in 2009, when he led his team to 23 wins — their most since 2006 — and fell one game short of a conference championship appearance.

Yanchak departs with the four seniors he recruited and coached since the beginning, including pitchers Jamie Al-lard, Ryan Badertscher and Corey Lilly and catcher Frankie Wilson. Badertscher, a senior, was sad to see Yanchak go but excited for the new era of Falcon baseball.

"Coach Yanchak's departure must mean a new chapter in the program," he said in an interview. "The returners need to remember to turn the page and not dwell on it."

Badertscher was thankful for the role Yanchak played in his life the past four years.

"As a coach I will always thank him for leading us to the back-to-back semifinals, but as a person I will always be grateful for the opportunity he gave me as a transfer and for allowing me to come and play with this great group of guys," he said.



PHOTO BY LOGAN MOORE

The vacancy for the position came about after George Yanchak was released. He had a 120-249 career record.

Fairmont State was knocked out of playoff contention in early April, once again leaving the Falcons out of the postseason.

Financial issues relating to the problem have been at the forefront of McNeely's thoughts about the program and he said everyone in the business office has acknowledged that as a problem.

"The reality is that at the Division II level programs aren't fully funded like they are traditionally at the Division I level," he said. "We face financial challenges across the entire department, not just baseball. FSU has experienced general budget reductions over the last two years and this impacts every department."

McNeely iterated his hope that Fairmont State can continue to look for ways to be more complete, relevant and innovative, especially as it relates to external fundraising to help baseball be more successful.

Badertscher was not shy to voice his opinion about the financial issues in regards to the baseball program, stating that monetary support was definitely lacking.

"You can't field a team that is going to compete with top teams when you have just enough guys to play a series," said Badertscher, part of a pitching crew that finished sixth in the MEC with 188 strikeouts. "Not to mention we don't have a fully paid coach who can go out and recruit like other sports. Plus, even if you did recruit it is going to be hard to convince players to come here and get little to no scholarships."

Despite monetary issues, a head coaching vacancy and clear frustration off the field, the Falcons return 28 players next season including 23 freshmen and sophomores.

A young foundation and new direction may be just what they need to get them off of the ground for the 2016 season.

Softball team exits MEC tourney after early losses

Tommy Retton

Fairmont State's softball season came to an abrupt end after the Falcons were bounced from the Mountain East Conference (MEC) tournament last week, falling to the University of Charleston 5-0 and eventual champions Notre Dame College 5-2.

After a hot 10-3 start to the season the Lady Falcons cooled off, losing three straight in mid-April to conference opponents. They still managed to finish with a 23-16 record, including 13-13 in the conference. Seven of the 12 teams in the MEC finished with a conference record of .500 or better, creating a difficult path to win the championship.

Despite their final disappointing loss to NDC, Coach Rick Wade expressed how proud he is of his squad's efforts while giving due respect to Notre Dame College as well.

"We didn't lack anything.

The ladies played hard," said Wade in an interview. "NDC got two crucial hits that scored their runs and made softball plays at the right time."

Wade said the hardest part was seeing his eight seniors leave, a recruiting class that won a conference championship and set a school record for wins in a season (37) in 2013. He added it will especially be hard to watch the departure of senior Carly Mundie, who has been the foundation to his team's success.

"Carly has led us with the big hit for four years," Wade said. "She set the home run and RBI record and played great defense at three different positions."

Mundie, the team's right fielder, now holds the school record for home runs (36) and RBI (42) in a career. She was more than dissatisfied with her team's loss, but had only positives to take away from this season. "I had the chance to finish my

career with a great group of girls who have a ton of potential to lead the team to a championship," said Mundie in an email interview, referring to a squad that will bring back 16 players next season. "Luck was never on our side, but the talent on this team is tremendous."

Amanda Skidmore, the starting first baseman, also had encouraging things to say despite her team's early tournament exit. When asked what she can take from this season, she said the love of the game that all eight seniors brought day in and day out will always be the first thing she remembers.

"Wins and losses are just numbers but the feeling of making clutch plays and the drive to win is a feeling we constantly had," Skidmore, also a senior, said in an interview. "I'll never forget the friendships I've made and how it felt to play on the same field as my teammates."

The Lady Falcons earned a sizeable number of individual accolades as well. Mundie, Skidmore and junior Sissy Stubbs were all named second team All-MEC with a combined 83 RBI, 15 home runs and a .382 batting average.

For the seniors, though, individual rewards don't really compare to what the last four years have meant to them. Through ups and downs, wins and losses, success and heartbreaks, Skidmore said playing collegiate softball was definitely worth it.

"I wouldn't trade the last four years for anything," she said. "I am so thankful for the many people I have met, the different places we've traveled to and the ability to continue playing the sport I've grown up with and love playing."

The Falcons part ways with Mundie, Skidmore, Aja Gosper, Alesha Jones, Sarah Parsons, Terri Lynn Wolfe, Ashley Knight, and Ericka Aversa.

The returning players and new recruits will have some big spikes to fill when next season begins in 2016.



PHOTO BY FIGHTINGFALCONS.COM

Carly Mundie makes her exit as a Falcon after setting FSU records for most RBI and home runs during her career.

Winners and losers abound so far in NBA playoffs

Bleacher Report

We are still waiting for the NBA playoffs to crown a champion. We needn't wait any longer for it to yield a sizable collection of both victors and vanquished.

A discernible field of early-playoff winners and down-and-outers is swiftly emerging. These are not winners and losers in the truest sense of the words. A team that advanced into the second round isn't necessarily a winner, just as a player bounced in the first round isn't a surefire loser.

Winners, be they players, coaches or teams, have gained something substantial from their latest postseason push regardless of how long that push lasted.

It could relate to winning a championship, acquiring job security or even improving or building upon preceding reputations.

Losers, by comparison, have been wronged by the playoffs in some way. Certain teams might have been eliminated too early and face severe repercussions, coaches' futures might hang in the balance or players may have injured themselves or their reputations.

Grab those paper pitchforks and tinfoil trophies. The time to deliver mid-postseason assessments is upon us.

Losers: Rajan Rondo

Rondo entered the postseason picture with a chance to quell all the uncertainty surrounding his playing style, health and star status ahead



PHOTO COURTESY OF WWW.THEEPOCHTIMES.COM

Los Angeles Clippers power forward Blake Griffin has proven his ability when guard Chris Paul went down with an injury. The Clippers are facing the Houston Rockets in the second round.

of free agency. He left facing even more questions.

Never mind that the Dallas Mavericks fell to the Houston Rockets without putting up much of a fight. Rondo was barely part of the 4-1 drubbing they suffered. Head coach Rick Carlisle yanked him from the action 30 seconds into the second half of Game 2 and Rondo never returned.

Though the Mavericks tried to sling his absence as a back injury, it didn't take a nuclear physicist who minored in cognitive psychology to figure out what was happening. Rondo never fit in with the Mavericks and they were trying to help him save face ahead of free agency, according to ESPN.com's

Tim MacMahon. Mission not accomplished.

Winner: Dwight Howard

Yes, the days of Howard averaging 25 points and 15 rebounds during the playoffs are gone. That's only because he isn't putting an entire Orlando Magic team on his back any more.

Make no mistake, Howard is carrying the Houston Rockets to a degree with his play at center. His defense is helping limit opponents to sub-45 percent shooting at the rim and he's blocking shots in obnoxious volume, keeping the Rockets afloat.

They have been a defensive disaster without him, allowing significantly more points per

100 possessions when he's off the floor.

The quickness with which Howard is rotating from one player to another and getting off the ground to contest shots invokes memories from five years ago, as does his pick-and-roll destruction on offense. He ranks third in points scored per possession as the roll man and is burying more than 70 percent of his shots in such situations.

Fresh off a regular season where he missed more games (41) than his previous 10 years combined (36), playing at such a high level is huge for Howard. He does need to stop straying from his offensive strengths so much.

Overall, though, Howard is doing solid work, proving

yet again that no matter how Houston's season ends, talk of his demise remains grossly exaggerated.

Losers: Tom Thibodeau

Thibodeau, who coaches the Chicago Bulls, isn't your average loser. Some might even argue he's a winner.

Former NBA MVP Derrick Rose is semi-healthy for the first time since 2012 and the Bulls look like a genuine contender at times.

Even after being pummeled by the Cavaliers in Game 2 of their best-of-seven series, Chicago has stolen home-court advantage and Cleveland is still without Kevin Love the rest of the way.

There's a real chance the Bulls respond to their current situation by making the Eastern Conference Finals, perhaps even making a beeline for the NBA Finals.

None of which suggests Thibodeau is a loser. Then again, the Bulls' postseason push doesn't need to imply anything. The rumor mill is insinuating everything.

Joining the unemployment ranks isn't a concern of Chicago's head coach. Thibodeau will find work elsewhere if he's sent packing.

Enduring such uncertainty while in the thick of a championship hunt is the worst. It doesn't matter if it's warranted or unwarranted, or if Thibodeau continues to put on a brave face, or if the Bulls keep winning to the point that their coach's job is safe. He's still working under a cloud.

Winner: Blake Griffin

The legend of Blake Griffin continues to grow. Once considered a byproduct of superstar guard Paul's playmaking chops with the Los Angeles Clippers, All-Star forward Griffin has morphed into a different player entirely. It's not just that he's a more well-rounded superstar. It's that he's a well-rounded superstar who is capable of carrying the Clippers on his own.

Paul is being forced to watch Round 2 unfold from the sidelines as his hamstring heals, yet the Rockets haven't run the Clippers ragged. On the contrary, it's the Clippers who gained control of the series by bilking Houston of home-court advantage. It's Griffin who spearheaded that initial cause with a triple-double, tallying 26 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists.

It's also Griffin who averaged 24.4 points, 13.3 rebounds, 8.1 assists and 1.3 blocks through his first eight playoff contests. The last player to maintain those statistical benchmarks during postseason play? Nobody.

Everything about Griffin's postseason performance thus far is unprecedented for both himself and the league. More importantly, everything about his effort is forcing even the most stubborn folks to realize what many began understanding long ago: unlike David West, Paul's former sidekick with the New Orleans Hornets/Pelicans, Griffin is the byproduct of no one.

Filling up Fairmont's blank spaces with art

Sarah Eacho

With Old Man Winter finally leaving Fairmont the natural scenery on campus has been coming alive again. That kind of colorful presentation may help transform a blank space on campus.

The library tunnel is a main thoroughfare for students on campus, protecting them from the elements and giving them a place to talk with friends when the weather is nice.

However, it is a completely bare space with the exception of the occasional cigarette butt.

That's why the Student Government Association (SGA) decided to have open submissions for anyone who wanted to submit ideas for a mural to transform the area.

Hoping to start a new tradition of painting and repainting the wall by the library, the student government sent out a mass email asking for submissions so a mural could be painted in the tunnel.

They chose Juan Guerra, a studio art junior, as the winner. His submission, which will cost around \$500 to execute and will remain in place for five years, has themes relating to Fairmont State's 150th anniversary including



PHOTO BY CAROLYN NOLAN

The library tunnel will be painted with a mural this summer and will be repainted every five years according to the SGA.

The Columns and the Be First logo.

A delay in the delivery of the paint will put a hold on the original plan to have the mural done by the end of the semester. However, the painting

should be completed during the summer months.

"It would depend on the mural," said Janayla Byrd, a sophomore engineering major, about the project. "It would have to be something

meaningful or it would be pointless."

After a year of planning and approval, SGA secretary Rachel Ball hopes next year there will be more student involvement and that this will

be the newest tradition on campus.

"I hope that it allows students to have pride in Fairmont," said Ball, a sophomore communications major.

"By including students in

aspects of campus I hope that they can look back and say that they are proud to have gone here."

While the mural may brighten up a student's day, the lack of lighting in the tunnel may not allow it to be portrayed at its best. The issue has been brought to the Physical Plant's attention in hopes of highlighting the work, Ball said.

With a mural going on every other panel and each lasting for five years, the artwork could start a new tradition.

"Depending on what the theme is, I think it would be a great idea," said Rochelle Woodson, a freshman criminal justice major, in an interview. "I feel like the school could use something new and exciting. We have a lot of nice landmarks on campus that people enjoy, so it would be interesting to see something new."

From ringing and saluting the victory bell, to its last ring after the Second World War, to the tradition of painting the same bell, Fairmont State University has many traditions that make students proud to have gone.

The Student Government Association hopes the latest

Time may be ripe for farmers' market on campus

Brad Riffie

Being able to buy fresh vegetables and other locally farm grown foods on campus could become the next hip trend at FSU, but students and faculty members will have to put forth the initiative so this consumer resource can become available.

If Fairmont State shows interest in hosting such a market, it would have to join the West Virginia Farmers Market Association (WVFMA) along with every other similar organization in the state. The association's mission is to provide resources and support connections that enhance the economic growth and sustainability of West Virginia farmers markets, according to wvfarmers.org.

The WVFMA is a membership-based group supported in part by both membership fees and grant dollars, its website said.

For students who are looking for alternative ways to stock their kitchens, an organization and event like a farmer's market could provide that benefit.

"It would definitely give students more choices when

'To improve campus life students have to become more involved. Students should be standing in line to form a group like this.'

-Nikolay Seymenov

it comes to buying fresh produce and foods," said junior Nathan Fox, national security and political science major, in an interview. "A farmers' market sounds interesting and might add a little character to FSU's campus life, especially on the weekends when there isn't much going on."

Before plans can be made for a farmers' market, a FSU student or employee must sponsor the proposition and volunteer to head its campaign. After the market has an established leader he or she would form a committee, similar to other clubs on cam-



PHOTO COURTESY OF FARMERS' MARKET FACEBOOK

Fresh organic vegetables and fruits from local growers are common staples at outdoor markets. Hosting such events at Fairmont State would require university approval.

pus, and then submit a request to join WVFMA. This is basically how any organization is chartered on campus.

For the project to take off it would require students to actively participate, which has been lacking in the FSU community. Some students think otherwise, encouraging their fellow classmates to step up and make things happen.

"I think it's a great idea and students should support some-

thing like this," said Nikolay Seymenov, a freshman student computer science major, in an interview. "To improve campus life students have to become more involved. That means supporting things that work, offering more to the community and making life more diverse around here. Students should be standing in line to form a group like this."

Once the committee is

formed its members would have to reach out to local farmers and gather enough vendors to make the market worth hosting. Each vendor must be a state-registered business and also be insured.

Cities across the state have already established events like this including Fairmont, which hosts a farmers' market downtown during the spring and summer. Some FSU administrators think having

something like that on campus would be great idea.

"I would love to have a farmers' market on campus," said Geneva Hines, the director of international student services, in an interview. "I know the international students would too. Many of them like to cook their own food and don't have a means to go to markets in other cities. They like healthy vegetables and anything they can get (that's) organic."

Not only would the market help support local farming, it would also give students the opportunity to buy healthier foods of higher quality than they might be able to purchase at the local grocery store or in the Falcon Center cafeteria.

"If the farmers can actually make a profit on campus and there are enough students and community members to support it, then it would be a great addition to campus life," said Mark Husk, an adjunct psychology professor, in an interview. "I know the farmers' market in downtown Fairmont at Veterans Square is a neat thing. It would be wonderful to see programs like this continue to grow."

Coal Country offers outdoor fun, learning opportunities

Anna Wyont

Anyone who has driven north on I-79 has probably seen an unlikely roadside view: a 22-foot tall metal statue of a coal miner that rotates on a large platform. "Big John," as he's known, resides on the property of Coal Country Mini-Golf and Batting Cages.

The facility, which has been in business since 1998, came by its name honestly. Michael Rohaly, its owner, worked in the coal industry for many years in several positions after continuing his education.

Having owned the property for a few years, he decided that something should be done to celebrate the heritage of coal mining in this area. Along the same lines, he noticed that there was no miniature golf course in the area, so he decided to incorporate the two ideas into one business.

The mini-golf course has the standard 18 holes, each featuring equipment that came straight from the mines. There is a posted description next to each hole that informs customers about everything that individual piece of equipment did for the mining process.

The equipment was donated by several mining locations



PHOTO BY LOGAN MOORE

Big John, a 22-foot-tall metal coal miner, can be seen from Interstate 79 by anyone passing by as a marker for the course which is located at 22 Coal Country Lane in Fairmont.

including the Humphrey mine in Morgantown and the Loverridge mine in Marion County as well as the Robinson Run, Arkwright and Blacksville mines in Monongalia County.

Some of the equipment may look downright odd to those unfamiliar with the trade. One of the large and unusual pieces on the course is a shearer drum, which has a large circular center piece that has a perimeter lined by

smaller cylinders.

The cylinders act as picks that chip away at coal as it is moved along the wall of the mine.

"I really enjoy being able to learn about the equipment and industry," said Abby Quinn, a sophomore business major, in an interview. "It also helps that I get to spend time outside while doing so."

Customers also have access to batting cages at Coal

Country, which were added to the business a year or two after it opened. Although it isn't coal mining themed, it's another way for people to get out in the nice weather and spend time doing something active. There is also a concession stand in operation so customers can enjoy a treat while getting some exercise.

One mini-golf game for adults costs \$5 while children under 12 years old and seniors

pay \$4 per game. The batting cages use a token system and 20 pitches per token costs \$1.

The facility also houses non-recreational activities. It is the home of the Northern Appalachian Coal Mining Heritage Association (NACMHA), which focuses on educating the public on the region's mining heritage and preserving physical artifacts as well as memories. It was established in 2000 but the physical location wasn't decided upon until 2005, when it became a museum on Coal Country grounds.

The museum is in a separate building. Although it may be small, it provides an extensive look into the experience of coal mining. Local community members have donated items that are on display in the museum and set up an exhibit titled "Safety in Underground Coal Mining," which walks visitors through the experience of being processed into the mine for a day's work.

Other activities such as a coal-shoveling station are offered to make the experience as interactive as possible. Most of the museum is meant to be historical while offering a modern twist.

The facility also offers a virtual mine tour. The pro-

gram is on a computer and offers a simulation that takes users through what it's like to walk through a mine.

"It's pretty representative, I think, of today's coal mines," said Rohaly in an interview.

NACMHA meets monthly with the goal of preserving the mining culture in this area. They aim to recognize miners, fallen and living. Their main event, a swap meet, occurs annually on the Saturday nearest Dec. 6, National Miners' Day.

The event is hosted by the Knights of Columbus and offers a place for historical societies and vendors from all over the country to set up their display.

People come to this meet to buy, sell, and trade coal mining items. Guests may bring items for amount appraisals. Informational booths are also a part of this event. They also provide a table for all miners to sit and fellowship about their memories in the industry.

Coal Country is located at 22 Coal Country Lane, which is just off Hopewell Road in Fairmont.

NACMHA asks for a \$1 donation for a visit to their museum; however, it is not mandatory. Check their Facebook page for coupon offers and announcements.