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Opinion: AC Drip Brought Ballroom Culture to Campus and We Are All Better For It

Liam Rappleye
Editor-in-Chief

By 11:30 p.m. on February 4, the Kiki Ball had run over its allotted 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. time slot by two and a half hours, but nobody seemed to care. While City Girls and Drake blasted from the speakers and Ballroom queen Delicious Gucci purred into the microphone, the ball felt like it could have lasted another three hours.

If it did, I would have stayed.

The Kiki Ball was this semester's iteration of the ever-popular AC Drip ball, hosted by Albion College Drip and a slew of other campus organizations. This time it centered around the theme of ballroom culture, something that, before going, I was unfamiliar with entirely.

Dior Love, Chicago senior and vice president of AC Drip, spoke at the start of the event, explaining what ballroom culture is all about.

"For those that are unfamiliar with the ballroom scene, it's an LGBTQ+ culture that originated in NYC, beginning in the late 20s," Love said. "Ballroom is known for its support, family orientation, its categories and its great sportsmanship."

Shortly after Love addressed the crowd, he brought on the overwhelmingly high-energy special guest, Delicious Gucci, to emcee the event.

According to Love, Gucci is the "Princess of Chicago."

She was a contestant and finalist on the HBO Max reality show "Legendary," where contestants competed in ballroom competitions for a grand prize of \$100,000.

Gucci walked into the Kellogg Center, took the microphone and immediately stole the show. She explained what ballroom competition is: Contestants walk the runway, competing against each other in various categories like sneakers, outfit, face, twerk or body. She purred into the microphone while students strutted down the runway.

"Walk the runway! Serve the runway! Eat the runway!" she said through the speakers, loud enough to be heard from every corner of the Kellogg Center.



The author's roommate, John Valvo, mid-air, backflipping down the runway. AC Drip hosted an event centered around queer ballroom culture, exciting the campus and providing an important cultural experience (Photo by Cade Thomas).

I was immediately captivated by the concept. It was loud, competitive and sexy. It was high energy. It brought something novel to this campus that, in my two years here, I've never felt.

I was at the event with my roommate and best friend, Oxford sophomore John Valvo. He was wearing clothes he designed and styled and I encouraged him to walk the runway for the best outfit category. After winning a few rounds of the competition, Valvo waltzed for a few seconds down the runway before launching himself into a backflip. The room lit up.

Our mutual best friend, staff photographer and Detroit sophomore Cade Thomas captured the flip on camera. It was a moment of pure joy and exhilaration in a queer environment where the stakes were low and the love was high. For that experience, I am forever thankful.

I will remember that night fondly. The memories I made are the kinds that pop up randomly years later and force

an inescapable smile. Things like that are invaluable; that's what the college experience is all about.

Existing in such a lively queer space, while not identifying as queer myself, was truly a cultural experience for me. I was blown away by how much fun I was having. On a college campus, especially one with a stated commitment to diversity, equity and belonging, events like this are essential. The open existence of ballroom culture on this campus should be celebrated.

Gucci, who has made her career in ballrooms, said when she was in college five years ago, ballroom wasn't allowed.

"That's really groundbreaking for you guys to be able to see the community and to be able to see what we do and showcase our talent," Gucci said. "So to see this, it gets me emotional. It shows me progress, change."

Love said ballroom culture isn't just about death-dropping and twerking. It's

about family. Ballroom participants typically belong to houses that serve as alternative families for queer people who "have been denied or rejected by their birth families," Love said.

Gucci also spoke to that point in an interview following the event.

"To me, having that family and house support is really vital, because some people don't have it at home," Gucci said. "I feel like the best thing you can do is support your peers and support the people you love."

Gucci made sure the entire night was underpinned by that theme of support and love.

Following a rap performance from Muskegon sophomore MarTaven Hardy, who raps under the name YermTeam Paw, Gucci showered him with praise.

"I love seeing student performers, they're the future," she said. "It takes nerve to come up here and perform in front of people."

Despite not actively walking on the runway or dancing with Hardy, I still felt uplifted.

Love later said that was his goal with the event.

"With me being a gay student on campus, I didn't really think that other cis(gendered) people or heterosexual individuals on campus would attend, but I wanted to make it as open to everybody as much as possible," Love said.

Events like this don't just happen because of a pride flag on the quad or pro-LGBTQ+ virtue signaling from the administration. Events like this are built from the ground up, they happen because of people like Dior Love and Delicious Gucci.

Cultural experiences like the Kiki Ball are the result of a decades-long battle for queer visibility. I'm happy that it can exist on my college campus. We should celebrate the fact that we have a safe space on campus for all students to feel comfortable voguing, death-dropping, backflipping and, yes, even twerking.



Left: Ramaq Madhi, Dearborn Heights junior, takes a selfie while competing on the runway. Center: Love, vice president of AC Drip, hits the floor while voguing. Right: Valvo and the crowd look on as his competitor, Akila Brown, Pontiac sophomore, dances before him (Photos by Cade Thomas). For more photos and reporting from the AC Drip Kiki Ball, visit albionpleiad.com

Carrying on a Family Legacy: College Hires Travis Rundle to Coach Football Team

Gabriel Peraino
Sports Editor

It's the dawn of a new era for Albion College football. The athletic program announced on Jan. 17 that Travis Rundle will be taking over as the new head coach following the departure of Dustin Beurer.

Interim Director of Athletics Andrew Lawrence said the program is excited to have Rundle as head coach.

"We are extremely excited to have Coach Rundle on board to continue the success of the program both academically and athletically," Lawrence said.

You may recognize the last name Rundle.

Rundle's father, Craig Rundle, coached the Britons for 22 seasons from 1997-2018. He led Albion to seven MIAA Championships and is currently the winningest coach in program history.

Much like his dad, Travis Rundle held coaching positions at other institutions. His latest head-coaching job was at Sewanee: The University of the South, but he was also the defensive quality coach at Penn State University from 2004-11, helping the Nittany Lions appear in the Orange Bowl, Alamo Bowl, Outback Bowl and Rose Bowl.

Rundle is returning to the place where his collegiate football journey started. Being under center for the Britons from 1998-2002, he led Albion to three MIAA Championships and was named a captain and all-conference player in 2001.



Travis Rundle coaching at Sewanee: The University of the South in Tennessee. It was announced on Jan. 17 that Rundle would be coming "home" to take over the Albion College football program (Photo courtesy of Marissa Smego).

He was incredibly successful during his first stint as a Briton. He said his favorite memory as a quarterback came during the final game of his senior year when Albion defeated Hope College for the league championship.

"That was a complete team effort. The defense caused turnovers and the offense scored a touchdown on the first play for 77 yards," he said. "It was as perfect of a game that we could've played."

Rundle said having the opportunity to learn from his father's philosophy as a coach influenced him to follow in his footsteps.

"I played for my dad and even before

that, I watched him coach as I was growing up," Rundle said. "Seeing the relationships my dad had with his players outside of football just shows how big of an impact you can have on somebody."

Rundle is ready to take the next step, but is always going to put the players first before anything else. One of his biggest objectives is to give his athletes the same experience he had: being connected to the greater community.

"I want guys being involved as much as they can be on campus. It reflects the college life I had here and I learned so much from it," Rundle said. "We want a first-class program here at Albion."

Finding players that are willing to become better men off the field is something Rundle will be looking for with incoming players. Dedication is a quality that's most important to him.

"Do you love playing football? Are you a high-quality individual? Those are the most common questions I ask in the recruiting process," Rundle said.

According to Rundle, his goals are simple when it comes to competing in the MIAA. He feels lucky to have the honor of wearing the headset for a college that has given him and his family great fortune.

"Being in a place that loves winning and has the desire to keep doing that is a great culture to be a part of," Rundle said. "We're gonna work hard by having goals, and we're gonna fight like crazy to make sure we accomplish them."

Rundle understands what it takes to win in a tough conference like the MIAA, and will put forth his best effort to rise Albion above everyone else, especially after a tough loss in last season's finale against Alma.

He said his main goal "is being 1-0 at the end of every week," adding he wants to continue a winning tradition at Albion, a place he considers to be "a football championship factory."

Keep an eye out for an explosive and highly anticipated fall in the coming months, because the name Rundle is back on the sidelines bleeding purple and gold.

Opinion: Should You Live With Your Best Friend?

Bella Bakeman
Managing Editor

On Feb. 1, I was sent a highly anticipated housing email from Community Living that read: "Good afternoon Brits-What kind of community do you want to belong to next year here at Albion?"

There I sat, next to my best friend, absolutely panicking. A million questions swirled around in my head: Do I want to live with them next year? What if they don't want to live with me next year? What if they don't love me anymore if I don't want to live with them?

Do I have anxiety? The answer is yes, but that's not the point. The anxiety-induced thoughts pose an important question: Should you live with your best friend?

According to long-time best friends and first-years from Petersburg, Ella Bolster, and Madison Waterhouse, the answer is yes, with a caveat.

"It also depends on the relationship," Bolster said. "The personalities can clash so much that it would be a bad idea."

However, this is not the case for

Bolster and Waterhouse, who always intended to live together, and will continue to next fall. The only doubt in Bolster's mind was that Waterhouse would be inclined to live with one of her softball teammates instead.

"I feel like she's the type of person that someone on the team would ask her if they want to live with her and she'd be like 'Aw sure,'" Bolster said.

Waterhouse confirmed Bolster's worry, saying that she "wouldn't know what to say," in that situation.

While that might've been the only doubt in Bolster's mind, mine was still filled with many more.

I'm a transfer student. This is only my second semester at Albion College. Going into roommate selection last year, I was randomly assigned to live with my current roommate. Luckily, it ended up being a perfect fit. Yet, unlike Bolster and Waterhouse, we are far from best friends.

My roommate and I have very different schedules. On weekdays we are in classes at the same time, but we rarely see each other outside our dorm room. If we do, it is jarring. After my classes, I often return to an empty dorm room because she has already left for work. Around 9:30 p.m. we give each other a daily update. Then, she does her homework while I read before we go to sleep. On weekends, she leaves Friday afternoon and doesn't return until Monday morning for her 9:15 a.m. class.

To me, it is the perfect roommate relationship. We don't share the same friends, but we get along great and make sure to keep each other updated on our lives.

Waterhouse also said her favorite thing about living with Bolster is talking about things that happen while apart,



Best friend and roommate pair, first-years from Petersburg, Ella Bolster (left), and Madison Waterhouse (right) pose in front of a sign on their door that reads, "Softball Season." Decorating their dorm room door is one of their roommate activities, Waterhouse said (Photo courtesy of Shay Athayde).

even though they spend the majority of their time together.

I don't think I could possibly spend more time with my best friend. Most people already assume that we already are roommates. If we lived together, we'd never have any space from each other.

In contrast, Bolster says her favorite part of living with Waterhouse is that she is always there for her.

"If I'm ever nervous to go somewhere I can always ask her," Bolster said.

The thing is, I have that with my best friend already. I know they are there for me when I need them. But, I also know that if I lived with them, I would do everything with them, rather than challenging myself to do things alone.

It doesn't mean I love them any less; I just need my own space to love and appreciate them.

And that's the hard, unfortunate truth: I want to be able to appreciate my best friend and my roommate, separately.

So, what should you look for in a roommate?

Above all, look for someone who will communicate with you when they need something or are upset about something. You want someone who you can talk to about your day, someone you can invite to do things with you and someone who you feel comfortable existing with daily.

In terms of practicality, look for someone who will share cleaning duties equally and who actually leaves the dorm room from time to time.

If you're struggling to find a roommate with those qualities, and your best friend fits the bill, then give it a try. After all, it's working for Bolster and Waterhouse. Ultimately, the choice to live with your best friend depends on the relationship you share with that person.

Next year I will live with my current roommate again, but my best friend won't be too far; they'll only be a shared bathroom door knock away.

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