



J^e-TAC

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAN NEWS SERVICE

MAY 1, 2025



**CELEBRATING
OUR GRADUATES**

GRADUATION- SPRING 2025

texannews.net

VOL. 106, NO. 12

TNS/J-TAC STAFF

Haeley Carpenter
Editor-in-Chief
Mackenzie Johnson
Managing Editor
Ashtyn Hansard
Digital Media Director
Reese Keeling
Marketing Director

Brenna Dempsey
Executive Producer
Drew Fleming
Associate Producer
Andrew Utterback
Podcast Producer

Lindsey Hughes
Art Director
Caroline Crain
News Editor
Gavin Patrick
Sports Editor
Colton Bradberry
Opinion Editor

Helena Knutson
Marketing Executive

Bethany Kilpatrick
Multimedia Journalist
Brooklyn McKinney
Multimedia Journalist
Hannah Brooks
Multimedia Journalist
Leslie Posadas
Multimedia Journalist
Annabeth Johnson
Multimedia Journalist

Austin Lewter
Faculty Adviser

CONTACT US

Mail: Box T-0230,
Stephenville, TX 76402
Physical: Grant 396
(254) 968-0519
editor@texannews.net

Independent Student Journalism Since 1919

The opinions expressed in J-TAC and the Texan News Service are those of the student journalists and individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Tarleton State University its administration, faculty, staff or student body as a whole.

The Texan News Service strives for accuracy and fairness in all its reporting. However, we acknowledge that errors may occur. If you believe a factual error has been made, please contact our editorial team at editor@texannews.net and we will address the matter promptly.

Content published in J-TAC and the Texan News Service, whether in print or online, is protected by copyright and may not be reproduced without prior written permission from the editors.

J-TAC and the Texan News Service operate as an independent student-run publication and adheres to the principles of free speech and journalistic integrity as outlined in our editorial policies.

Artificial Intelligence Policy

The Texan News Service is constantly monitoring the use of artificial intelligence in journalism. At present, articles will expressly state if generative AI has been used for any reason in a story, though AI is presently expressly prohibited in story and art creation per our AI policy. Any questions or concerns can be addressed to alewter@tarleton.edu

Work, friendship, school: *Isabella Becerra's* *college journey*

BY LESLIE POSADAS
Multimedia Journalist

Juggling three jobs, good academics and deep involvement on campus, Isabella Becerra will walk the stage toward graduation this May.

Becerra, who is originally from Florida, found her home at Tarleton State University three years ago.

Despite having to be financially self-reliant from the beginning, she never let it stand in the way of achieving her dreams.

Becerra started working at the Student Welcome Center, later took a job at Firehouse Subs and recently began working as a teaching assistant in the genetics lab.

"I started working at the Welcome Center, and that was probably the best decision I ever made coming to college," Becerra said. "It kind of gave me a home away from home."

Eeva Linna, a student at Tarleton State University who works beside Becerra at the Welcome Center, has felt her impact since the day they met.

"She was the first person I met here, and that moment truly changed everything for me," Linna said. "If it weren't for Bella, I honestly don't think I'd be at Tarleton today."

"Her campus tour completely changed my outlook, and she inspired me to choose this university and get involved," Linna said. "Everything I'm a part of now can be traced back to her influence because she paved the way and gave me the confidence to push beyond my limits."

Even with the challenges of managing work, school and her social life, Becerra has no regrets.

"If I were to do college again, I would still work as much as I do," Becerra said. "I'm just one of those people who has to be busy all the time, and to me, it's rewarding that after my three years here, my college education is going to be debt-free, and I still made quality friendships."

Becerra grew up in Florida until high school, when her father took a job on a dairy farm in Plainview, Texas.

Her family has since moved back to Florida, and although Becerra still misses them, she has found comfort in mentors like Savannah Trantham, who was previously the director of the Welcome Center.

"Being so far away from home, it's like I don't have my family here, and it's hard sometimes because I just want to call my mom and talk to her, but all I can do is hear her voice over the phone," Becerra said. "So Sav was really kind of like that mothering role model for me; she cared for me professionally and helped me grow."

While working three jobs, Becerra still found ways to stay connected with her friends and enjoy her social life.

"I joined Alpha Gamma Delta, and that brought me so many amazing friendships," Becerra said. "My roommates now and some of my best friends are associated with Alpha Gamma, so I love the sisterhood, and I wouldn't give up that either."

Throughout her time at Tarleton, Becerra has also been involved with other leadership roles, such as being a Tarleton Transition Mentor for two years, orientation staff and on the Roundup leadership team.

"My first semester, especially, was hard to transition into," Becerra said. "When you get to campus, you don't know anybody, and that's why joining those organizations, getting those jobs, is what helped me the most."

Zully E. Contreras-Correa, the assistant professor of the Animal Science department, has witnessed Becerra's growth firsthand.

"I've seen a lot of professional and personal growth because when I first met her, she had minimal animal handling experience," Contreras said. "She worked a lot with dairy cows from back home, but this was a small ruminant project, and she got to do blood collection, take body weights and feed these animals, so she

the J-TAC



 /texannews



@thejtac1919



@texannewstu

FOLLOW US!

showed a lot of responsibility.”

Becerra worked under Contreras on a research project, which was then presented at the Division of Research, Innovation and Economic Development Research Symposium for the American Society of Animal Sciences, where Becerra won first place, leaving everyone impressed with her three-minute thesis.

“Her three-minute thesis presentation at the American Society of Animal Sciences was outstanding; I just feel so proud of her and her hard work. Sometimes we feel like hard work doesn’t pay off, but that’s a day that it paid off. The way that she answered questions to the public, the way that she talked to other scientists, that was that was a great impression and a great satisfaction to me as a mentor,” Contreras said.

In the days leading up to the presentation, Becerra struggled to balance work with preparation, but Contreras stepped in to help her through it.

“She works at Firehouse Subs, so I went by around nine p.m., and she was there working, and I said, ‘Timer starts now, tell me your speech over the counter.’ So, that shows her commitment towards work,” Contreras said.

As Becerra gets ready to walk the stage this May, she is struck with all the emotions possible, and although her plans for the future are still on the table, she is excited for what lies ahead.

“What I look forward to the most is walking across the stage knowing my parents are going to be there watching me and all the amazing people that helped me get the degree, from those mentors to those amazing friendships that I’ve had, I just can’t wait to make my parents proud.”

As Linna looks back on her time with Becerra, nothing but words of encouragement come to mind.

“Bella, never stop being the amazing person you are,” Linna said. “As much as I wish I could convince you to stay in Stephenville forever, I know the world needs what you have to offer, and you’re going to make an impact wherever you go, and I truly believe one day we’ll all get to call you Dr. Bella Becerra – and I can’t wait to see it happen.”



Spring 2025 graduate, Isabella Becerra, poses in front of the famous gates that never close.

PHOTO BY ADELYN BECCA

Evan Soward:

Firefighter, family man, future physician

BY BRENNA DEMPSEY

Executive Producer

Evan Soward is a remarkable student, and there is no shortage of people who would agree.

While he attends Tarleton State University as a full time student, he is also a volunteer fireman and works as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) for another fire station and an emergency medical service (EMS) station.

He also makes sure he takes the time to prioritize his wife, Summer Soward, and continues to build on their marriage – all while studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).

He is majoring in biomedical science and minoring in chemistry and kinesiology. With this degree, he is focusing on getting into medical school and becoming an osteopathic physician.

“I picked it because I thought it was the most encapsulated thing to get me to where I wanted to be long term, to be a physician, to get into med school with all the courses I needed. I’ve definitely learned a lot from it about the human body from the ground up,” Soward said.

Soward is applying to go to the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (TCOM) at the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, where he will graduate as a licensed Physician.

“They have the osteopathy focus, which I really like. They have a strong emphasis on rural medicine, and Summer and I want to long-term stay kind of close to this area. We can move around a little bit, but we both like it around here, so rural medicine will probably be the way to go,” Soward said.

The drive and dedication Soward has for achieving these goals is inspiring and often goes unnoticed due to his respectful and humble attitude.

Dr. Joe Priest with the School of Kinesiology’s Department of Health & Human Performance, was happy to share his thoughts on Soward.

“Evan was a student in my exercise electrocardiography course, which is not easy, and with my 28 folks in class, I’m throwing details out there, and I’m laying their ears back, and it’s a lot of information,” Dr. Priest said. “He’s understanding everything, and that’s kind of unusual because I’m famous for repeating myself 14 times. He hears it, he learns it.”

Soward places a lot of importance on his education, and he wants to learn as much as he can to become the best physician possible.

“He kept up so well with the technology I was talking about that is new to our kinesiology majors and really challenging to them. He understood it the first time through, and so he stood out

real quick as what I call an overachiever,” Dr. Priest said.

People often associate the term overachiever with someone who is stuck up and wants to stand out, but this couldn’t be further from the truth.

“He volunteered in our champions lab to administer cardiovascular stress testing, and I mean, didn’t hesitate one minute, stepped in there, learned the computer network, learned the software necessary for capturing the electrocardiogram,” Dr. Priest said. “Just took over very nice, very low keyed. You hardly know he’s there, but he’s taking care of things, just a wonderful addition to our School of Kinesiology.”

Soward took any opportunity he could to volunteer, get more hands-on experience and share his knowledge.

“He volunteered again when I had invited nurses over from Health Sciences to come over and see our operation, where we’re testing cardiovascular health,” Dr. Priest said. “And he says, ‘I’ll do that.’ So, he took the lead in training the visiting Health Science nurses to introduce them to this technology that we do over here.”

Soward is in a research group that focuses on drug delivery systems for cancer treatment, to develop a less toxic and selective system for medication and ultimately offer a less abrasive alternative to chemotherapy.

“For cancer treatments, you want something that’ll slow down and kill cancer cells but leave healthy cells alone. So that’s essentially what we do. We have a plant kind of delivery system that we chemically bind an anti-cancer agent to,” Soward said. “We applied it to cells, and we just measure how many cells there are after the course of three days, and then, specifically, if they’re killing cancer cells and not killing healthy cells, because that’s what we want.”

This kind of research will be valuable to Soward as he moves into the medical field.

“It’s cool, just to be able to do research that you know might really make a difference in people’s lives, especially using a plant as the delivery system. It’s a lot cheaper and more readily available long term. You want to be able to give those treatments with people’s food,” Soward said. “And theoretically, it’s a lot less toxic. It’s killing just the cancer cells, not our body cells, because traditional methods of chemotherapy, in a lot of ways, is just throwing a carpet bomb in the body, killing a whole lot of stuff. So you want that selectivity with cancer treatments, and that’s what our research is.”

At the Division of Research, Innovation and Economic Development (RIED) Research Symposium, Soward and his group won first place for the undergraduate faculty-led research pre-

sentation on their drug delivery system.

The undergraduate winners were invited to Austin, Texas, where they got to present again and interact with other scholars from universities and individuals within legislation.

Dr. Rajani Srinivasan, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Department Head of Chemistry, Geosciences and Physics, oversees this research group.

“He does the work till he gets the results, and if you criticize or say something, he takes it positively,” Dr. Srinivasan said. “He’s able to apply what he has learned. Of course, he is a brilliant student. He was in my organic chemistry two. He made an A in my class. So wonderful. Result-oriented, hard-working.”

His dedication does not stop in the classroom and carries over into his work as an EMT and firefighter.

“He would work days and nights over there but still show up and do the research. And here also he stays late. They are all here until 10 or 10:30, he has been there,” Dr. Srinivasan said. “For some of the results and for some of the experiments, you cannot just leave in the middle, and say, ‘Oh, it’s eight o’clock, or it’s five o’clock, I’m leaving.’ That’s hard. You cannot do it. So, he’s very dedicated.”

As an EMT, Soward is often one of the first responders to various accidents and other issues people have.

“I enjoy EMS and medicine in general, because we get to make a real, impactful difference when people are at their most desperate,” Soward said.

The training for that will also translate into his career as a physician.

On top of his desire to do his best, he also finds learning about health and the human body engaging and inspiring.

“Kinesiology, it’s interesting, because you learn a whole lot of stuff about how the human body works, like looking at anatomical structure and electrons flowing from point A to point B and all that stuff. But Kinesiology is a lot about how to apply some of those things to address overall health. So that’s really interesting, and I think it’s going to make me a better doctor down the road,” Soward said.

When it comes to why he is motivated to do this kind of work, he looks at the bigger picture of American health.

“I’ve done a lot of looking into the kind of practices that Americans have today, like how we treat things, how we eat, a lot of things like that. There’s so much in our healthcare system that I just don’t think is the best way to go about certain things. So, I think that is kind of something else that pushed me to be a physician,” Soward said.

He wants to help inspire others to think about the underlying



Evan Soward presenting his group research on drug delivery systems for cancer treatment at the Texas Capitol.

PHOTO BY SUMMER SOWARD

issues of health problems.

“Obviously, one physician can’t change or fix every single problem in America, but, you know, just being a beacon of change, like starting with one patient, helping them, and then over time, contributing to larger improvements,” Soward said.

The practical applications are important to him because he wants to promote long-term help and healing without using as many medications.

“I believe having a physician who thinks, ‘Is this really the best thing to do?’ or talks about nutrition and puts that at the forefront, instead of just resorting to, ‘Oh, what drug’s gonna fix this?’ Because that drug is going to have side effects that will cause you to need another drug, and then, it just becomes a spiral that can get out of control,” Soward said.

His faith also plays a role in his outlook on

health and inspires him as he works towards his goals.

“Thinking about being a physician who is able to more innately heal people, depending on the way God designed our bodies, and using that knowledge and that focus first, and medicine, of course, is there when you need it. Because there are obviously times that we need it, but not to just immediately snap our fingers, resort to that,” Soward said.

He wants to follow his faith wherever it leads him, and the medical field is where he finds himself.

“At the end of the day, the reason I want to be a physician is because I want to serve God in that way. Paul said, in everything you do, honor the Lord, whether you eat, drink or whatever it is,” Soward said. “And so, the way that I want to honor God is to protect the body that he’s given to us and try to help people in the most direct

and impactful way that I can.”

This is why he felt connected to osteopathic medicine and the protocols that are involved in it.

“Osteopathic is the way I want to go, because it focuses more on pretty much exactly what I just said, realizing that the body is designed to heal itself; it focuses on how the structure of the body correlates to its function,” Soward said. “And looking at the position of your muscles and bones and figuring out how to improve someone’s life just using the body, not just blasting them with drugs.”

To keep his motivation and drive himself forward, he remembers his goals and the reason he wants to achieve them.

“Keeping in mind my end goal, that goal of becoming a physician, and everything else just falls into place. There’s so much that goes into it. I mentioned MCAT and getting good grades

and all that, but there’s so much they want to see in people,” Soward said. “I think that keeps me going and just reminding myself of all the effort that has gotten us to here, and the tiny moments, spending time with Summer, especially that, it helps a ton. Gotta grab every moment we can.”

There are many things to be proud of when it comes to the energy and effort Soward has put out, and his professors have confidence in him as he takes the next step by going to medical school and becoming a physician.

“He is just so capable, so calm, so focused. I just think he’s gonna succeed in whatever he wants to do. And of course, TCOM is gonna be pretty challenging, five-year med school, but he’ll graduate as a full-fledged licensed physician, and I’m so happy for him,” Dr. Priest said.

The future is bright for this graduating Tarleton student.



Alvaro Huidobro hits a ball out of the sand at the Oregon State Invitational in Corvallis, Oregon, in October 2024.

COURTESY OF TARLETON STATE ATHLETICS

Alvaro Huidobro:

Spanish-born golfer ironed out his American dream

BY GAVIN PATRICK
Sports Editor

They say the United States is the land of opportunity. They say, when you have a dream, that anything is possible in this country. They say America is a beacon of hope for those who wouldn't have any otherwise.

Are those words still true?

Look no further than this story's place of origin—because Tarleton State University has been opening doors for international student athletes for years.

One of those athletes is Álvaro Huidobro.

Huidobro grew up in Gijón, Spain as an aspiring golfer. And upon graduation, he plans

to move back overseas to Europe to pursue a career as a professional golfer.

But he wouldn't have made it to this point without, first, living out his American dream.

Huidobro has been around the game of golf ever since he could walk. His grandparents always played at the course he had back home before he was born, and he grew up spending countless afternoons there with family and friends.

"I remember I got my first iron when I was two years old. It was a little Seven iron bury," Huidobro said. "I started playing golf every single day. I was so lucky that my grandparents and my parents also played golf, so I kind of

grew up with no other sports to play."

Huidobro quickly became one of the best young golfers in Spain. He won the U16 Spanish regional championship in 2019 and the U16 interregional championship in 2018 and 2019. He also won the IV Castilla Y Leon Cup Federation in 2021.

Perhaps most notably, Huidobro has competed in the Spanish Amateur Championship every year, at his age group, since 2011 (and will compete again in June). This is where he made connections to join one of Spain's premier sport programs: Blume National Golf School.

"I was lucky enough to play really good golf from when I was 14 to 16; that's maybe the

gap of age that the recruiters are looking for," Huidobro said. "If you play good golf and you are high in the rankings, that's when you get selected for the Blume."

The Blume is, in Huidobro's words, "an athlete's school."

Run by the Spanish Royal Golf Federation (RFEG), the school is devoted to developing elite young golfers under 18 who aspire to compete at the professional ranks. In short, it's a grind.

"We were waking up at 6 a.m. in the morning, going to the gym, then going to class around eight to two and then golf practice was from three to seven," Huidobro said. "That's all

the week for three years.”

Huidobro graduated in 2021 ranked in the top 20 of Spain’s U18 rankings. It was time to take his golfing to the next level. But where, exactly, was still in question.

None of Huidobro’s family members had ever attended college in the United States. They had a “tradition” of studying in Spain and chasing golf at the professional levels in Europe. His parents took that route. They were expecting the same from their son.

But not only did Huidobro want to play against the best golfers in the world; he also wanted to get a degree.

“In Spain, it’s very difficult to combine both,” Huidobro said. “Once you choose to study a degree in Spain, it’s way more difficult and requires more time in order to pass the classes. If you want to play college golf, or you wanna play professional golf and you wanna have a degree as well, the best option for us is to come to the states.”

Some of the best Spanish golfers have done just that. Jon Rahm, Jose Maria Olazabal, Sergio García, Seve Ballesteros, Miguel Ángel Jiménez and Rafa Cabrera-Bello have all played on the PGA Tour—and with great success.

“As I grew up watching all those guys that were older than me going to the states, it made me want to chase that dream as well,” Huidobro said.

Huidobro’s first stop in the U.S. was an unconventional one: Milligan University, a private Christian school in Elizabethton, Tennessee with an enrollment of 1,200 students.

The COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing at the time, and many DI and DII schools were not recruiting. They were, instead, giving their players a “gap year” that wouldn’t count for eligibility.

Huidobro considered taking a gap year of his own in Spain but decided to attend Milligan for a year, play good golf and transfer when better opportunities arose.

“It was probably the greatest thing that happened to me because I made really good friendships there, and the trade (from Spain to the U.S.) was so good and I learned a lot from there,” Huidobro said.

When recruiting opened back up, as Huidobro hoped, that’s when he discovered Tarleton.

The program was assembling their first men’s golf team in over 25 years. And after a friend hooked him up with the opportunity, Huidobro became the fourth member of the team and the first transfer.

“He told me, ‘Hey, I know this is a new program, and they have a couple spots. If you’re interested, email coach,’” Huidobro said. “So, I emailed coach, everything went smooth; we talked, it was a great relationship and he offered me a scholarship.”

Things seemed to be working out for Huidobro. He got his opportunity to play golf in the United States. He was making good grades, keeping in touch with his family back in Spain. Everything was set on the right path.

Then, he changed course.

Huidobro fell into bad habits his sophomore and junior year. “No drugs,” he said, but he was “drinking too much” and stopped taking care of his body and mental health. He even stopped enjoying golf.

Huidobro hit a low point after the fall 2023 semester. This time, he felt the impact. And all of a sudden, he snapped out of it.

“That was when I decided to change everything,” Huidobro said. “I stopped talking to everyone. I deleted every social media that I had. I was waking up at 6 a.m., going to the gym three times a day, eating just a little bit of the food that I was cooking, reading books, [listening to] podcasts—just kind of getting in my own bubble, working on myself.”

One person who helped pull Huidobro out of that place was his strength coach, David Anderson.

“Right from the get-go, he approached me and was like, ‘Hey, I got problems with my key spine, with my ankles, my hip, my back.’ And so, he went through some series of testing, either stuff he’d done before and didn’t work, and then I’d come up with something new until we found stuff that worked and helped him,” Anderson said.

Over the next year and a half, Huidobro underwent a “big body change” and mental re-routing. He was outworking those around him, and his coach took notice.

“He was the one on the team that you could tell he cared and he wanted to get a lot of extra work in, always asking a question,” Anderson said. “He was always trying to find stuff to help him that we translate to golf.”

And translate it did. In March 2024, Huidobro had his best collegiate performance at The Big Texan, finishing 5-under-par and tying for second overall individually.

The previous tournament, he shot a career-low 8-under-par, which tied him for fifth place. Suddenly, things were clicking again.

“It was awesome to see Álvaro turn the cor-

ner with back-to-back top-fives,” head coach Chance Cain said after The Big Texan. “He’s been putting a lot of work in his game, and it’s been great for him to see that starting to pay off.”

Now, Huidobro is taking that work ethic to the professional ranks in Europe, joining many of his Spanish friends.

There have been many people who have been supportive of Huidobro, but none more than his parents: the ones who gave him the opportunity to play golf in the United States and

many more before then, which Huidobro will be forever grateful for.

“They are being the best thing that happened to me ever,” Huidobro said. “... They are the ones that showed me how life works and showed me that bad things are gonna happen... and you’re gonna have to be with people that you like, [who] mean [something] to you.”

Many of those people are back in Spain, waiting for him to come home after graduation.

As for America, the words rang true.



COURTESY OF TARLETON STATE ATHLETICS

Alvaro Huidobro practices his golf swing at the Bandon Dunes Invitational in Bandon, Oregon, in March 2024.

Nicolas Lopez is among ‘The few, the proud’ at Tarleton

BY BROOKLYN MCKINNEY
Multimedia Journalist

Nicolas Lopez started his college journey strong in 2021 as a member of Tarleton State University’s Corps of Cadets and A&M’s PSA program. His goal was to transfer to A&M College Station’s Corps of Cadets before graduating, but little did he know his ties to Tarleton would last a lifetime.

“I still qualified for it, but I liked it a lot here. I really liked the small town feel and the Corps of Cadets here is not as strict, I would say. And the living situation is a lot better. The dorms are a lot nicer for cadets here at Tarleton than they are at College Station,” Lopez said.

In fact, the only time that Lopez’ friend, Jamin Patterson, can recall that Traditions South didn’t have running water or electricity was during a snowstorm in 2023.

To those who know him, Lopez is not only hard working, but also a gentle soul with a kind smile.

“I’ve never seen him really frustrated or angry or anything. So, he’s got a very calming presence, which is part of why I like to be around him,” Patterson said.

When Lopez, a Tarleton cadet and member of the Marine Reserves, walks across the stage, he will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in business. Although he only intends to pursue a career in the Marine Corps, his natural affinity for leadership made it the clear choice.

“I really love teaching. I thought it was silly when I was a freshman, but now that I’ve gotten to this point where I’m a senior and I’m instructing underclassmen cadets on how to perform our military duties and that sort of thing, I think it’s super cool,” Lopez said. “Because they’re a couple years younger than me, but at the end of the day, they’re going to be my peers once we’re actually in the military.”

Having completed his training from his training at Officer Candidates School this past year, Lopez is eager to be commissioned as a

Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps following graduation. Although Lopez is leaving behind his fellow cadets, they will always hold a special place in his heart.

“The friendships I have made here with my fellow cadets, working through everything we’ve done for the past four years has definitely made lasting friendships that I know I’ll keep for a long time,” Lopez said.

Not only has Lopez remained confident in his leadership of underclassmen cadets but also humble enough to make a good impression on former Marine and Senior instructor of the Military and Leadership College, Ted Roberts.

Having read several military history books in his free time, Lopez passed his US Military History and US Defense Policy and Military Affairs courses with flying colors while receiving a glowing recommendation letter from the professor.

“What I know about Nic is he is not one of those people who sit in class, and they say they know it all already. And before the instructor can even finish the sentence, they spring out of their chair. I know Nic is not anything like that, he’s very stolid in his character,” Roberts said.

Although he was the first in his family to enlist in the military, there was never a doubt in Lopez’ mind that he wanted to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps for the rest of his life.

“What really drew me to the Marines was that it was like the toughest branch to get into, especially as an officer,” Lopez said. “You always see the signs that say, ‘The few, the proud’. They have the longest boot camp and the smallest branch, so I thought it’d be something cool to do if I was a part of that.”

Throughout the years, his family has always been supportive.

“My parents, my family, they were a little bit iffy at the beginning because I’m like the first person in my family to be in the military, so they were a little bit unsure about it,” Lopez said. “They didn’t know what it was all about, but when I made it clear that I wanted to do this



Nicolas Lopez

COURTESY PHOTO

with my life, they came out super supportive and just helped me get through it all.”

With the support of his friends and family and the required bachelor’s degree, Lopez will soon be commissioned into the Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant, but this is just the beginning.

“In five years, I really hope to be at least a captain, which is the third rank,” Lopez said.

While Lopez doesn’t have much free time to spare, he does enjoy dancing at the Twist on Two Step Tuesday and reading sci-fi novels when he can.

Lopez also seems to have held on steadfast to his faith as a Christian during his time at Tarleton.

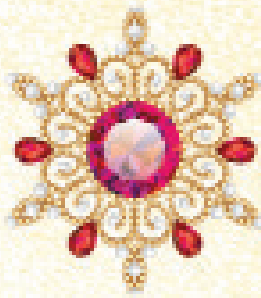
“I was over at his place the other day and he

did in fact have a prayer book and hymnal right next to his bedside. So, a devout Christian, I’m assuming,” Patterson said.

Being in the Corps of Cadets as a college student, taking 21 credit hours while training with the Marine reserves at least once a month and working a full-time job at HEB sounds like a lot for one person to have on their plate, but Lopez has what it takes.

“You have to be able to do things that a lot of people really aren’t willing to do for long periods of time. Just really having the mental endurance to get through it, especially when it gets really tough,” Lopez said.

As a member of ‘The few’ and ‘the proud’, everyone can count on him to do it all with a smile on his face.



MELANIE J FINANCIAL, LLC

stronger together



Services Offered

- LEGACY, TRUST & ESTATE PLANNING
- FINANCIAL PLANNING
- INVESTMENT STRATEGIES
- PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT
- RETIREMENT PLANNING
- RISK MANAGEMENT
- LIFE INSURANCE & ANNUITIES
- 401(K) ROLLOVER

At Melanie J. Financial we offer more than two decades of financial experience.

Our team includes multiple licensed Financial Advisors that all have the same goal, and that's to help you.

We truly believe that we are

Stronger Together

110 N Bell St, Hamilton, TX 76531

Office: (254) 386-4500

www.MelanieJFinancial.com

**Visit Our
Website!**



Maggie Sandoval leads with heart

BY CAROLINE CRAIN

News Editor

When Maggie Sandoval first arrived at Tarleton State University, she was timid and unsure of her place. As a first-generation college student and the daughter of an immigrant mother, the path to higher education often felt like a maze she had to figure out alone.

“It started with my mom,” Sandoval said. “She’s an immigrant from Mexico. She came down with no money, literally no plan, just wanting a better future.”

Without a parent who knew the process, Sandoval often had to figure things out on her own. She leaned on the kindness of advisers, asked countless questions and found extra support from her “bonus family” – her sister-in-law’s parents. Every small success—registering for classes, finding housing, applying for scholarships—felt like a personal victory.

One group of people Sandoval credits for a smoother transition into college was her Duck Camp Tarleton’s Transition Mentors (TTMs). After her freshman year, Sandoval became a TTM herself, where she found her place helping incoming students

– students whose shoes she once stood in.

“In Duck Camp, I got to connect with so many students,” Sandoval said. “Seeing their growth—freshmen they were so terrified, so scared you could see it in their eyes like, ‘I don’t know if I’ll make it,’ —and seeing them now killing it, it’s so cool to see their growth and just know that I had a little bit of an impact on that.”

Eventually, she joined the TTM leadership team, a role that pushed her into public-facing leadership positions to help her step outside her comfort zone.

But Sandoval didn’t just think about students – she thought about their families, too. As a TTM during orientations and a Texan Rep during campus tours, she noticed how many parents were eager to support their children but didn’t understand English. The language barrier often left them sitting quietly, unable to fully experience their child’s big moment.

This challenge hit close to home for Sandoval.

“When I came to orientation as a student, my mom didn’t get to come because she speaks Spanish only,” Sandoval said. “It made me kind of sad, like everyone has their parents, and I

don’t.”

Determined to bridge the gap, Sandoval worked with New Student Programs to implement a system where she can translate everything going on in orientations into an earpiece for Spanish speakers.

“They’re still getting all the information, all the hype and the excitement of their student going, and it’s encouraging more families with a diverse language to still come,” Sandoval said.

As a Texan Rep, she also gives bilingual tours, ensuring every family feels included and empowered.

“We would have families that would have preferred to have them bilingual, and I saw them go on a regular tour, and it was just the student listening to all the information, but the families were just in the back,” Sandoval said. “We started doing tours where I got to give them a tour and translate the whole thing to Spanish.”

Along with her roles in campus tours and transitions, Sandoval also worked as student manager in Tarleton’s Division of Student Engagement and Success under the guidance of the department’s vice president, Dr. Diana Ortega. Among many other

Local Advertising

That Works as Hard as You Do

Nobody reaches the Tarleton community better than us!

and we know how to make the most of your advertising budget!

Texan News Service/J-TAC
Marketing Department

254-968-0528

alewter@tarleton.edu

www.texannews.net



duties, Sandoval helped plan and organize events that connect Tarleton and the greater Stephenville community.

“Fortunately enough, I met Dr. Ortega, who is one of my biggest mentors, and Keely McMillian,” Sandoval said. “I got connected with them, and they pushed me way beyond anything I’ve ever experienced. They don’t treat me just as a student worker; they treat me almost like a full-time staff member.”

Ortega has witnessed Sandoval grow both in her skills and in her personal confidence.

“Her character is really caring about people, leading with dignity,” Ortega said. “She really takes the time to show compassion and dignity as she’s dealing with situations. She’s kind hearted, she’s loving and she’s definitely an advocate.”

Sandoval is graduating in May with a bachelor’s degree in education. As part of her hands-on teaching residency, Sandoval has spent her senior year teaching second graders at Chamberlin Elementary under the mentorship of Loretta Greeney.

“I’ve gotten the opportunity to actually experience what it means to be a teacher,” Sandoval said.

Students and teachers alike quickly grew to love Sandoval for her kindness, her energy and the way she made every child feel seen.

“She’s just a bright light, and we have really enjoyed her,” Greeney said. “Our principals would hire her on the spot if she would take a job.”

But the year wasn’t without heartbreak. Sandoval witnessed several students being removed from her classroom due to family situations — moments that left a lasting impact on her. That experience shifted Sandoval’s vision for her future. She realized her calling was bigger than a single classroom.

“I had three really sad situations happen where kids were taken out of my classroom through CPS, and it kind of lit a fire under me that said, ‘I want to make a difference.’ I want to help those at-risk kids and not only in my classroom,” Sandoval said.

After graduation, Sandoval plans to take a year off to prepare for the next chapter: law school. She hopes to attend the A&M law program beginning in the fall of 2027 to advocate for children and families in vulnerable situations.

“I have fallen in love with working with the at-risk kids, the ones that most people are like,

‘Oh, I’d rather not have them in my classroom.’ I love those kids,” Sandoval said. “I want to support those kids, and I want to fight for them because usually they don’t have a great background and no one is really advocating for them.”

Her heart and leadership have not gone unnoticed. This spring, Sandoval was crowned Lady Tarleton during the university’s historic Mayfete celebration — a tradition that has honored outstanding students for over 100 years. Each year, students select individuals who embody Tarleton’s spirit, integrity and leadership.

“Whenever I got called, it was literally an out-of-body experience,” Sandoval said. “It’s so surprising to me that people think it’s cool to have my story. It’s an honor to be able to have that title and maybe inspire someone that doesn’t fit the description of a ‘regular college student.’”

During the quiz portion of Mayfete, the contestants were asked what their biggest achievement was at Tarleton. Sandoval had a unique answer.

“My biggest achievement is making my mom proud,” Sandoval said during the event. “She has always been my biggest inspiration. Making her proud and making my family proud; they didn’t get the opportunities that I did have, so I just know that if it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t be here.”

That sense of pride extends beyond family to the Tarleton community she’s come to call home.

“I am also proud to make my work family and my Tarleton family proud,” Sandoval said. “It feels like I have a family even when I leave.”

Sandoval’s crowning was a special moment, not just for her, but for those who had watched her journey. One of her coworkers, friends and the former Lady Tarleton, Magaly Lopez, reflected on how fitting the honor was.

“Everything she does, she puts in 110, 120% into, and I feel like that is what being Lady Tarleton is about,” Lopez said. “I know it used to be about how poised you were and how pretty you were and the outfit that you were wearing, but I feel like now, it’s more of who embodies this idea of a Texan; who can make Tarleton a home. I feel like her experiences have definitely earned her that.”

Sandoval’s story is one of perseverance, compassion and purpose — a reminder that sometimes the biggest impact comes from those who once wondered if they belonged.



PHOTO BY BRITTANY ROARK

Maggie Sandoval, Lady Tarleton 2025, served as a Texan Rep, TTM leader and student manager while advocating for first-generation students and Spanish-speaking families.

“My biggest advice is even if you’re terrified, just go for it—find your people, get involved, connect,” Sandoval said. “I’m not the typical stereotype of someone that gets crowned or the stereotype of a college student. I didn’t have the

finances, I didn’t have the background, I did not have anything behind me. And now I have the best family supporting me. Not necessarily just biological, but also my Tarleton family.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF TARLETON ATHLETICS

Standout midfielder Zoë Lam transferred to Tarleton for her senior year of college soccer. She will attend Arizona State University in the fall for her Masters in Sports Communication.

Zoë Lam:

Soccer star turned sports reporter

BY ASHTYN HANSARD
Digital Media Director

For most students, transferring to a new college right before your senior year can be a terrifying thought. However, Zoë Lam, a senior journalism major, did not let this stop her from achieving her goals.

Although she is a Dallas native, Lam grew up in Wyoming and attended grade school there. Once she graduated, she attended the University of Texas at San Antonio

for three years before moving to Stephenville.

As for Lam's reason for transferring, it was pretty simple.

"Wyoming is pretty cold, so I just needed a change of scenery... It was tough being away from my family and everything, but a good change and good change of weather, too," Lam said.

Before becoming a student at Tarleton State University, Lam was enrolled at UTSA and was a student there for three years. After being asked to transfer to play soc-

cer for Tarleton's team, Lam accepted. Since UTSA is a much larger school than Tarleton, it was easy to wonder how the two colleges compare.

While both schools are in Texas, Lam says that the two schools are very different.

"I think that being at Tarleton is much more of a family community," Lam says. "At UTSA, it was a commuter school, so everybody just drove in from wherever. Nobody was really on campus and having events like every other day here."

Even though Lam ended up loving Tarleton once she got here, she still had some concerns about transferring. Moving to a new school is always nerve wracking, but doing it as a senior in college is a whole new level.

Lam had several concerns, some out of her control.

“I was worried about transferring for just one year, if I was even gonna get picked up.

Then I was worried about losing credits,” Lam said. “I think it was definitely rough. Moving from somewhere I’ve been for three years just to go somewhere for a year was definitely something I was worried about, along with making new friends and all that kind of stuff for a year.”

Although she was skeptical, Lam’s concerns quickly vanished once she got to Stephenville.

You may be wondering why anyone would transfer during their last year of college, but Lam had a pretty good reason: soccer.

Lam, while still living in Wyoming, grew up playing soccer and falling in love with the sport. When she got older, she dabbled in other sports, such as volleyball and track, but none captured her heart the same way soccer did.

When Lam realized how serious she was about soccer, she put more time and investment into her abilities, even going as far as driving two and a half hours to Colorado from Wyoming five days a week to attend practice.

Once she was accepted into UTSA, Lam continued her passion for the sport by joining the soccer team. After her junior year, Lam decided to transfer over to become a part of Tarleton’s soccer team. She doesn’t regret a second of it.

“I love the team here. They’re so great,” Lam said. “I knew some of the girls from when I played in Colorado—a bunch of them are here—so I knew them already. Everybody’s so welcoming, and it’s just so good to be a part of a team that really wants to be a team.”

Being a student athlete while attending college can be extremely difficult, especially when you factor in internships and looking at graduate schools.

With having to schedule classes around practice and make sure all of the homework is getting done, it seems like a nearly impossible task. Lam struggled with this task her first year of college but has since made it work for her.

“As I’ve grown up, it’s a lot of time management and just scheduling. It’s pretty crazy because we have to schedule our classes between,” Lam said. “You just gotta manage your work-life balance.”

Along with her love for sports, Lam has decided to pursue a career in journalism with an interest in sports communication.

When creating the J-TAC’s sports edition, two of Lam’s profile pieces were featured, discussing Steve Uryasz and Victoria Cameron. This was the first time Lam’s work had been published in Tarleton’s newspaper. Lam was honored to have her work featured in the student newspaper.

“Seeing my stuff in there for the first time, I was just so shocked and grateful.

It’s cool to not just be an athlete – people can now see that I can actually do something outside of my sport, too. That’s some-

thing I am so passionate about, just being able to represent off the field as well,” Lam said.

Lam’s accomplishments in her journalism studies paid off well. Lam received multiple offers from graduate schools and even received a job offer to work as a news writer. While she turned down the job, Lam accepted a graduate program and will be a student at Arizona State University (ASU) starting in the fall.

When discussing Lam’s initial interest in journalism, she couldn’t pinpoint the exact time she realized her decision to be a journalist.

“I went into college wanting to do education and then, obviously, sports is like my whole life. I decided that I’m gonna get super involved at my university, and I’m gonna tell the stories for the people. Then I really narrowed down on journalism because... I just couldn’t leave sports, and then I found out I loved to tell stories about people, and it just worked out,” Lam said.

While Lam’s writing is great for any story, she’s got a special interest in sports stories and profile pieces. Her love of sports from an early age and her interest in people’s lives help fuel her love for journalism, even when it gets hard.

After she graduates from ASU with her master’s degree in sports journalism, Lam hopes to work in the broadcast industry despite the fact that it’s a tough field to get into.

“The dream job would be to be a sideline broadcaster for some random sports team,” Lam said. “I would love to just be on the sideline with everybody, still stay involved in sports and just do the post-game interviews and that kind of thing.”

Although Lam has only been able to be at Tarleton for a year, she’s been able to build great connections with both the residents of Stephenville and the town itself. Her favorite part of Tarleton is the community.

“There’s always something going on, and it’s always bringing the community together, too,” Lam said. “Regardless of where you go in Stephenville, somebody’s gonna have a Tarleton shirt on, and you’re gonna connect because you’re wearing purple together.”

Moving to Tarleton was quite a new experience for Lam, but it turned out to be a great one. However, there are some things she wished she knew before college, one of them being to just say “yes.”

“Always say yes to new experiences, always say yes to a job interview and always say yes to your friends for going out or something like that. Just get yourself involved and take it all in because it goes by so fast,” Lam said.

Lam’s time at Tarleton also taught her some valuable lessons to carry with herself throughout life.

“Always bet on yourself,” Lam said. “At the end of the day you are the person you talk to the most. You gotta put yourself first, and if you don’t like the direction that you’re going in, then change it.”

When going to a smaller college like Tarleton, it’s expected that someone is going to make an impact on your life. Whether it’s a professor, an adviser or a classmate, someone or something is going to leave a lasting impression.

Lam had multiple people create a positive impact, her main



ZOË LAM

PHOTO BY AVERY HARR

ones being her team and her communications professor, Austin Lewter.

“Obviously, my team and my coaches have been huge, just coming in and accepting me as who I am,” Lam said. “It was also nice having everybody try and lead me in the right direction, and Lewter helped out a lot – he got me a job offer.”

Lewter has been a professor at Tarleton for several years and instructs many of the journalism classes that are offered. He’s also the main adviser for the J-TAC and was the one to suggest putting two of Lam’s stories in the paper.

After only knowing Lam for one school year, Lewter was impressed by her work ethic and drive to write a good story.

“She’s a great student and does impeccable work. She keeps her stuff straight,” Lewter said. “I think that discipline of being a student athlete and an honor student and all these things going on will help her. She knows how to be successful, and she’s a complete pleasure.”

While he’s only seen a glimpse at her talent of news writing, Lewter is certain she’s going to be an excellent journalist.

“She’s just one of those individuals that’s gonna excel at whatever she does,” Lewter said. “It would not surprise me if we turn on a network sporting event one of these days and see her on the sideline doing player interviews. I really feel like she’s one of these students that we’re gonna be able to say, ‘Man, we knew her back then,’” Lewter said.

Against the odds:

Lauren Tucker's Tarleton journey comes full circle

BY LINDSEY HUGHES

Art Director

Lauren Tucker is a Tarleton State University student who, despite all of the challenges she's faced, will be walking the stage this May.

Her college journey has been one that is filled with hills and valleys, and throughout the past six years spent at Tarleton, she has overcome and conquered every challenge and hardship that has come her way.

Tucker majored in communications with a focus in public relations and social engagement and has a minor in psychology. She is already putting the degree that she fought so hard for to amazing use with her new job at Cross Timbers Family Services.

There she gets to use her outgoing and empathetic personality to help those who have survived domestic, sexual or violent crimes, as well as use her communications skills to help with the marketing side of the business.

One of her mentors and professors at Tarleton, Dr. Cessna Winslow, helped her to get her internship with the Communications Department, which carried her into her current job at Cross Timbers.

Dr. Winslow was also a huge supporter of Tucker, both outwardly and silently. Dr. Winslow was both a teacher and academic adviser to Tucker and has recognized her resilience in many ways throughout the classes they have had together.

"We have a nice partnership with Cross Timbers Family Services, and when she came to me about being placed for an internship, I realized she would be a really good fit. She has a very empathetic personality and is very caring. It takes a special person to work there," Dr. Winslow said.

The path toward where she is now hasn't always been clear for Tucker, and she had a difficult time choosing where she wanted to be at the beginning of her journey at college.

"I interned at our [veterinarian] who also lived across the street from us, and he graduated from A&M. I was looking at West Texas A&M, I was dead set on going there, and he was like, 'look at Tarleton, it's closer to home,'... and I was so against it, but I came and toured and loved the homey feel... It was the best decision of my life," Tucker said.

Tucker was looking for colleges with the goal in mind of becoming a vet, and after choosing Tarleton, intended to see it through to that destination; however, the Lord had very different plans for her life.

"I came into college as a pre-vet major, and I think before I ever started classes I switched to education. I then switched between education and communications probably three or four



PHOTO BY: REAGAN ELISE PHOTO

Lauren Tucker and her fiancé, James Wilsey, both graduating this May, are also planning for thier upcoming wedding in June.

times," Tucker said.

Graduation has been a long time coming for Tucker, and she has had to go through many trials and tribulations to get to where she is now but has gotten up and continued down her path every time she's been knocked down.

"I struggled really badly with getting into the party scene when I came here," Tucker said. "I didn't party in high school, I never went out, so when I got freedom in college, I went a little crazy. I was a freshman in 2019, so Covid happened my freshmen year of college, and I had never done online school. To keep myself motivated was a big struggle. It got to the point where they had put me on academic suspension, so I had to take a semester off and wasn't allowed to enroll in school anywhere in Texas. It was the most trying time of my life."

Even through one of the most difficult times in her life, where it was easy to feel like the world was against her, she picked herself up. She used the time to grow her relationship with God and to work on personal growth and has now made the Dean's

List twice.

While her struggles were primarily in her personal life, the impact expanded further into her school life as well. Two of Tucker's biggest challenges during her time at Tarleton dealt with personal loss, something that was very unfamiliar to her up until that point.

During her third year at college, while working as a teacher in a local preschool, a little boy in her class passed away very unexpectedly. This loss was a detrimental one to everyone involved, and understandably, school took a backseat to grief for quite a while.

Then, in 2023, a very close friend of hers passed away about a week before she would have walked the stage at graduation. Instead of letting the pain steer her away from school again, she stood tall and pushed through.

"Those two losses were really big turning points, the little boy turned me away from school, and I really struggled. The second one helped me to stay on track, knowing that she didn't

get the opportunity to walk the stage; I wanted to be able to do that. She was one of my biggest supporters in school and in my relationship with God,” Tucker said.

Another struggle that she had to learn to not only overcome, but also redefine for herself, was her engrained idea of success.

“I defined success as having a big money-making job, whereas now I work at a nonprofit, but I get to do things that fulfill my heart so much... I would definitely say that my definition of success has changed from going to college to being able to get a job that pays well, but now I’m leaving with these memories, and I get to go home and be happy and enjoy my life and not just be focused on money,” Tucker said.

The unavoidable lows that life throws at everyone hit Tucker hard at especially difficult times in her life; however, the highs that followed every tough time helped to make her college experience one that she wouldn’t change for the world.

Some of her best memories happened with the friends and family that she has met along her walk, from moving in with her best friends during her third year at Tarleton, to meeting her now fiancé, to serving at the college ministry Timber Ridge On Campus (TROC).

Of course, her parents have also cheered her on during the bad and the good and supported her even on the hardest days.

“My parents have been my biggest supporters; whenever I went through all of my school troubles it was really hard. I felt like I let them down in a huge way. But now, getting to celebrate graduation and getting to actually walk the stage has been so awesome to get to celebrate with them,” Tucker said.

Dr. Winslow has also been one of those supporters for her and has expressed how proud of the progress that Tucker has shown throughout the many challenges she has overcome.

“She’s just a good-hearted person, and I’ve been so impressed. I’ve watched her mature from when I first had her in PR, to capstone and internship,” Winslow said. “If I had to describe Lauren in three words, I would say passionate, conscientious and empathetic. She strives for quality work, and she’s the student you want in your classes.”

Not only has Dr. Winslow enjoyed having Tucker in her classes and watching her growth academically and professionally throughout the years, she has also noticed her personal growth, rooted for her to overcome every hardship and

celebrated her achievements both internally and outwardly.

Winslow’s biggest piece of advice to Tucker is to stay true to who she is.

“Stay true to yourself, just be you, be passionate, keep striving. Don’t let anything get in your way,” Winslow said. “It’s students like her that make you as a professor proud, she didn’t let her obstacles shut the door, instead she re-opened the door... She’s going to go places, and I couldn’t be more proud of her.”

Outside of her blood family, she has made many connections closer to college that have been her support system during her time in Stephenville.

Nic and Johanna Burleson were the pastors at Tucker’s church for her first four years of college and have truly become her family away from home. They have been there throughout all of the hardships that she has faced and have been supportive and uplifting during her greatest times of need.

“They took me under their wings. They have two kids who became like siblings to me and now my fiancé – they are in my wedding, too, and Nic is officiating our wedding. Here in Stephenville, they are my biggest support system... They’ve been some of the biggest influences in my life,” Tucker said.

They have also had some of the biggest impacts on her relationship with God, which has grown immensely since her first days of freshman year, when she was first invited to TROC.

She has been serving in the ministry for the entire six years that she’s been at Tarleton, but there was one night in particular that she had a turning point in her walk with the Lord. She ended up giving her life to Christ, as well as turning her school life around.

“I don’t know what it was that triggered this one night, but I had opened up my Bible to do a Bible study, and there was so much going on in my head... this was in the midst of getting kicked out of school and not knowing where I was going to go. I started praying that God would remove any distractions from my mind, and I sat there for two hours bawling my eyes out,” Tucker said. “I was just thinking, ‘Something has got to change in my life. I’ve got to want better for myself. If I want to be able to graduate, if I want to be able to have a family one day, I’ve got to change something.’”

After wrestling with the difficult battle between dedication to church and her walk with God versus worldly pleasures and the party

scenes that college provides, that night was the night that everything began to change for Tucker.

“That was the day that I truly said, ‘I need God in my life,’ and I gave my life to Christ that night,” Tucker said.

Her time spent at Tarleton has been what she describes as “fun, challenging but rewarding.”

Every day, from the ones that presented challenges to the ones that were fulfilling, were days that Tucker woke up and chose to overcome all odds to get to where she is now.

“I had my fun times, and I had my really challenging times. Now, being able to walk the stage, I look back on all of it, and I’m just thankful that I made it here,” Tucker said.

Her journey to graduation ended up looking different than most, but without the longer path that she was sent on, she wouldn’t have met the people or accomplished the things that have gotten her to where she is now, and one of the people she is most grateful for finding is her fiancé, James.

“He’s graduating a year early, I’m graduat-

ing a year late, but God put us on the path for a reason,” Tucker said.

College looks different for everyone, and hardships fall upon even the best people, but she truly figured out how to make the best out of every experience and learned through some of the hardest times in her life that leaning on her support and more importantly, on God, can get you through the darkest of days.

“Be proud of where you are; no matter where you are, you always can be and are made for more and for better. Trust in God that he will use your past to create a better future,” Tucker said.

After graduation, Tucker wants to stay in Stephenville with her fiancé, who hopes to work for the Tarleton police department. While she has no “dream” job, Tucker truly hopes that wherever she ends up working in the future, she gets to make an impact on people.

She feels called to be a mom and wants to raise her family in Stephenville, to maybe one day be Tarleton Texans just like she was and forever will be.









Mathilde Christensen hits a drive during a tournament for the Tarleton women's golf team.

PHOTO BY: TOBY RHODES

From Denmark to Texas:

Christensen's journey leads to growth and independence

BY COLTON BRADBERRY
Opinion Editor

Four years ago, Mathilde Christensen stepped onto a plane bound for Texas, leaving behind the familiar streets of Hammel, Denmark, for a university she'd never seen in person.

This May, she will stride confidently across the graduation stage at Tarleton State University, celebrating not only academic achievement but an incredible journey of discovery, determination and dedication.

Christensen, now 23, has made her mark as a communications major concentrating in journalism and broadcasting, complemented by minors in technical writing and psychology, all while excelling as a member of Tarleton's women's golf team.

Initially attracted by the rare opportunity to combine athletics and academics, something notably challenging to achieve in Denmark, Christensen took a leap of faith, moving to Texas

without ever having visited due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"It was mainly because I could combine golf and studies here," Christensen said. "I wanted to try something new."

Christensen's passion for golf was ignited by chance at age 11 or 12 when she accompanied a friend to golf lessons. Her friend invited her along simply as a casual activity, not knowing it would spark a lifelong passion.

"At first, I obviously couldn't hit the ball," Christensen said. "But it was fun, and after that first lesson, I found myself returning week after week."

This initial curiosity blossomed into a lifelong dedication. Without any familial background in the sport, Christensen's determination set her apart, propelling her toward competitive play and ultimately a collegiate career overseas.

Transitioning to life in Texas required quick adaptation. Although Christensen had studied English in school, speaking it daily posed a significant challenge. Culture shock, homesickness

and the need to adjust academically all combined to make her first weeks in Stephenville a true test of resilience.

"My major insecurity was language," Christensen said. "Initially, I was afraid people wouldn't understand me, or I wouldn't be able to keep up in class."

Her concerns, however, were short-lived. Within two weeks, Christensen found herself more comfortable, aided greatly by the welcoming and friendly atmosphere she encountered. The kindness of strangers in small everyday moments helped ease her transition, offering a sense of belonging that she hadn't expected to find so quickly in a foreign country.

"People here are so nice. Holding doors, asking how you're doing; you're not expected to do that in Denmark. These small acts made it easy to feel at home," Christensen said.

Her teammates, many of whom are also international students, provided invaluable support and camaraderie, particularly her coach, Isabell Heminez. Together, they formed a tight-knit

group where shared experiences built strong bonds of trust and friendship, easing the challenges of living and competing far from home.

“Coach Heminez helped me immensely. She helped me fill out my passport and visa paperwork, things I couldn’t have navigated alone,” Christensen shared.

The detailed and often overwhelming paperwork associated with international study became manageable thanks to her coach’s guidance and encouragement. Navigating these bureaucratic hurdles alone would have been daunting, but with Heminez’s help, Christensen was able to focus on what mattered most – her studies and her sport.

Balancing academics and athletics required meticulous planning and disciplined execution. Christensen thrived under a structured routine, managing a rigorous schedule that combined practice sessions, tournaments, classes and study sessions.

“I like having a structured plan,” Christensen said. “I know exactly when to study because practice is always waiting. It forced me to be disciplined and organized in every aspect of my life.”

Another highlight of her time at Tarleton was the opportunity to fully experience American culture, experiences Christensen embraced throughout her time at Tarleton. She found joy in discovering the intricacies of American traditions, from attending lively college football games to experiencing local festivals and events.

Christensen appreciated the openness and warmth of her American friends and their families, which allowed her to fully immerse herself in new customs, creating memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.

“I celebrated Thanksgiving with my teammate’s family the past two years,” Christensen said. “Experiencing traditional American holidays was wonderful, especially since we don’t have Thanksgiving in Europe. It made me feel very welcomed and included.”

Looking ahead to life after graduation, Christensen plans to return to Denmark, hopeful about pursuing a master’s degree. She has already applied to programs back home but awaits confirmation of acceptance.

Meanwhile, her passion for golf remains undiminished. Christensen intends to continue playing competitively, targeting the Let Access Tour, which is a pathway to the Ladies European Tour.

“It’s very day-to-day,” Christensen said. “but I’m excited about continuing my golf career and seeing where it takes me.”

Reflecting on her transformative journey, Christensen highlighted personal growth and independence as her most significant achievements.

“I’ve grown as a person and have been more reliant on myself. I mean, moving here, no mom and dad, they’re literally thousands of miles away and time zones away. I’ve had to stand on my own legs and do everything myself,” Christensen said. “I think I’ve learned a lot about myself. That might sound a little cliché, but whenever you’re in a tough situation, I feel like you learn about yourself.”

Christensen also acknowledges the profound influence of specific professors, notably Austin Lewter, who significantly impacted her academic experience.

“Austin Lewter has been incredibly supportive,” Christensen said. “Having his classes throughout my four years here, he was always accommodating of my golf schedule and genuinely enthusiastic about having an international student in his classes.”

Outside of classes and athletics, Christensen enjoys the simple pleasures of downtime, such as watching movies, sharing meals with friends and exploring local spots for ice cream. These moments of leisure provided essential balance to her busy schedule, helping her maintain both her physical health and mental well-being.

As her departure approaches, Christensen anticipates missing Tarleton profoundly. The people, the campus, the sense of community, all have left a lasting imprint on her heart. While Denmark will always be home, Tarleton carved out a special place that she will carry with her wherever life takes her next.

“I’ll miss the people that I’ve met here and also just the campus. I love the weather, the weather in Denmark is usually not that nice,” Christensen said. “Even little things like going to basketball games or daily practices.”

As Christensen prepares to close this chapter and begin the next, she does so with the confidence of someone who has already conquered unfamiliar territory and thrived.

With every step forward, Christensen carries the lessons, friendships and memories made at Tarleton, ready to take on the world one bold swing at a time.



PHOTO BY: TOBY RHODES

Mathilde Christensen follows through on a drive during a tournament. Christensen has been a key player for the Tarleton women’s golf team, balancing athletics and academics throughout her college career.

Kyle Cooke's time at Tarleton centered around faith and friendship

BY ANDREW UTTERBACK

Podcast Producer

There are only 6,800 or so people in Brock, Texas. It's located about 40 miles west of Fort Worth and about 40 miles northeast of Stephenville, Texas. Stephenville is by all means a small town, but for Kyle Cooke, it's like living in the city.

Cooke is a biomedical science major at Tarleton State University and is graduating spring of 2025.

He grew up with his older brother Colby and younger brother Carter on land with a pond right in their backyard where they could hunt and fish. Cooke's family lived on the same street as his grandparents as well as his aunt and uncle.

Cooke considered going the Texas A&M route but ultimately decided on Tarleton.

"I came to Tarleton because I liked the size of the school and the proximity to my hometown. Initially, I wanted to pursue medical school after my time at Tarleton, but I really didn't know what was out there in the field of medicine. I now plan on pursuing Physician's Assistant School after I graduate in hopes of being a PA. As a PA, I'll work under the supervision of a physician to see patients and meet their needs," Cooke said.

Cooke's college experience, like many other Tarleton students, started at Duck Camp.

"I was super super grateful, looking back, to go to Duck Camp, be a part of the traditions and push myself a little bit to make some friends and just get involved," Cooke said.

Cooke's freshman year included getting involved with Paradigm, a weekly worship night for college students and young adults. Cooke not only went every Thursday night but also went on the Paradigm mission trip.

"I came into Tarleton as a freshman, leaving my high school friends behind and having to make new friends again for the first time since the 4th grade. This was a hard adjustment for me, starting from zero and longing for community," Cooke said. "I knew that I shouldn't just make friends with whoever was in front of me at the time. I prayed and waited for God to answer my prayer and bring me godly friends. That prayer was answered when I went on the Paradigm mission trip during spring break. I have been in two weddings so far with guys and girls that I befriended on that trip, and those friends have been one of the biggest blessings God has ever given me."

During his freshman year, Cooke also learned new skills and disciplines, like living on his own, good study habits, how to prioritize his time, how to read the Bible and have a deeper prayer life and what living for Jesus could really look like.

It was this year that Kyle met someone who made a profound impact on his life.

"My RL, Preston Coughlin, quickly became one of the most influential people in my life," Cooke said. "We would hang out every week and get honest about what our current life was like, read Scripture and pray with each other for about two hours. I wanted to model my life after the way he pursued Jesus, the way he never missed a Sunday service, the consistency he had in reading his Bible daily, the way he prayed with expectant faith for God to answer and the way he valued others above himself. Outside of our time meeting together, we would go to the gym, go to Paradigm... and hang out at each other's houses, just doing life together."

Cooke's sophomore year saw him in a chemistry research internship at Tarleton where he used plant-derived polysaccharides as a non-toxic gene delivery system to provide safer cancer treatment.

At this point, he was accustomed to "living life in college" and was able to apply the traits, skills and disciplines he had learned the year before.

This was also the year that he became a Challenge leader, a small group program associated with Paradigm.

"As a challenge leader, a leader of a small group Bible study, I had taken on the responsibility of teaching and leading a group of college students closer to Christ," Cooke said.

This year also turned out to be one of the busiest.

"I tried to take it all on. I wanted to be a part of as much as possible. I had a job, was a challenge leader, was doing cancer research and was a full-time college student in the middle of classes like organic chemistry," Cooke said. "I was drowning at times between school work, planning lessons and working. I learned a valuable lesson that year: Each 'thing' I was involved in was a good thing, but even good things, when you are a part of too many of them, can start to have negative effects when you spread yourself too thin."

At the end of Cooke's sophomore year, his close friend, Griffin Berend, passed away.

"I made a friend here at Tarleton my freshman year who invited me to the church I am now still a member of to this day, FBC Stephenville, and his name is Griffin Berend. He convinced me to go on the Paradigm mission trip to Phoenix, Arizona, that would go on to give me the friends I had earnestly prayed for and a college ministry to serve in," Cooke said.

Cooke and Berend had quickly become close friends.

"He was funny, confident, a true servant and so full of life. We had served alongside each other as challenge leaders our sophomore year and were planning on serving again our junior year. During the end of our sophomore year in April was when "life" happened to me. Griffin passed away unexpectedly. His passing affected our church community as well as his family

and so many others. I was at the height of involvement in my college career, had never even lost a great grandparent, and now was learning how to grieve the loss of not just someone for the first time, but a dear friend," Cooke said.

Kyle is able to reflect on Griffin's passing years later and find peace in God.

"Looking back just over two years later, I am now able to see how God redeemed such a situation, no matter the hurt, to His glory," Cooke said. "Because of Griffin's faith in Jesus, I do not stay in sorrow, but rejoice that in just one lifetime, I will be reunited with him in the presence of God for eternity. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says: 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.' For now until my time here on earth expires, I strive to comfort others in their sufferings just as God and the community around me extended that comfort and compassion to me in my suffering."

Cooke credits his steady position in life today to Griffin and his friendship.

"I am so thankful to have known Griffin and how he pushed me to be all that God desires me to be. I stand here today because of the faithfulness of a faithful friend," Cooke said.

Cooke's advice to those going through similar hardship is to lean on those close to you.

"I think grief looks different for everyone. Community is so important in a time of grief and loss," Cooke said. "Don't shut yourself out to other people; lean into them. The Bible talks about carrying each other's burdens, and that was a time when I couldn't carry my burden. I needed people there to cry on their shoulder to listen to my hurt and help me navigate it."

Following this hardship, Cooke's junior year was one of "restoration."

"I cut back on my involvement in the various areas I applied myself the previous year," Cooke said. "I chose to work odd jobs with my friends over a steady desk job, served on Paradigm's street team and didn't continue cancer research. These new decisions gave me the proper time I needed to allocate to each area of my life. With the time I gained back that year, my number one priority was to not just survive each semester but give myself room to grow into who I wanted to become."

Cooke's senior year of college saw him go back to being involved in some of the activities from his sophomore year.

"My senior year I was recharged and ready to step back into more responsibilities and opportunities. I became a Challenge Leader again, began working as a medical scribe and started to give serious attention to my life after my undergraduate degree,

all while pursuing intentionality with the time I had left with my friends and ministry,” Cooke said.

This year also was a time of trusting God and walking in faith.

“In my spiritual walk, my senior year has been all about walking by faith. I have learned spiritual disciplines, applied them for the past 4 years and now the Lord has asked me to have positive assurance in things yet not seen,” Cooke said.

Looking back on his four years at Tarleton, Cooke says his greatest accomplishments are the difference he made in the lives of others.

“My greatest accomplishments at Tarleton aren’t on paper. My greatest accomplishments at Tarleton are hopefully living on in the people I was blessed with the opportunity to invest in,” Cooke said.

As he moves on to apply for PA schools during his gap year, he gives three pieces of advice to incoming freshmen.

The first is to trust God with your future.

“Make plans but hold them loosely,” Cooke said. “We all dream of what we would like to do or who we want to become, but life can happen in just a moment. Proverbs 16:9 says: ‘In their hearts, humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.’ So make your future career plans, but be willing to let God open doors you should walk through and close doors you shouldn’t.”

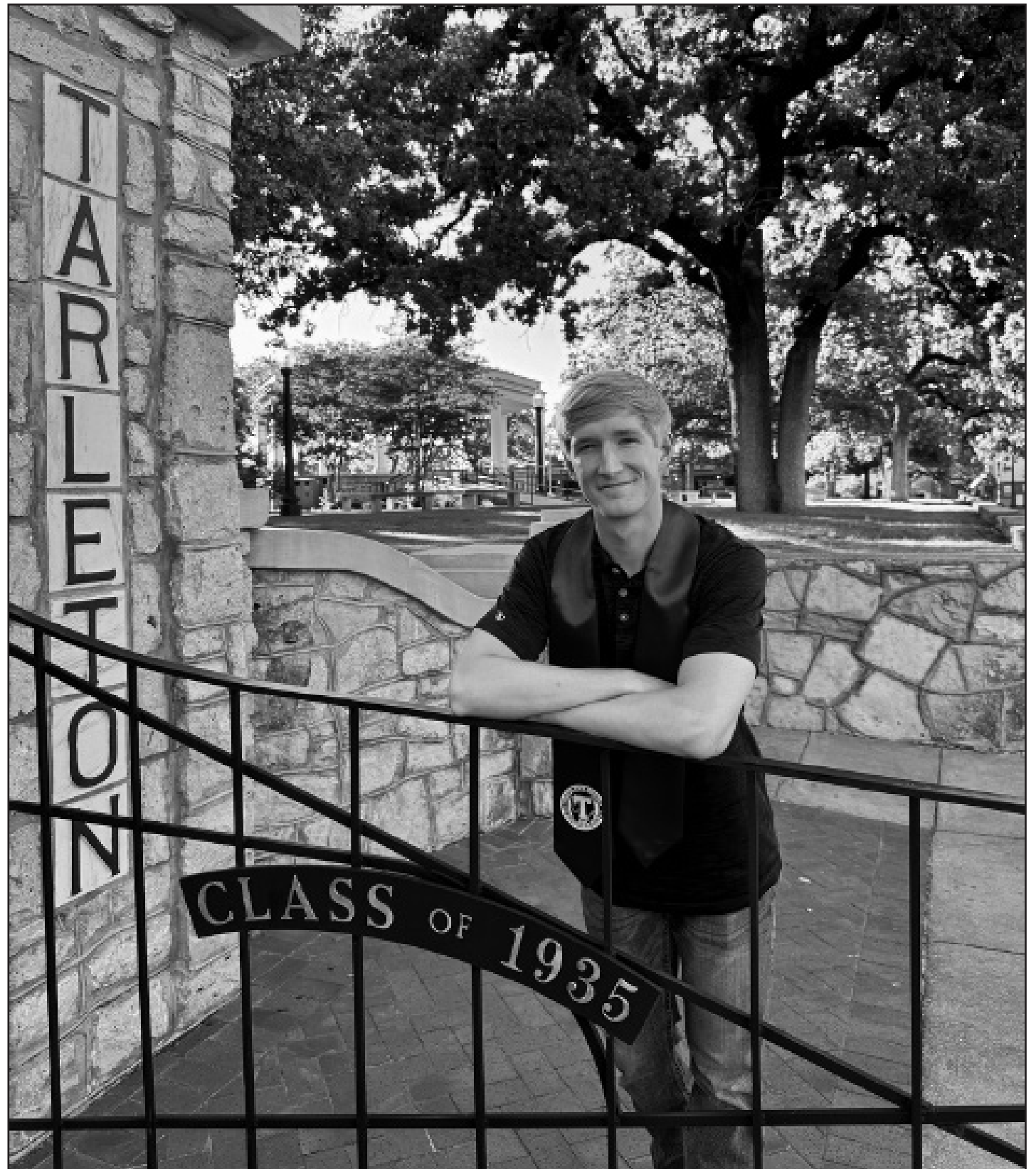
The second is to enjoy the next four years.

“Make the most of your time here at Tarleton,” Cooke said. “Don’t become so absorbed in your own craft that you forget to look around and enjoy the current moment you are living in or the people around you that you call friends. Also don’t be in such a rush to get out of this place either... Enjoy the blessings you have here to have your first class at 11:00, to go to the rec pretty much whenever you want and to have so much time to invest into your relationships and whatever career path you are pursuing.”

The third is simply to try new things.

“Don’t be afraid to step out and try something new either. So many of us want the perfect scenario before we are willing to invest in a new opportunity. But that is the beauty of trying something new – you probably will mess up or could have done it better another way, but that is how we learn and grow,” Cooke said.

As he moves on from his college years, Kyle thanks his parents, Matt Mabry, Drake Wayland, Preston Coughlin, Colton Fowler, JW



Kyle Cooke graduates this year with a degree in Biomedical Science.

PHOTO BY SYDNEY ROUILLARD

Weiss and Jesus.

His advice to the world is this:

“Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him,” Cooke said. “That’s John 14:6. If you are searching for peace, hope and a purpose, Jesus

is the only one who can truly satisfy those holes in your heart. God is love, and he wants nothing more than for you to run into his arms and begin a lifelong, eternal relationship with him. I have that relationship with Him, the Creator of the Universe; isn’t that mind blowing? And you

can, too... Change your heart to a posture of ‘not my way Lord, but yours.’ I believe that Jesus Christ paid for my sins, and my life is yours. I follow you now Jesus.”

‘No handouts, just hustle’

Tarleton’s Alexis Cole overcomes obstacles, defies the odds

BY HANNAH BROOKS

Multimedia Journalist

Alexis Cole is a personal trainer, nutrition coach and student at Tarleton State University.

She will graduate in May 2025 with a major in sports management and a minor in coaching. She’ll be immediately turning around to begin her masters in recreation and facility management.

In addition, she’ll be stepping in as the Grad Assistant (GA) for the wellness and fitness sector of the Recreation Center on campus.

But her story is far more than this alone.

She was raised in Fort Worth, Texas by her adoptive parents.

She was pushed to excellence and accordingly attended a college preparatory academy in place of public high school, near Keller-Saginaw. She wore a uniform daily and had to learn Chinese and Spanish.

“I was always pushed in the direction of going to college,” Cole said.

But even with her advanced schooling, going into college revealed itself to be no simple task.

“My parents had originally told me that my biological father’s death benefits money would assist me in college but one day they revealed it wasn’t in the account anymore. They also said they weren’t going to co-sign for any loans,” Cole said.

They continued to make it as hard as possible for Cole, further filing their FAFSA incorrectly so that she couldn’t acquire federal aid.

“It’s a lot to explain but it was a control thing for them,” Cole said.

Having only a few hundred saved up, Lexi entered her freshman year knowing she was going to have to keep up with paying out of pocket. She landed a job as a server at pastafina to help her stay at Tarleton.

Cole’s twin sister also came with her to Tarleton, but had to drop out after freshman year because of the cost.

Cole soon found herself struggling however not only with typical freshman woes, but also the revelation that many people that she thought were for her, like her adoptive parents,

were not.

“I really struggled because I didn’t have a community to support me. I didn’t have many friends and the friends I did have drank a lot. I was also going through a horrific break-up and even made an attempt on my life,” Cole said.

She finished her freshman year coming off of academic probation, which made her evaluate what she really wanted for college.

“I had originally chosen nursing as my major and then after the first semester I realized it really wasn’t my passion, so I took one semester after that to do business, which still wasn’t working for me,” Cole said.

Cole started to branch away and devoted time to the gym, where she found her passion for all things health and wellness and decided to switch over to kinesiology.

During the summer after her freshman year, she met her now fiancée, Tristan Phillips.

Phillips graduated from Tarleton this past December. They’ll be getting married on June 20th in Palmer, Texas.

“My first impression of Alexis was that she had been through a lot,” Phillips said. “Many people had given up on her, and she felt alone. But despite the adversity, she remained strong. She struck me as someone determined to become self-made, to find her identity, and figure out who she wanted to be.”

In the midst of her own battles, Cole realized that her little sister was no longer safe with her adoptive parents and the fight for her to win custody of her began.

She was now balancing being a full-time student, working (as she was fully independent), and navigating the legalistics of getting her sister.

“My adoptive mom had put us on a ton of medication that we (her and her sister) didn’t need to take. She would take trips to Mexico to obtain some of these drugs. I used to feel actually crazy but my fiancée was the one that convinced me that I didn’t actually need to take any of that medication. When I stopped, my whole mind changed,” Cole said.

As Cole continued her sophomore year as a kinesiology student, she felt that everything was so right for her. She had found her commu-

nity in the gym and had professors that cared and supported her.

Cole made it through her sophomore year, beginning court battles and working at Anytime Fitness.

“They hired me knowing that I was a student. I had been doing classes throughout the summer and at this point I was on the Dean’s List,” Cole said.

When August came, she saw that her job had been posted on Indeed. When Cole approached her head trainer for advice for moving forward, he belittled her, angry in truth that she was transparent with customers about shady business dealings even though she had brought the highest sign up rates in the past three months she’d been there.

She left early and headed straight to the Tarleton Recreation Center with blotchy eyes.

“I was at the benches. The last Grad Assistant, Noe, who I’d never met, approached me and said ‘Hey you look like you know what you’re doing, do you want to be a personal trainer?’ I did of course and it was perfect timing,” Cole said.

Cole went to her interview at the recreation center in formal dress attire, later to find out she was the first student to do so.

She got the job and her training certificates, and never looked back at Anytime Fitness.

Around this same time, she began working at Jimmy John’s to pay her court fees.

“Right now, I’m the assistant manager at Jimmy John’s and I work full time over there. I’ve been there for almost 2 years now. Taking up another job was purely out of need. I am fully independent,” Cole said.

Through no easy feat, Cole finally won custody of her sister with the help of Cross Timbers family services and the district attorney.

“I ended up winning full legal custody of her over a year and a half ago. She’s been living with me; I’ve been her caretaker for over 2 years now,” Cole said.

The process wasn’t as simple as paper makes it seem.

“It was very stressful and I did not get support from any of my adopted family... My sister struggled mentally; she could not be

left alone in a room. I had to take her to work with me for a few months. Even getting her into school was a challenge. There were a lot of tears and there were times where I thought my fiancée was going to walk away, but he was always very supportive.”

Phillips reflects on how far Cole and their relationship has come since then.

“Alexis has grown tremendously,” Phillips said. “She’s become a top personal trainer, a President’s List student, and a manager at multiple facilities. For the past 2 years, beyond academics and work, she’s fought for and won custody of her younger sister, who is now graduating high school this year, has full-time student load while maintaining Presidents List, managing 40-50 hours a week at Jimmy John’s as an assistant manager, working 10–15 hours a week as a personal trainer at the campus recreation center, and planning our wedding for this June 2025. She proves that even in difficult circumstances, it’s possible to achieve your goals with resilience and determination.”

Even through everything, Cole speaks with extreme compassion and grace.

“Everyone’s struggles are their own. I feel grateful for my life and am happy with where I am.

But I wouldn’t be who I am if I hadn’t gone through what I have. I don’t look at things as unfair. I focus on a ‘I get to’ mindset. I get to work this job. I get to have this income.”

Cole will finish her bachelor’s at Tarleton on a high note.

“These past four years have been the most challenging but rewarding because it pushed me in so many ways, including from a personal aspect. It pushed me to see things from a different perspective.”

Cole’s story is a story of courage and incredible resilience.

It’s a model for walking in compassion and being decorated with integrity.

Her story teaches us that we can reclaim our own lives, no matter the circumstances.

Good luck and thank you for being you.

From ‘Sister Cork’ to commencement

BY HELENA KNUTSON
Marketing Executive

Payton Long has been wearing a mask for the last two years. It wasn't until she stood on that all-too-familiar stage that she finally unveiled herself.

Originally from Tennessee, Payton Long came to Tarleton a few years after her family moved to Fort Worth. Long was drawn to Tarleton because of its values.

“I really only toured Tarleton, and then I toured UNT also, but the difference in their campuses drew me more here. Tarleton was just right off the bat very friendly, very family oriented, very small. I used to live in Tennessee, and Stephenville just really reminded me of where I used to live. I just immediately fell in love with it. I loved the small town feel, and it was also close enough to where I could go home. That was really meaningful to me,” Long said.

The Purple Poo have been a long standing tradition at Tarleton State University for the past 103 years. This organization, also known as TTS and TTP—the Ten Tarleton Sisters and the Ten Tarleton Peppers—selects 20 members each year to embody one of the original Poo.

For Long, she got the honor of becoming “Sister Cork.” However, becoming a Poo isn't the only way Long got involved in this long standing tradition. Long was also voted in as the TTS president.

“I had to organize a lot of when we go to Duck Camp and stuff like that. Just organizing our meeting structure and communication with each other and communication with the school. We were the first line of communication as TTS president and then TTP, which was Bo Thompson at the time. We kind of represented the organization as a whole,” Long said.

One of the traditions that comes with being a Purple Poo is the secrecy of who is behind the mask. For most people, it may seem difficult to hide your identity for two years, but for Long, it was a learning experience.

“It was pretty difficult and challenging, but it really taught me to manage my time and to set my priorities straight to make sure that I had time to do my classwork, to go to the library study, but also spend time with my friends and also grow my relationship with my brothers and sisters and the Poo,” Long said.

Long balanced this duty with being a full-time student majoring in kinesiology.

“I have always loved giving back to people and helping people. I'm going to UMHB [University of Mary Hardin-Baylor] for their physical therapy program this fall. I'm currently a tech in a physical therapy clinic. I've been an athlete, so I've loved the kinesiology, sports stuff, and physical therapy kind of just drew me in to be able to help people and make them more knowledgeable about how to move their bodies,” Long said.

But as many of us know, school can be hard, and balancing a whole load of classes can make taking the next step in your



PHOTO BY STEPHANIE NELSON

Payton Long, also known as Sister Cork, in her full costume at Tarleton Memorial Stadium.

career challenging.

“I kind of struggled with all the sciences and prereqs for PT school, and I was debating if I wanted to do it, or if I wanted to go to PTA school and not go through the hard sciences, but I talked to one of my mom's friends, who was a PT, and she really encouraged me to just keep going and keep pushing through and I did, so we're going to PT school,” Long said.

Along with her outstanding academics, which have placed her on the Dean's and President's Lists, and her involvement in Tarleton traditions, Long is also actively involved in her sorority, Delta Zeta, where she served as philanthropy assistant, social and sisterhood chair and fundraising.

“I think it helped me definitely step outside my comfort zone and meet new people. And I think that coming to a college was the biggest. The thing that helped with the transition was being able to have that group and always know that I had those people,” Long said. “I was able to have those leadership roles and kind of be creative, and I love being creative and being artsy. That was a lot of fun and being able to communicate with other people and other organizations and my sisters.”

All of this love for leadership and service came from Long's

time as a TTM where she helped mentor the incoming freshman class at Duck Camp for summer 2022.

“I loved being a mentor and stuff like that. I was able to step out of my comfort zone and be silly and goofy, but obviously that helped me down the line with being a Purple Poo, too,” Long said. “I was able to connect with a lot of people that I don't think that I would have ever talked to through the TTM program and being able to just mentor the freshman incoming class was such a blessing. I still talk to a lot of my baby ducks today.”

Being at Tarleton, Long was able to experience so many different opportunities as a student, a Poo and a sister.

“I really don't have any regrets of what I wish I could have done because I got to experience Tarleton through a whole different lens of being just a normal student and experiencing the sorority life, the typical student, and everything before I was in the Poo. Then I got to see a whole different lens of being in the Poo and how much of an influence that is just on the student body and the Stephenville Community as a whole,” Long said.

All of Long's hard work and involvement have allowed her to make an impact on Tarleton and its students.

The criteria of a cowgirl...

Kiley Morgan crafted her unique, early career journey in Western media while at Tarleton

BY MACKENZIE JOHNSON

Managing Editor

Within the glossy pages of a Western magazine, a cowgirl more than likely will take printed shape astride a horse. She probably has a worn rope in her hand, spurs on her boots and a straw hat on her head. More often than not, she also wears a belt buckle and the hems of her blue jeans are frayed.

While these criteria may fit the description of many cowgirls, it doesn't fit them all. Some aren't typically found on horses, attached to a rope and decked in hardware won in the arena.

Instead, some cowgirls in the Western industry prefer to wear headsets and all-access media badges and hold computers containing set notes.

From Cross Plains, Texas, Kiley Morgan is one of these cowgirls, and she has always been immersed in the Western community.

"My whole family rodeoed," Morgan said. "My mom was a breakaway roper at Tarleton, my uncle was a steer wrestler for Sul Ross and went on to PRCA rodeo, and my cousins were also involved in PRCA."

Although Morgan's entire family was involved in the sport, Morgan never got into the competitive side of it – but she did get into the media side.

"Ever since I was young, I went with my two cousins everywhere they went," Morgan said. "I would go to the rodeos, and I started meeting all the people, connecting with them and making a relationship with the rodeo community. And so it kind of got me interested."

That interest ignited when she graduated high school and attended junior college at Cisco. Her rodeo background led her to take on the role of manager for Cisco's rodeo team, which in turn led her to write for the Wrangler Express, Cisco's student newspaper.

"I've always liked writing, but I never really knew that I could pursue that," Morgan said. "But when I went to Cisco College and went to be the rodeo manager there, I was in a journalism class where the professor was the head of the college newspaper. She wanted us all to be a part of the newspaper by being in that class. When she asked what I was interested in writing about, I was like, 'I don't know. I'm part of the rodeo team as the manager. I could write about that.'"

Needing no further instruction, Morgan took that and ran with it. Every weekend Cisco competed at a college rodeo, she would interview the winning athletes and write about the results.

"I never knew I wanted to pursue that," Morgan said. "Going

into Cisco, I did not have a career plan or an education plan. I was just going to get my associate's and was hoping that everything played out, and maybe I would stumble upon a passion. Sure enough, I did."

Through being rodeo manager at Cisco, Morgan had yet another avenue to pursue the newfound passion of media through primarily handling the team's social media and marketing presence.

Cisco's head rodeo coach, Don Eddleman, has known Morgan since she was a little girl and knew she would excel in the position.

"She had the pieces to the puzzle," Don said. "She's been around this industry her whole life. She just needed somebody to help her put a few things together to get her to where she is today. I just feel lucky that I got to be a part of it at the beginning."

Morgan finished her associate's at Cisco within a year, and Don and his wife, Pam, were the pair to encourage her to not only go to Tarleton, but pursue a communications degree there.

"When I got to Tarleton, I took one of Austin Lewter's classes, and we had an opportunity to write an evergreen story. I decided to do it on the Tarleton rodeo coach, and Lewter pulled me aside after that assignment, and he was like, 'Hey, you're really good at this,'" Morgan said.

When Lewter, adviser of the Texan News Service, asked Morgan to join the team, she didn't hesitate.

Similar to her time at the Wrangler Express, Morgan began interviewing rodeo athletes and writing articles on weekend results – just this time for Tarleton.

"Working for the TNS gave me both experience and relationships, and I think that's very important in our industry – networking and building those relationships with not only the athletes but the coaches," Morgan said. "Being at Tarleton and being a part of the TNS exposed me to the Tarleton rodeo team, and I got to know those athletes and the coaches and write about them and share their stories while also building my own connections. And I think that helped me when applying for my internships."

With two internships on her radar, building those connections played a major role in getting her foot in the door of the Western media industry.

The College National Finals Rodeo media internship takes place during the June finals in Casper, Wyoming. It's a two-week internship focused on written and production coverage of the prestigious rodeo, where collegiate rodeo athletes from across the nation compete.



COURTESY PHOTO

Finishing her last year of college online to fully immerse herself in her role at the Cowboy Channel, Morgan is redefining what it means to be a cowgirl in today's world.

While Morgan applied for the internship while she was at Cisco, priority was given to upperclassmen candidates. The spring she joined the TNS, she applied once more.

Around this time, Morgan also attended a broadcasting clinic hosted by Justin McKee, a television host for the Cowboy Channel and PRCA Rodeo. Although the Cowboy Channel didn't have an official internship program, Morgan inquired McKee about one and got hold of an application.

"Within a day of each other, I was accepted into the CNFR internship and the Cowboy Channel internship, back-to-back," Morgan said. "I actually started my Cowboy Channel internship in May, took two weeks off to go to Casper for the CNFR internship, and then came back for the Cowboy Channel internship."

The Cowboy Channel internship was broken up into three parts, and Morgan rotated each week between three departments. The first department was with the producers, where she

helped make show rundowns and build graphics for the channel's TV shows. The second part was the digital team, where Morgan got to write articles and do what she was most comfortable doing. The final department was in the studio, helping with the lights, cameras and stage setup.

Theoretically, the Cowboy Channel internship was supposed to last three months, but Morgan's path in media has never been completely by the book.

"I got offered a full-time job at the end of my internship," Morgan said. "It was very surreal. It's what I had worked for, but it still kind of came as a shock to me. It was something I had to think about, but then again, it wasn't. It was a hard decision in that I knew I was going to be taking on a lot of responsibility. And at the end of the day, I knew I had to put 110% into college and 110% into my work."

Getting offered a job following an internship isn't uncommon, but it is when you're still classified as a junior in college. Yet, however unorthodox, McKee saw something in Morgan from the start, and her devotion to her summer internship only solidified that instinct.

"Kiley is passionate about learning and growing as a professional," McKee said. "There's a big difference between getting the job done and getting the job done at a very high level, and she wants it done with excellence. That's what an employer will easily recognize early. She shows up early and stays up really late to make sure that we reach our goals."

For her senior year, Morgan opted to finish school online in order to simultaneously pursue a position at the Cowboy Channel. Being considered a full-time student while also working a full-time job is an undertaking she knew would be challenging from the get-go. And yet, it was a no-brainer.

"Balancing school and work has been a challenge, but ultimately it's something that I set my mind to from the beginning," Morgan said. "I knew that I had worked so hard to get there, so I wasn't going to pass up that opportunity."

Riding that line between student and industry professional was an intimidating position to leap into for Morgan, especially considering how seriously she took the opportunity.

"It was a little bit intimidating, but the Cowboy Channel is like a big family to me," Morgan said. "Everyone was very accepting and patient with me, and they still are as I learn. But it was a lot at first, and it still is – it's something that I don't think I'll ever really stop learning. There's something new to be learned every single day, but I think now it's just a matter of keeping everything balanced."

Daunting or not, accepting the position as production assistant is one Morgan has flourished in completely. While she initially thought she'd fall into a more editorial position when she stumbled upon the passion of media, through the Cowboy Channel, she's grown to love the broadcast side of things.

Working primarily alongside executive producer Karlee Peterson, Morgan helps with the day to day production of the Cowboy Channel on location; meaning she travels to rodeos to serve as the producer for the channel's pre-show, coordinates with rodeo committees and attends production meetings.

"Karlee was also young when she started her career at the Cowboy Channel, and so she was still juggling college and ca-

reer," Morgan said. "She has been a tremendous help checking in on me and making sure that I'm where I need to be in college and with my career. And so I think having a person like her in my corner to not only help me, but also keep my spirits up and encourage me, has been tremendously helpful."

From the perspective of also being a young woman in Western media, Peterson knows what it takes to be successful, and she saw it in Morgan instantaneously.

"Kiley's work ethic and professionalism are rare to find, especially in someone so young," Peterson said. "She genuinely wants to do the work, be part of big conversations and fully understands that earning a seat at the table takes effort and commitment. That kind of presence—the ability to carry yourself with confidence and maturity around others—isn't something you can really teach. Simply put, Kiley has that 'it' factor... I've been in her shoes, and because of that, I want to do everything I can to help her grow and succeed."

While many professionals believe in Morgan, it's still easy for self-doubt to creep into the corners of her mind.

"I think everybody has a little bit of self-doubt and thinks, 'Am I ready for this?' Especially when in such a big role," Morgan said. "But I put my mind to it, and I was determined, and I never backed down, and I'm still not backing down. And so that's something that I've got to be proud of – to know that at my age, a lot of people only dream of being where I am. I'm so thankful that I've met the right people for all of these doors to open."

No matter how big or small the decision, Morgan encourages others to never let the fear of unfamiliarity dictate their chosen path.

"The best thing for me was diving right in with both feet," Morgan said. "I think the worst thing that you can do is sit back and miss an opportunity because you're fearful of what might happen. I don't think that I would be where I am today if not for that drive because I probably would have been concerned that maybe I wasn't ready for a career this big, but I did it, and I wouldn't change a thing."

Beyond soaking in every opportunity available, Morgan has another mission she strives to fulfill.

"I think that if you're going to work in the Western industry, you need to wholeheartedly be an advocate for the Western industry," Morgan said. "That's what I try to strive for every day – being an advocate for this industry, telling our story, showing people why we do what we do and why it's important to keep this industry alive. I got to do that with my journalism, but I also get to do that on the production side of things. I get to be a part of that storytelling through television. My main goal is to inform people of who we are and what we do and just appreciate our way of life."

For Morgan and her passion for Western advocacy, the past year has been anything but comfortable – but as a result, she's evolved like never before.

"I think that you grow where you're uncomfortable. If you're uncomfortable, then you're doing something right," Morgan said. "And if for whatever reason it doesn't work out, there is another door out there that will open. And it will probably be greater than you ever could imagine."



PHOTO BY HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Kiley Morgan is a 2025 spring Tarleton graduate. Her journey is a testament to how far hard work and dedication can take you, no matter your age.

Morgan will be graduating with a major in communications, a minor in business and concentration in public relations and social engagements.

Although Morgan may be closing the door of being an undergraduate, the door of focusing even further on her career is swung wide open, and it wouldn't be possible without her mentors and family along the way.

"As I enter this next chapter of life with graduating, I can't help but look back on how far I've come," Morgan said. "I know that none of it would be possible without all of these people that played a significant role in every step of my path."

This is just the beginning for Morgan. While her career has gravitated to televised media, and she won't necessarily be writing the articles that fill the glossy pages of a western magazine, she will more than likely one day be in them.

A cowgirl who dedicates her life to sharing the stories of other cowgirls and cowboys is one herself in all capacities—no matter whether she holds a rope or a microphone in her hand—and Morgan is the embodiment of that unique criterion.



Kyle Earp tutors students at the Research Conference held in the Mathematics Building.

PHOTO BY FAYETTE JIANG

Scientific Success...

BY ANNABETH JOHNSON
Multimedia Journalist

From his first steps on the Tarleton State University campus, graduating senior Kyle Earp knew he had found his new home for the next four years.

Earp graduated from a small high school in Florence, Texas, which played a part in his choice to attend Tarleton due to the university’s smaller size and a

scholarship he was awarded.

He was not the first in his family to bleed purple, as his older brother graduated from Tarleton in 2016 with two degrees, one in chemistry and the other in biology.

Earp himself will be walking the stage on May 17 at 9 a.m. to receive his two diplomas in mathematics and computer science.

Kyle Earp earns two degrees at Tarleton

Growing up, he always enjoyed mathematics and loved learning about it and applying it. In his senior year of high school, he decided that he wanted to pursue a mathematics degree, but his plans expanded.

In his third semester at college, he would choose to double major and add computer science as his second major.

“During my senior year of high school, I took my first programming class, and I fell in love with it,” Earp said. “So I was torn between taking either a computer science degree or a mathematics, and I asked myself why not both.”

Earp’s classes had a lot of overlap, so his plan to double major worked out in his favor.

During his time at Tarleton, Earp was involved in numerous organizations.

He has been a student tutor at the Math Achievement Center (MAC) since the second semester of his freshman year.

In order to be eligible to apply for this position, you have to have a B in calculus 1, which Earp easily obtained.

“It really helped me build connections with other math majors,” Earp said. “It helped me strengthen my knowledge in the early mathematics and helped to keep my knowledge fresh throughout my schooling here.”

Earp was also very involved in Paradigm Student Ministries as a Challenge Leader for about two years.

Within Paradigm, Challenge Leaders—a pair assigned to each group—teach lessons based on passages from the Holy Bible that each Challenge Group reads together.

Earp got promoted in his final semester to guide a Leader to Leader (L2L) group that gives out lesson plans to the Challenge Leaders.

Mackenzie Watson has known Earp for about two years and shares what she admires most about him during the time she has known him.

“The way he intentionally loves people around him in such a caring and intentional way,” Watson said. “Seeing him go from a challenge leader to an L2L leader really put him in a position to show what he normally wouldn’t share with people. He really took that step and became the leader everyone knew he could be.”

Lizzie Wood met Earp around three years ago and got to lead their L2L group with him in his last semester of college – getting to first hand witness his positive qualities and growth.

“He is really humble. He is also a great teacher and so service-oriented,” Wood said. “He just wants to serve people, and he really lives that out in his life. I’ve seen him before he ever interviewed and wanted to lead, and as he kind of figured that out and now getting to lead a group with him, I’ve seen him grow exponentially in his confidence and spiritually knowing Jesus and living that out daily.”

Along with Paradigm, Earp was also a part of the Honors College.

After entering college with too many core classes completed, he ended up having honors contracts in two of his math classes, where he did extra work on top of regular coursework.

Earp’s Honors contracts consisted of mathematical proofs.

“A proof is where you take a statement, and you don’t know whether it’s true or not,” Earp said. “Using assumptions that you state, you show that that statement is true.”

Starting the spring semester of his sophomore year, he was also a student researcher for the College of Math and Science and worked with Dr. Chris Mitchell and Dr. Scott Cook.

As a Student Researcher, he helped Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Cook with their disease modeling research, where they worked to improve methods to estimate parameters for Ordinary Differential Equations (ODE) systems of disease spread.

Differential equations are equations that describe how a function changes at a time.

Earp reviewed a system of ODE that describes how people move between different illness diagnosis classes.

A person starts as susceptible, then gets exposed to a disease, so now they are infected, and after some time, they recover.

“We have equations that model how people move in that population,” Earp said. “The hard part is finding parameters that fit that system to a set of data. We were working on Bayesian methods to improve those equations.”

Earp was also a band member for two semesters and has been playing the saxophone since high school. He wasn’t sure about time requirements for his classes, so he held off from band for a semester.

In the spring, Earp decided to join the University Band, which is a spring-only band that is for students who just want to have fun or maybe work on a second instrument.

The following fall semester, he played for the Symphonic Band, which is a full-year band, but because of his class restrictions, Earp only stayed for the fall semester.

Along with his academics, Earp enjoys reading.

“The amount of books I’ve read has fluctuated in college, but it’s something that I can always go back to,” Earp said.

He also spends his free time occasionally playing video games or spending quality time with his friends.

During his college career, Earp’s greatest obstacle was time management.

On average, he took 16 hours each semester and had to find a way to balance his academics with his social life and

job.

He had to figure out how to allocate time for different things and estimate how long something might take in order to set aside time to complete that task.

“Navigating social life, too, was a hardship. I didn’t have a whole lot of friends in high school,” Earp said. “I’ve always been introverted. Introversion is just how you recover. Introverted people recover by themselves; extroverted people get energy from being around other people. I’m introverted, but I’ve become better at hanging out with people and initiating friendships.”

Although she has only known Earp for over a year, Lily Small shares her appreciation for him.

“Kyle is genuinely one of the nicest people I have ever met,” Small said. “Every single time I walk into a room, he makes sure I feel welcome. He has gotten so much more comfortable around other people. He has always been so powerful in his faith and confident in letting people know how loved they are.”

Also having a newer friendship with Earp for around a year, Kason Miller recognizes the many admirable qualities that Earp has shared with him.

“Kyle is a phenomenal historian whenever it comes down, not only to scripture but random historical facts,” Miller said. “I’ve watched him be able to step out of a comfort zone that he had from being really soft spoken to leading an L2L group which in turn leads other groups.”

Once graduated, Earp plans to attend the University of Texas at Arlington to pursue a doctorate in mathematics.

He will start in August and will be a member of their research training group, which is a National Science Foundation-funded program.

The training program Earp will be a member of is the Vertically Integrated Inter-Disciplinary Training in Mathematics for Human Health.

“We are looking at cancer biology, computational neurology, vector-borne diseases and how to research those topics and how to research in general,” Earp said. “It is a two year program, but I will carry the research until I graduate.”

Taking a look at the past four years, Earp leaves some advice for his freshman self.

“Have fun. I remember the fall semester of my freshman year, I spent a lot of time in my dorm room. It wasn’t until the next semester and the years following that I actually made friends and started enjoying my time here. So just get out there. Have fun,” Earp said.

With four years at Tarleton to be greatly proud of and a very bright future ahead, one can only congratulate and celebrate Kyle Earp in his past and future achievements.

Brianna Brink is a woman of God ready to step into the medical field

BY BETHANY KILPATRICK
Multimedia Journalist

Brianna Renee Brink, better known as Bri, will be graduating from Tarleton State University on May 16, 2025, at 9 a.m. at the Tarleton Memorial Stadium, with a nursing degree and aspirations of becoming a labor and delivery nurse.

Brink is from San Antonio, Texas, and began her college journey in 2021. Since that point, she has worked as a facilities employee at the Tarleton Recreation Center, became involved in Paradigm College Ministry and recently became engaged to her fiancé, Michael Gonzalez.

Much in Brink's life has changed in the last four years, including her decision to be saved, which means accepting the gift of salvation offered to all humanity by Jesus' death on the cross.

The person who has stood beside her through every season and whom Brink credits as her biggest supporter is her best friend, Sofia Gonzalez.

Sofia and Brink attended the same school since middle school but did not develop a deeper friendship until their college days.

"It was our first few weeks here, and I texted her on Snapchat," Brink said. "I was like, 'My mom told me that your dad told her that you are here at Tarleton.' And so literally after that, she came over to my dorm, met my roommate and we became a really big group of friends."

Sofia's faith in God inspired Brink and ultimately is what led to the deep connection they now share and cherish. Sofia was saved in the summer between her sophomore and junior year, and Brink remembers being confused by her decision at first.

"I was like, 'Who is this weirdo?'" Brink said. "She was telling me what the Lord was doing in her life, and I did not really know how to react. I didn't grow up in church, and I didn't really know Jesus at all."

Sofia began to invite Brink to Bible studies and her challenge group, which is a small group Bible study that is led through Paradigm.

"She planted that seed, and she reflected Jesus," Brink said. "That is ultimately why I was like, 'Okay, she has this overwhelming sense of peace, and I want to figure out what this is, too.'"

Brink was saved her junior year, and her relationship with God began to grow from that point and is what led to her further involvement and commitment to Paradigm.

"I thought the things of the world could fulfill me," Brink said. "I was depressed, and there are photos of how I looked freshman and sophomore year, and I look different. I was carrying a lot. But God found me, and I finally met him there."

Brink began to notice a change in her life for the better after her decision to follow Jesus, which led to an indescribable peace.

"Once I finally started putting my trust in Jesus, it was the only thing that ever stood," Brink said. "It was the only thing that had that firm foundation. That is when I felt most set free. We are not held to the ways of this world."

During her senior year, Brink has served as a challenge leader alongside Paradigm intern Braden Garcia, mentored and disciplined younger women on a weekly basis, regularly attended Paradigm's Thursday night worship gatherings, attended Paradigm's Sunday morning Bible study and attended Sunday morning service at First Baptist Church in Stephenville.

"Bri is not only my best friend but my sister in Christ," Sofia said. "She pushed me to be a better person and to always put the Lord first. I have seen her grow so much in her faith and as a woman of God."

In addition to her involvement with Paradigm, Brink has worked at the recreation center on campus since the beginning of her freshman year. Her boss, Christian Dollof, is a senior in graduate school at Tarleton and has personally known Brink since March of 2023.

"She is a manager and helps lead others and passes on her knowledge to them daily," Dollof said. "Bri radiates positive energy and is kind to everyone. She just has a lasting effect that makes people's days positive and better. It is

something truly special."

Dollof was a member of Brink's challenge group this past year, creating a unique friendship between the two.

"I think it's a really good dynamic because not only is he my boss and I'm his challenge leader, but that allows us to be friends in a way," Brink said. "I go to him for a lot of advice, and he also comes to me for a lot of advice."

Dollof thinks highly of Brink and considers her to be extremely encouraging.

"As a challenge leader, she is phenomenal," Dollof said. "Bri is also a great friend of mine, because she's one of the only ones who's been on staff with me throughout my entire rec process and has always given me guidance and help when needed. She is just someone I can always count on and trust to give me an honest opinion."

Brink credits her relationship with God and her friends with providing the motivation and determination she needed to excel in nursing school.

"Nursing school is not easy," Brink said. "God has definitely guided me through school and has given me the heart to want to stay in it."

Brink desires to become a labor and delivery nurse due to her passion to care for mothers.

"My sister let me be in her last delivery with her," Brink said. "And I just saw how her nurse treated her, how her nurse really advocated for her and made sure she felt safe. That's when I really took a step back, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, like, this is exactly the type of nurse I want to be, a nurse who advocates for the mom.'"

As Brink prepares to begin her professional career, she is also planning a wedding. Brink and Michael have been in a relationship since 2022, and he proposed on April 4, 2025, while hanging out beside the lake with Brink.

"Michael was trying to throw me off," Brink said. "He was like, 'I want to graduate from school and get my life together.' And he does not graduate until next year. So I am not expecting it at all, and so the fact that that happened was just amazing."

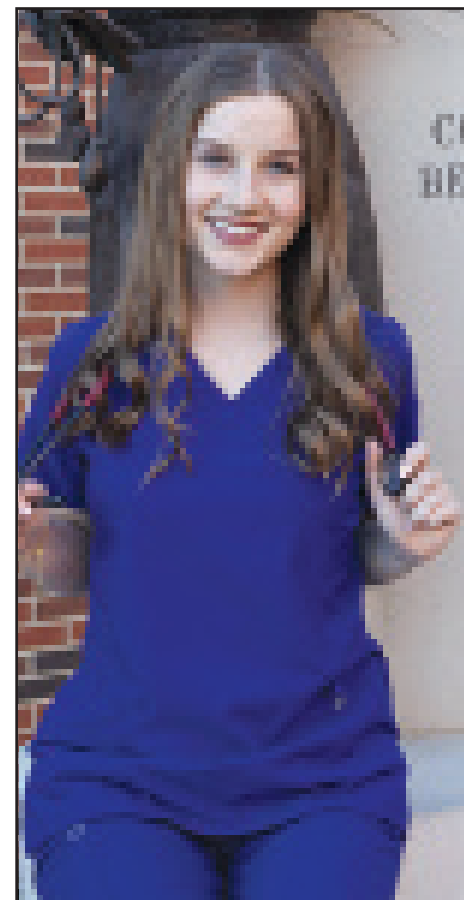


PHOTO BY ANNALEIGH MCCALLON

Brianna Brink poses outside the Tarleton Nursing Building with the Bea Marin statue

Brink is excited to begin the next chapter of her life but is saddened about leaving the place that has morphed her into who she is today.

"I'm sad to leave everybody, especially at Paradigm," Brink said. "Those are my people. And I'm very sad to leave Paradigm. I am excited to be done with school, but it is bittersweet."

The joy that radiates from Brink is obvious to any of those who know her or have a relationship with her, and she wishes for all to know that her joy comes from God and the peace He provides.

"If there is one piece of advice that I can give, it is to trust God," Brink said. "Know that you are here for a reason, and the things that happen in your life are not a coincidence; they always happen for a reason."

A Goodbye, but never a farewell

Dear Texan News Service Family,

As I sit down to write this, I can't help but feel overwhelmed with gratitude, nostalgia and love. It's hard to believe that three incredible years have flown by so quickly. In just a few weeks, I'll be turning the page to the next chapter of my life, but a piece of my heart will always remain with the Texan News Service.

When I first walked through the doors of TNS, I never could have imagined how much it would come to mean to me. I was just a student looking for a place to belong, to create and to learn. What I found was so much more: a family. Through every late night deadline and every unforgettable trip, I grew not only as a journalist and leader, but as a person.

I was lucky enough to serve as Art Director, Editor-in-Chief and Marketing Director, titles that sound official but to me meant the chance to work side by side with the most talented, passionate and inspiring team. Each role taught me something new. How to lead with empathy, how to create with purpose and how to adapt and grow when challenges came our way.

To Mr. Lewter, thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Your guidance, patience and trust gave me opportunities for which I will forever be thankful for. You created a space where students like me could find our voices, make mistakes and become better because of them. I'll never be able to fully express how much your support has meant.

To Mr. Wise, you were the first to check up on me when I needed it most. Your kindness left a mark that I'll carry with me forever. It's the small moments of genuine care that define a place, and you made TNS feel like home.

And to my best friends who came along with TNS, Jolee, Copeland and Kiley, there aren't enough words to describe how much you all mean to me. We grew together within these walls, sharing laughs, tears, long nights and endless memories. You made the hard days bearable and the good days unforgettable. I couldn't have asked for better people to walk through this journey with.

TNS taught me more than just journalism. It taught me resilience, teamwork, leadership and the power of storytelling. It gave me experiences that textbooks never could, covering real stories, the pride of publishing work and the quiet satisfaction of knowing we made a difference.

As I prepare to say goodbye, I know that Texan News Service will continue to thrive and grow, just as it helped me thrive and grow. I'm endlessly proud to have been a part of it, and I will forever carry the memories and lessons from these years with me.

Thank you for giving me a place to call home. Thank you for giving me my best friends, my mentors, my memories.

With all my love and gratitude,

Reese Keeling, *Marketing Director*



‘Have a wonderful day, Texans’

BY HAELEY CARPENTER

Editor-in-Chief

If you were to tell little Haeley that she would become the editor-in-chief of her university’s news service, she would ask how the hell that happened. If you were to ask high school Haeley, she would wonder how we even made it to college. If you would ask spring 2022 Haeley who was in news gathering and writing, she would simply tell you no way.

If you were to ask me now if I ever thought that I would be writing a goodbye letter to the best team and organization I have ever been a part of, I would tell you no, but that I wouldn’t change a thing.

The girl who sat in Mr. Lewter’s class in 2022 was unsure of herself. She didn’t know what she wanted to do with her life; didn’t know who she wanted to be. Hell, she didn’t even know what she wanted to do for dinner.

I tell everyone that asks me how I like Tarleton that it was the best decision I ever could have made for myself. Looking back, yes that is true, but it is because it led me to walk into Lewter’s office the first day of the fall semester in 2022 and accept his offer to be a multimedia journalist (MMJ) for the Texan News Service.

Little did I know that it would change my life.

I was so worried about not liking it or letting everyone down, but Lewter convinced me to trust him and go into things with an open mind. I gave him an underwhelming, “I guess.”

He believed in me more than I believed in myself.

I came in as an MMJ and was excited to write about the school I loved. It was a semester of learning and getting comfortable with the team. At the time we were small but we didn’t let that stop us. Taite Read, thank you for being so welcoming and leading with passion and integrity.

As the digital media director, I spent weeks and weeks pressing all the buttons on that website until something worked. The website is my baby and, now, we are about to hit 150,000 views. I could not be more proud of the website, and I thank y’all for trusting me with it.

That semester, I started to feel that maybe this isn’t just a college job to make a little extra cash on the side. Lord knows we aren’t in it for the money.

Jolee, Reese, Copeland, Jaxon, Michaela, Thomas, Payton and Ashtyn; Lewter may have helped me join the team, but y’all are the reason I stayed.

The summer after being the digital media director, I became the managing editor and we merged with JTAC. I had so many hesitations about it because I was so proud of the TNS, and I hate change. I was nervous because I didn’t know how things were going to go, but I realized that those feelings meant that I cared so much about what we were doing.

The merge happened, and for a while there were some bumps in the road, but we got through them as a team.

The fall semester started and we almost doubled in size in two weeks. It was crazy going from a small group of friends to being in charge of so many baby journalists. I learned so much about leading a team, the writers whose stories I was editing and, of course, myself. I (somehow) balanced 18 hours of classes, two other jobs and, don’t tell human resources, over 20 hours at the TNS. I didn’t have room to think, but when I did, it was more often than not about the job that meant more than anyone will ever know.

Being the editor-in-chief this semester came easy to me; like putting on a sweatshirt that fit perfectly. I was so gung ho about all of the things we could do, I jumped in, and we started swimming through the semester together.

Every person that I have come across in the newsroom—every staff member, professor and person interviewed—has meant the world to me.

To my JTAC Editors: If anyone has put up with the most from me this semester, it was

y’all. Thank you for working with me, being patient while we figure out Canvas and being patient with me when forgetting to assign stories. The three of y’all have helped so much this semester, and I was so lucky to have y’all.

To my podcast crew, thank you for taking your ideas and running with them. Podcasting is the area that I knew the least about, so I was slightly worried when y’all pitched the idea, but I knew that between the four of us, we could figure it out. And it turns out you didn’t even need me. Keep producing your witty popcast, the world is lucky to listen.

To my broadcast team, I have loved your creativity and eagerness to try something new. Even if it didn’t work, you tried again, and if it still didn’t work, you never let it get to you. After a bumpy road last semester and the promise of bigger and better equipment, I can’t wait to watch as an alumna.

To my marketing team, the two of you started with little to nothing and have learned as you went, and I am so proud of you. The connections and money y’all have made will benefit the TNS for years to come.

To my MMJs, you guys have grown so much this semester, and I can’t wait to see y’all flourish even more. Your ideas and creativity cannot be recreated, and I am so lucky to have individuals who are so passionate about starting something new. Thank you for being teachable and excited to learn.

Reese, I can’t believe it but we did it, girl. Congratulations on everything you have accomplished in college and at the TNS. I’m so excited to be graduating with you.

Ashtyn, words can’t describe how much your friendship has meant to me. Every up and down, you have been there making me laugh, and I can always count on you to pick me back up. Even when you weren’t trying, our time together has been some of my favorite moments. You are going to be extraordinary.

Kenzie, I wouldn’t want anyone else to take my place. You are going to do great things. Your talent, support, humor and logic have kept me grounded and humbled this semester, and I don’t know what I would have done without you. The team is in your hands now. Good luck, because they are a handful, but have fun, because it’ll be worth it.

O Captain, My Captain, Mr. Lewter, I owe you so much. You will never know how much you saved me. Every correction and compliment has made me the person I am today.

Even on the days I didn’t necessarily love my job, I liked it. Every awkward interview, stutter at the anchor desk, 11 o’clock paper night, crashout over Oxford commas, frustration at late submissions, I still liked what I did.

The negatives were few and far between, and it was so much easier to focus on the positives.

I have traveled to incredible places like New Orleans and New York City, got to speak on a panel at the Texas Press Association, write almost 30 articles, grow more than anyone will ever know, lead an amazing team and best of all, make some damn good friends.

The opportunities I have had at my time during the TNS were unmatched. I owe it to every administrator that has ever supported us. Lewter, Dr. Emran El-Badawi, Dr. Chris Gearhart, Kirk Wise, Tonya Ford, Dr. James Hurley and countless others’ dedication have helped improve our organization and make successful students.

All in all, I am undeniably sad to leave. I am also beyond proud of every member of this team. You all will do incredible things, and it has been an absolute honor to be your editor-in-chief.

Winnie the Pooh has a famous quote that says, “How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.”

While it couldn’t be more true, I hate goodbyes, and I will be back, so for now:

Have a wonderful day, Texans.



100.7 THE PLANET
THE PLANET 100.7
CARLETON RADIO

LISTEN AT KXTR.COM

BRING SOUND TO THE UNUSUAL

KXTR



100.7

BECAUSE WE ARE A DJ ON THE PLANET

254-968-9586

MATH 138