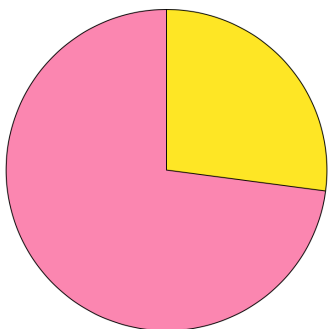


What's Your Opinion?

Who will be graduating in May?

Out of 50 responses:
I will -- 15
I will not -- 35



● I will ● I will not

Next Poll:

DOORS VS WHEELS
Are there more doors or wheels in the world?

Students can answer the poll on The Herald's Instagram page, [@astateherald](https://www.instagram.com/astateherald). Instagram polls are posted on Mondays. Previous poll results can be found on [astatetheherald.com](https://www.astatetheherald.com). Have an idea for a poll? Send your ideas to heraldopinion1921@gmail.com.

These and future articles can be found on the Opinion section of The Herald's website.

The best decision I almost didn't make

LAILA CASIANO
OPINION EDITOR



Laila Casiano is a senior multimedia journalism major from Paragould.

I nearly let fear keep me from college—but stepping out, even just a little, led me into the most transformative years of my life.

A month before my high school graduation, I fell into the worst depression I've ever experienced. It lingered all summer, weighing me down until just a couple weeks before I started college. I was miserable, scared and frustrated. The thought of growing up and stepping into a new, unfamiliar world overwhelmed me. I even turned down a school in Conway because the commitment felt too big, too far.

Instead, I chose Arkansas State University — just 30 minutes from home — because it felt safe.

And now, as I prepare to walk the stage in May, I know that was the best decision I ever made.

“Challenge yourself and your beliefs, even when it's uncomfortable. That's where real growth can begin.”

Although the fear still creeps in from time to time, I've come to realize that everything I've learned over the past four years wasn't just about getting to this moment. I've learned valuable life lessons that I'll carry with me for a long time.

Fear doesn't mean you're not ready, it means you care.

I wasn't just scared of failure or not living up to expectations—or of surpassing my parents' devastating sacrifice as a first-generation child of immigrants. I was afraid of being closer to independence, of not having all the answers. But who knew that the biggest lessons would come from this very school, from meeting the right people at exactly the right time.

College isn't just about earning a degree, it's about meeting the world.

I went to a high school that was predominantly white. And while A-State is a PWI too, I've never been around so many different people, cultures, stories and ways of being especially not in the way I experienced them before, inside that small town bubble in Paragould.

I not only encourage you to attend any event that highlights culture and heritage, but to enroll in classes that strike conversations and arguments.

Challenge yourself and your beliefs, even when it's uncomfortable. That's where real growth can begin.

Some friendships are meant to end. That doesn't make them meaningless.

I'm not the same as I was in high school, and I shouldn't be. Not four or five years later. I've come to understand that growth sometimes means letting go. And the friendships that lasted prove we can withstand anything. And the ones that didn't? Well, they mattered too even if they were temporary.

From first-year orientation to The Herald newsroom, the friendships I made here were all meaningful in their own ways. With each year, each one taught me something about myself.

To those graduating alongside me and wondering what comes next — or

to anyone who's just scared of what's ahead — don't be. I hate to say it, but trust the process. And if, at the end of the day, you realize college isn't for you, that's okay too.

I just hope we all find ourselves on the same path of inner peace.



Photo by Laila Casiano | Opinion Editor

Photo depicts Laila Casiano in front of the Education/Communication building for her first day of sophomore year in August 2022.

It's okay to quit and start over

SHAILEY WOOLDRIDGE
NEWS EDITOR



Shailey Wooldridge is a senior multimedia journalism major from Caraway, Arkansas.

When I was in high school I often heard the phrase “college isn't for everyone,” and it almost always seemed to be followed up with an unspoken addition “but it is for you.”

To me, college felt like a dead end that I was barreling towards and the brakes in my car had gone out. I had no idea what I wanted the rest of my life to look like. I felt like I knew at one point, but it got lost somewhere along the way to adulthood.

In my junior and senior years of highschool, I kept repeating to my family and teachers that I had only a vague idea of what I was good at but all of my dreams were impractical and I

didn't want to go to college. Every time I was met with a brick wall of absolutism that I must go to college.

I decided to go to the University of Central Arkansas, because it seemed like a good place for a blank slate. Three hours away from my hometown and everyone else's opinion, my entire life began to unravel due to decisions I made.

“Every step out of my comfort zone felt simultaneously like I was stepping more into myself.”

When I inevitably broke down in the office of a professor whose class I really needed to pass but was going to fail, she shared a personal anecdote about herself with me.

She said she was a mess in college too but she dropped out and worked fast food for a few years. She came back when she was ready and no one remembered her when she was a mess. She encouraged me to do the same.

I dropped out for three years.

And in those three years: I worked myself high up in the chain of command at a restaurant; I got a dog and then three cats demanded to live with me; I moved in with my sister; I entered into

what is now a long term relationship; I visited nine states I'd never been to before and I went to therapy.

When I enrolled in the Arkansas State University journalism program I knew I was doing it for me, but that didn't mean that I didn't feel uncomfortable for a very long time. I cried more in the first semester than I had in my entire life. I wanted the diploma I'm getting in August more than I had ever wanted anything but I felt like I was making a mistake. Like too much time had passed and now I was too dumb to be here.

But it got better the more I stepped out of my comfort zone and working for The Herald helped a lot. Eventually I took on more responsibility here. I got to know my professors. I took a horse riding class. Every step out of my comfort zone felt simultaneously like I was stepping more into myself.

The honest to God truth is that at 18-years-old I had no idea who I was, what I cared about and what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Today, I'm glad the decisions for my education were left in the hands of an adult woman and not a mentally-ill teenager.



Photo by Shailey Wooldridge | News Editor

Photo depicts Shailey Wooldridge riding Trinity in the Gary Meadows Arena as part of her Intro to English Equitation class.

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Story ideas or news tips may be emailed to heraldnews1921@gmail.com. The Herald welcomes comments, criticisms or ideas that its readership may have. We encourage you to send a Letter to the Editor to jerry.burton@smail.astate.edu.

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The Herald is printed every Wednesday during the semester, except during finals and holidays. Copies of The Herald are free.

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