

A NATION IN THE STREETS
Fort Collins' ICE Out Protest

A ROCKY MOUNTAIN
STUDENT MEDIA PUBLICATION

WHY CAN'T I SAY (BLANK)?
What's so wrong about these words?

SELF-MEDICATION OR COPING?
A College Narrative



Volume 21 Issue 4 Spring 2026

COLLEGE AVENUE

TABOO EDITION

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This publication is not an official publication of Colorado State University, but is published by an independent corporation. Approximately 55% of Rocky Mountain Student Media Corp's income is provided by the Associated Students of Colorado State University (ASCSU) for the purpose of fostering student careers post-college and greater campus awareness and engagement.



FROM YOUR EDITORS

Some conversations are easy to avoid, especially in lifestyle magazines like *College Avenue* (*College Ave*). We naturally gravitate towards lighthearted, easy reads that align with our perceived reality. Though, within the current state of the world, our organization feels it is important to give the voices of our staff a platform to speak on issues they feel that matter. Not every story is comfortable, but it is important to make space for the conversations that challenge our preestablished ideas about the societies we live in.

Welcome to The Taboo Edition, the last printed issue of the 2025-26 school year where we break down stereotypes around those experiencing homelessness, try to pinpoint the line of when self medicating in college becomes a health concern, and delve into our federal government's recent push for language censorship.

We encourage you to read, take in, and investigate these issues yourself to come to your own conclusions. Happy reading and we hope that you stay tuned for next year's editions.

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Photo illustration by
Amanda Marken



Hookup Culture

YAY OR NAY?

ACCORDING TO A COLLEGE AVENUE POLL OF 29 STUDENTS CONDUCTED BY KENNEDY REISTER

SITUATIONSHIP (noun)

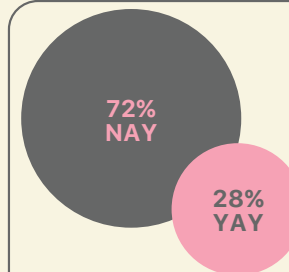
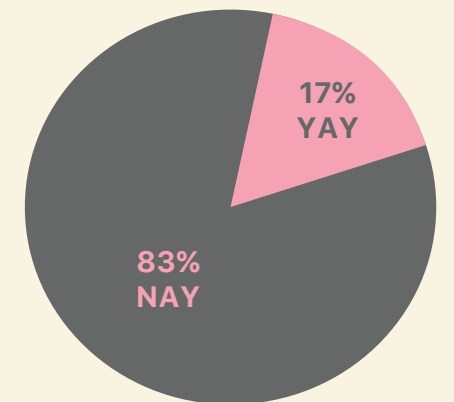
A romantic or sexual relationship that is not considered to be formal or established.

Colorado State University

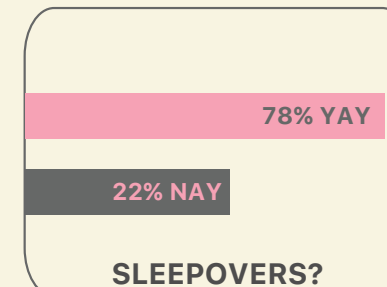
29 Participants

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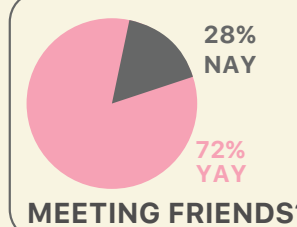
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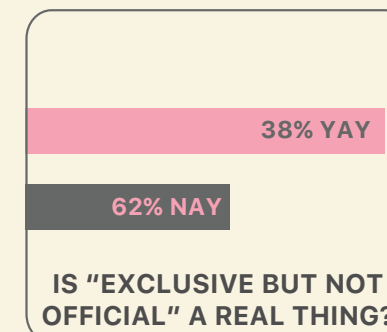
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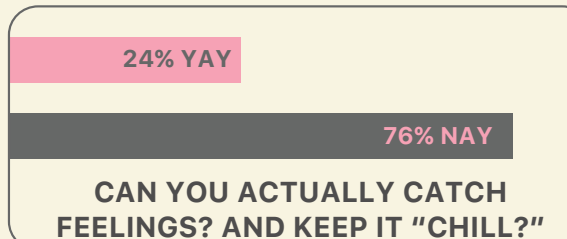
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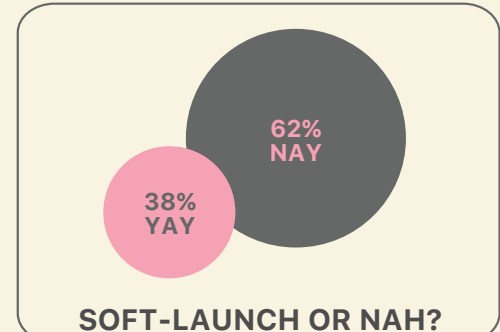
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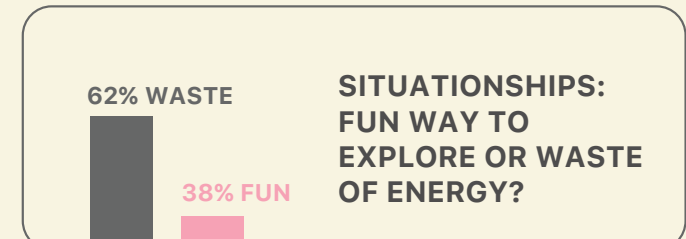
IS "EXCLUSIVE BUT NOT OFFICIAL" A REAL THING?



CAN YOU ACTUALLY CATCH FEELINGS? AND KEEP IT "CHILL?"



SOFT-LAUNCH OR NAH?



SITUATIONSHIPS: FUN WAY TO EXPLORE OR WASTE OF ENERGY?

DESIGN BY ETHAN MARTINEZ

A NATION IN THE STREETS

FORT COLLINS ICE OUT PROTEST

Written & photographed by Ashlyn Hoffman



The sound of chants and the rhythm of drums carried through Fort Collins as protesters gathered for the nationwide “Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Out” protest on Jan. 30, 2026. The crowd brought together multiple generations, from children to the elderly, including a large number of CSU students. The protest addressed the rising concerns surrounding current ICE practices. The major controversy lies with how the government has handled the detention, deportation and treatment of immigrants residing in the United States (U.S.). Some argue that ICE Agents, who serve as federal officers, have taken their enforcement methods too far. There have been documented cases in which removal operation actions resulted in family separations and, in some instances, deaths during or following detention. Others believe these operations support national security and reduce economic concerns.

Many protesters made signs, sharing messages of love and justice for all victims of ICE enforcements. Other protesters carried signs condemning the agents and President Trump’s support of these actions. The crowd, chants and posters all shared a clear purpose: to be present and to be heard. In doing so, the Fort Collins community joined in a national conversation about the rising immigration issue.



All photos taken in Old Town, Fort Collins, Colo., Jan. 30.



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P. LUKES '26

Written by Aubree Wood

WHY CAN'T I SAY ~~(BLANK)~~?

WHAT'S SO WRONG ABOUT THESE WORDS?

What's so controversial about words like "women," "equality," "race," or even "green"? And why would the federal government be inclined to include these, and a swath of others, on a list of federally banned words? What implications does this have on higher institutions like universities, and what does it mean for words to be federally banned in practice?

It has long been known from ancient to modern societies that language is extremely influential and has the power to shape worldviews and perceptions. As the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein put it, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." So what does it mean when government entities are the ones limiting and regulating the language that may be used in academic contexts?

On his first day in office, President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled, "Restoring Freedom of Speech and Ending Federal Censorship." Section one of the executive order explicitly states

"The project for which I received an NSF fellowship in 2018 would almost certainly not be funded today."

that "government censorship of speech is intolerable in a free society." That rings true on many levels, yet a growing list of banned words by the federal government is still underway. The words included on the list are silently being scrubbed and removed from government websites and documents. These words are an attempt from the Trump administration to erase mentions of what they call "illegal DEI" practices along with mentions of climate change, vaccines, and a myriad of other topics deemed unnecessary to mention or research.

Specifically, on college campuses and higher learning institutions, the language banned within these lists is necessary for research and the beneficence of human knowledge and progress. Federal bans, and most importantly, bans against particular facets of language, cannot force individuals nor universities to completely remove them from their vocabulary. But what it can do is threaten the federal funding allotted to these institutions and even negate research proposals that include said language.

Dr. Anna Mikkeltorg, an assistant professor of political science at CSU, had a portion of her PhD work sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) in 2018. In 2025, the NSF updated their statement of priorities, stating that funded research "should not prefer some groups at the expense of others or directly/indirectly exclude individuals or groups. Research projects with more narrow impact limited to subgroups of people based on protected class or characteristics do not effectuate NSF priorities."

"Given my focus on identity politics, it is impossible to describe much of my work

without using words that are currently being used to flag grants for further scrutiny on this basis. The project for which I received an NSF fellowship in 2018 would almost certainly not be funded today." Mikkeltorg shared.

Because words related to race, identity, and even environmental realities began to be flagged for review in 2025, researchers have attempted to find ways to describe their work without using "banned" words. And for some, like Dr. Mikkeltorg, whose work specifically calls on issues of identity and race, avoiding this language is nearly impossible. Instead, they have turned to private organizations to find necessary research funding. For example, in the past year, the American Political Science Association has received a record high number of grant applications without seeing any increase in their funding.

"This moment is a difficult one, and disproportionately so for researchers with limited alternative funding opportunities and those who are just beginning their careers," Mikkeltorg said.

As for universities, the federal government is unable to outright ban universities and individual researchers from using these words, but it can punish them by withholding or revoking federal funding. CSU's budget depends on hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding, creating a tension between attempting to support academic freedom while also keeping the lights on.

Now there exists a congestion between "students' right to learn about topics of scientific, social, and cultural importance as well as researchers' right to investigate these topics—and this new, really significant threat

to the economic wellbeing of their institutions,” Mikkleborg offered.

Censoring research and academic language while simultaneously declaring to end censorship and restore freedom of speech to the country is a complicated web to spin. And universities are in different situations to navigate the tension. Institutions with significant private endowments are in stronger positions to resist these regulations in more visible ways, while universities with fewer private funding sources have fewer options to push back against demands. In relation to research, “universities can work with scholars to pursue alternative funding sources and update their merit and tenure review procedures to account for the increased difficulty of obtaining federal grants,” Mikkleborg said.

As the reality of what these federal bans on language may look like in universities and government agencies unfolds, Dr. Mikkleborg offers that “nevertheless, scholarly research on questions related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and climate change (and the list goes on) will continue on.”

Design by Sarah Thomas

Now there exists a congestion between “students’ right to learn about topics of scientific, social, and cultural importance...”



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UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS

Written & photographed by Nicolette Wilks

Monte Wood holds his sign on a street corner while recovering from a severe car accident, Fort Collins, Colo., March 16.



As Coloradans, we are all familiar with the high cost of living and limited affordable housing. However, many struggle to find empathy for those who are currently unhoused. For some Fort Collins community members, there is a constant state of judgment, fear, and lack of understanding when they see camps, carts, and people asking for help. Assumptions pile up, not going unnoticed by unhoused people. Homelessness is not always triggered by individual shortcomings; it is often due to illness, injury, rent raises, and unforeseen circumstances. These negative beliefs harm the unhoused community and can make it harder for them to become financially independent.

“PEOPLE COME UP HERE AND DON'T UNDERSTAND I'M NOT HERE BECAUSE I'M A DRUG ADDICT; I'M NOT HERE BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO WORK; I'M HERE BECAUSE I CAN'T GET WORK.”



David Williams smiling for a portrait after sharing his story, Fort Collins, Colo., March 16.

Signage on the door of the Mason Street location of the Fort Collins Rescue Mission, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.



The Fort Collins Rescue Mission at 117 N Mason St offers night-by-night beds for Men, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.



I spoke to multiple people who have been judged and neglected before anyone has stopped to get to know them. They are all people with stories that deserve listeners. Each of them had messages for the community that would strengthen their relationships and allow them to be more successful in working towards a stable future. Two of the individuals who shared their stories are David Williams and Monte Wood.

David Williams has endured several life-altering events over the last few years, including a difficult divorce and cancer. During our conversation, he said, “People come up here and don’t understand I’m not here because I’m a drug addict; I’m not here because I don’t want to work. I’m here because I can’t get work.” I asked specifically what his experience was in Fort Collins and what he wished people knew about him. He responded with, “Your faith in humanity gets restored when you see that one car that pulls up. You can’t even believe the car is still running, but they hand you a 10 dollar bill out the window. And yet you can guarantee that every time you see a Tesla, not one of them will give a dime. The least of us help the least of us, but the most of us don’t help the rest.”

Monte Wood is a 61-year-old who is living with a disability from a car accident involving a semi-truck. He underwent intensive medical care, including spine surgery, and has recently improved his ability to walk. He wants to work and be able to take care of himself. He told me, “I’m too old to be out here like this; this handicap thing stopped me from working. That wreck changed my whole life.” Although he has experienced people yelling out of their cars and honking their horns as they pass by, he has worked hard to eat healthy when he can and stay away from drugs. He shared this: “My wife, when she died, made me promise not to use anything. December 7th was 14 years that I’ve been clean.”

(Above) David Williams smiling with his sign while standing on a street corner in Old Town, Fort Collins, Colo., March 16.

(Left) Monte Wood faces the wind to earn money in Fort Collins, Colo., March 16.

Design by Charlotte London



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IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THE ENEMY

Written By: Amanda Marken

“We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion.” This quote from the movie *Dead Poets Society* touches on a question that has made its way into professional, academic, and creative spheres. Is our passion being slowly stripped away from us, right before our eyes? Or is it taking on a new form, aided by new tools, technologies, and resources?

Artificial intelligence (AI) offloading human work has been a popular subject of discourse for a long time, from old science fiction plays like the 1920’s “Rossum’s Universal Robots,” to newer, academy-award-winning films, like 2016’s “Her.” With the recent, widespread surge of generative AI, these conversations are starting to take on new facets.

While there has been a topical emphasis on the impact this technology will have on analytical career fields like tech and finance, it’s important to ask about the implications for the creative industries, whose products are held to subjective standards.

According to research done by Goldman Sachs, the share of industry employment exposed to automation by AI in the U.S. is at 26%, in terms of work tasks in the arts, design, entertainment, media and sports sectors. This could be seen in the form of retouching photos, summarizing text, and making the digital design process more efficient, or it could be viewed as a simplification of the artistic job, automating parts of projects that would have once been created with artistic intentionality.

Nathan Hebert, a graphic designer for Sony Music Entertainment, explained how the integration of AI in his industry is impacting his career. “As time goes on, I feel like my purpose is deteriorating. Design is beginning to feel like a luxury that most people can produce through AI, and my job is slowly falling away from me.”

AI is making art and design more accessible to the corporate business sector, rapidly overtaking what would have been an artistic, human craft with cheaper, “more efficient” alternatives. With this new emergence, society is beginning to adapt their original opinions and responses to AI’s influence.

Originally, many were afraid of its implementation, but as it seeps into new corners of various industries, we are beginning to utilize the technology to optimize and streamline the work done within our careers, companies, and personal ventures. In this day and age, it’s not hard to recognize that failing to adapt to the new world of AI leaves companies at a significant industry disadvantage.

However, in a non-corporate setting, many artists are concerned that AI is destroying creative expression. Music artist and bass player Brogan McCreery says, “The work that we as musicians put our heart and soul into is getting replaced by inhumane machines. The industry is competitive enough, but now it’s nearly impossible to break into success.”



(Above) Musician playing the drums, Nashville, Tenn., March 19, 2026.

(Right) Jade Kautzsch looking at phone, while sitting on bench in Fort Collins, Colo., January 26, 2026.

As time goes on, I feel like my **purpose is deteriorating**. Design is beginning to feel like a luxury that **most people can produce through AI**, and my job is slowly falling away from me.

The way AI is taking over the creative industry discourages artists from putting in the effort and time to create.

People are constantly questioning why they would ever create anything if a machine can make it more efficiently, even if automation comes at the cost of the true soul of the work. Even though AI art has been integrated into many parts of the creative industry, it is missing authenticity and humanity.

In a *Purdue Exponent* article, Ella McNeely wrote, “It is important to remember that art is human expression. A machine will never be able create something truly meaningful; there are no emotions or thoughts behind an AI-generated image.” This captures the sentiment that artists are fighting to maintain, that art is a key feature of what it means to live, experience, and relay those feelings.

While AI can adhere to rapid consumption, it is missing the key component to what makes art real.

With all this to say, it is important to keep creating.



Design by Ashlyn Hoffman
Photos & photo illustration by Amanda Marken

SELF MEDICATING OR COPING?

A COLLEGE NARRATIVE

WRITTEN BY GRETA STURGIS

Whether it takes the form of intense exercise, substance use or something else entirely, self-medicating stress, anxiety and depression has become a reality for many university students. As academic, social and financial pressures accumulate, the line between everyday coping and harmful habits can become increasingly more difficult to draw.

Students (and, arguably, many other populations) are facing a lot of stressors. An uncertain labor market, a deeply polarized political climate and the ever-present influence of social media have reshaped how young adults experience and feel pressure. For many, the added burden of student loan debt lingers in the background, compounding an already high-stress environment.

Research from the American Psychological Association highlights the physical toll of chronic stress, while warning that many widely accepted coping mechanisms may ultimately have the opposite effect. Common



(Above) Beer on display at 7-Eleven near Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.

(Left) Window display flashing cheap tobacco and vape products at a smoke shop near the Colorado State University campus, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.



habits such as nicotine and alcohol use, excessive caffeine consumption, and reliance on highly processed “comfort” foods can provide short-term relief while contributing to long-term health risks.

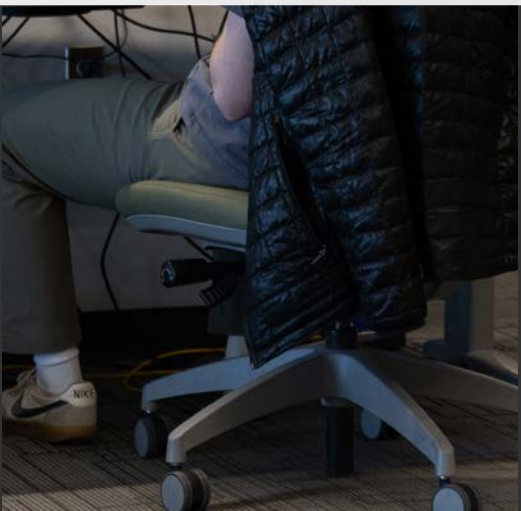
Others describe coping mechanisms that are less often recognized but follow a similar pattern of short-term relief. Steven Flores, a former CSU student, said stress often drives him toward impulsive spending. He described becoming fixated on a specific purchase when overwhelmed, which temporarily alleviates his anxiety. “Once I buy it, I feel fine for a couple of days,” Flores said. “The stress just goes away, but for a little while.”

These patterns reflect a broader issue: many coping strategies labeled as harmless, or even productive, can mask underlying stress without addressing its root causes. Over time, reliance on these habits can end up reinforcing cycles of avoidance.

Take Liz French, for example. The STEM senior balances a heavy homework load, vice presidential duties for CSU’s Ranch Horse

Design by
Charlotte London

Photos by
Nicolette Wilks



team, work at a university research lab and an active social life. When asked about maintaining her schedule, she pointed to a familiar cycle. “When I have a lot to do, it usually ends up cutting into my sleep.” Then, she said, she relies on coffee to power through the day (which can end up cutting further into the next night’s sleep).

Although clearly Liz’s approach works for her, the experience reflects a broader cultural normalization of productivity taking precedence over well-being. In many cases, these habits are not seen as maladaptive or potentially harmful, but as expected parts of student and young adult life.

For other students, the use of more controversial substances has become part of that equation. One former CSU student, who requested anonymity due to work-related restrictions, said he occasionally uses marijuana to manage the stress of overwhelming workloads. When deadlines pile up, he turns to small amounts as a way

to regain his mental composure. “Just enough to help me focus on one stressor at a time,” he said, describing that he tries to avoid using it as an escape, and more as a way to compartmentalize. Stress management comes in many forms, and some, like this student, have found a way to walk the line between coping and self-medicating by approaching marijuana as a tool rather than a crutch.

But we must ask, at what point do these habits start to become concerning? Is it when caffeine transitions into more intense stimulants, like recreational Adderall or cocaine? Or when a drink with dinner turns into weeknights spent at the bars?

As students continue to navigate an increasingly complex and demanding landscape, the distinction between coping and self-medication remains critical. What may begin as a manageable, even socially accepted habit can gradually evolve into a dependency that is more difficult to recognize.

(Right) An empty coffee sitting next to a student at work in the Morgan Library, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.

(Top left) Studying in the Lory Student Center at Colorado State University while drinking a coffee from a nearby cafe, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.

(Bottom left) CAM’s Lobby Shop has fridges full of energy drinks for students to grab on their way to class, Fort Collins, Colo., March 17.

(Bottom middle) Colorado State University student grabs an energy drink at the Morgan Library while studying, Fort Collins,

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