

Commuters connect at Voices in the Nest event

By Brandon Cortés
Features Editor

For many commuters, campus life can feel like a series of short stops between classes — a quick coffee, a quiet corner, then back on the road. The latest Voices in the Nest event invited commuters to gather in the Adanti Student Center in Room 217 for an open mic event.

The goal, psychology major Heather Rae Gaydownen, a senior and member of Commuter Services, said, was to help students feel part of campus life even if they do not live there.

“For Commuter Services, we try to do a couple smaller events so people can just know the area and do something fun in between classes,” Gaydownen said. “It’s another event where people can earn commuter cash.”

The karaoke setup transformed the Student Center into an impromptu concert hall for the afternoon, with students singing everything from pop hits to old favorites.

The event encouraged students who might otherwise pass through campus quietly to stop and connect with others.

Commuter cash,

Gaydownen explained, is a rewards program that encourages students to engage with events and resources.

Participants collect metaphorical money by attending Commuter Services activities throughout the semester, which they can later use to bid on prizes during a large auction at semester’s end.

“It gives commuters a reason to stop by,” Gaydownen said. “You come to an event, you have fun, and you also get commuter cash you can spend later. It’s a win-win.”

Events like Voices in the Nest are designed to make the university’s large commuter population feel seen and connected.

While residential students have easy access to community activities and social events, commuters often miss out due to tight schedules or long commutes.

Gaydownen said Voices in the Nest bridges that gap by offering relaxed, inclusive spaces between classes.

“It’s really about making sure commuters have opportunities to engage with campus life,” Gaydownen said. “Even if you’re only here a few

hours a day, you can still be part of something.”

Commuter Services hosts several small-scale activities throughout the semester, often incorporating games, trivia or music to keep the atmosphere light. The events are intentionally short and accessible — something students can enjoy without disrupting their day.

“You start recognizing the same faces,” Gaydownen said. “People who might’ve just come to eat or study now stick around to talk. You see connections forming.”

Gaydownen said that beyond the casual fun, events like this represents a larger oush at the university to strengthen commuter engagement.

Gaydownen said that beyond the casual fun, Voices in the Nest represents a larger push to strengthen commuter engagement. With more than half the student body commuting, programs like these play a vital role in fostering inclusion.

“Being a commuter doesn’t mean missing out on the college experience,” Gaydownen said. “These events remind people that community isn’t just for residents. It’s for everyone.”

Sign Language Club builds community through baking

By Brandon Cortés
Features Editor

The smell of fresh cookies and homemade pastries filled the Engleman Hall Rotunda last week, as the American Sign Language Club hosted its fall bake sale, not just to raise funds, but to bring visibility to the Deaf community and ignite curiosity about ASL among students.

For anthropology major Elena Picano, a senior and the club’s president, the sale represented something far more meaningful than a fundraiser.

“We wanted something accessible and personal,” Picano said. “Homemade goods help bring people in. It starts with a cookie, but the real goal is to start conversations about Deaf culture and the importance of learning ASL.”

Psychology major Alex Cruz, a junior and the club’s vice president, said the bake sale was designed with intention not only to raise money, but to involve members in a hands-on way that fostered ownership and pride within the club.

“Fundraisers usually partner with outside companies,” Cruz said. “But by keeping it here,

made by our members, it becomes collaborative. People feel like they’re part of something, not just supporting it.”

Founded in 2020, the ASL Club initially struggled to gain traction, especially during the pandemic when meetings were held over Zoom.

Cruz, who is autistic, said ASL became deeply personal for her before she even joined the club. Learning sign language allowed her to express herself authentically when speaking felt overwhelming.

“I already had a passion for it,” Cruz said. “ASL helped me communicate when words didn’t. Now, I want others to learn and feel empowered, too.”

The club now meets weekly in the student center on Room 305, where members review the ASL alphabet before moving on to themed lessons — fall terms, colors, animals, numbers — and discussions centered around Deaf history and culture. Both leaders stress that the club is open to everyone, regardless of experience.

“You don’t need any background at all,” Cruz said. “We understand what it’s like to be a beginner.

We’re patient and encouraging. Some members struggle at first, but we work through it together.”

That inclusive approach has shaped the club’s mission: not just to teach a language, but to foster appreciation and respect for the Deaf community, whose history Cruz said is often overlooked or misunderstood in mainstream education.

“There’s a lot of misinformation about ASL,” Picano said. “Signs evolve. Culture matters. Just like with any language, you can’t separate the words from the people who use them.”

As the club continues to grow, its leaders have their eyes on the future. They hope to bring in certified deaf speakers and host events that go beyond the classroom, immersing students in Deaf culture through interactive learning and campus-wide engagement.

Picano said she envisions the club becoming a hub for advocacy as much as education.

“I want people to recognize the people behind the language,” Picano said. “Not just learn signs, but understand Deaf experiences, history and resilience.”



PHOTOS | BRANDON CORTÉS
Cookies and brownies for sale during the American Sign Language Club bake sale at the Engleman Hall Rotunda.



Psychology major Alex Cruz, a junior and the American Sign Language Club’s vice president selling cookies during the ASL Club bake sale at the Engleman Hall Rotunda.

Owls Decide: Do you prefer hot dogs or burgers?

By Brandon Cortés
Features Editor



PHOTOS | WILLIAM GAGNÉ
Nursing major Julia Burton, a freshman
“Hot dogs because they taste better”



Political science major Theo Parker, a sophomore
“Burgers because there is so much variety in them.”



Political science major Layla Bowen, a senior
“Burgers because I stand for sandwiches, and a hot dog is not a sandwich.”



History major Cole Verrelli, a sophomore
“Burgers because they are easy to eat.”



Political science major Alana Drugonis, a freshman
“Burgers because they are more customizable.”



Sociology major Alisha Encarnacion, a senior
“Burgers because I can’t eat pork.”