



Staff ed: New P.E. policy hurts teams and athletes

Responses cannot be edited go crazy -> but not too crazy (respons

Student-run confession pages raise concerns about toxicity



Rising phenomenon of sports gambling puts teens at risk



THE saratogafalcon

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HOW WILL MANDATORY P.E. AFFECT SPORTS?



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO

STARTING NEXT YEAR, ALL FRESHMEN, INCLUDING ATHLETES, MUST ENROLL IN P.E.

BY Sarah Thomas

The district's recent review and new interpretation of California's Education Code standards for physical education at the school has ended the policy of exempting freshmen from P.E. classes while they are participating in school athletics. The policy change is the result of fears that freshman athletes are not meeting state P.E. standards. The policy starts with the Class of 2028.

This change is largely due to the district's interpretation of physical education and physical activity being separate, meaning participation in a school sport no longer satisfies California's physical education standards.

"Currently, an example of what we do is when a student joins the Cheer team,

they sign up for the P.E. Cheer course," principal Greg Louie said. "Those courses are not taught by a credentialed P.E. teacher, something that we're fixing (with this policy change)."

Current freshman and sophomore athletes are excused from P.E. during their season and return to the class after the season ends. The district is concerned that allowing students to stop taking P.E. during their seasons has resulted in not meeting the expectations embedded in the state's Educational Code.

"If you read the language of the Ed Code, there's an interpretation of physical education versus physical activity," Louie said. "Physical activity is typically a sport, while physical education is where these PE courses teach the three standards and eight domains."

The three standards include "knowledge of and competency in motor skills," "level of physical fitness for health and performance" and "knowledge of psychological and sociological concepts, principles and strategies." These standards are part of how students are evaluated in beginning P.E. courses, and the district's interpretation of these Ed Code standards is that "physical activity" like athletics might not effectively teach all three standards, according to Louie.

The eight domains include an understanding of how physical activity improves dynamic health, the mechanics of body movement, aquatics, individual and dual sports, gymnastics and tumbling, team sports, dance and combatives.

>> P.E. CREDIT on pg. 20

2015 alum challenges Pelosi for Congress

BY Anthony Luo

During the 36th season of "Jeopardy!" on March 2, 2020, Class of 2015 alum Bruce Lou buzzed in at his podium and discovered he had stumbled upon the third Daily Double of the night — a chance to double his score if he answered correctly. Despite getting the previous two questions wrong, he recalled what famed contestant (and now show host) Ken Jennings had told him over the phone: to swing for the fences. Ignoring the odds, Lou confidently stated "harvest moon," the correct answer, thus securing him a historic win and a prize of \$5,000.

Four years later, Lou, 26, is now buzzing in to contest for a seat in Congress, running as a Republican in a steep uphill bid to unseat incumbent and former House speaker Nancy Pelosi. The famous Democrat and one of the most powerful female politicians in U.S. history is trying to win a 19th term in her seat for the 11th district in the House of Representatives. On March 5, Lou secured the GOP Super Tuesday nomination, coming in second behind Pelosi with 8.6% of the vote and advancing to the general election in November. Pelosi had almost 74% of the vote while another Democrat garnered 5%.

To many observers, challenging such a hard-to-win seat in left-leaning San Francisco would be unthinkable. At 83, Pelosi is 57 years older than Lou. She was first elected in a 1987 special election and has been in Congress for the past 36 years. Additionally, she's the only woman to have ever served as Speaker of the House, a position she was elected to twice, once in 2007 and once in 2019.

Adding to the challenge, Pelosi consistently raises enormous amounts of money for her campaigns, bringing in more than \$5 million for this year's election alone, compared to Lou's \$51,000. Lou, a former Falcon newspaper staff member, said he is not deterred by the long odds.

>> BRUCE LOU on pg. 4

Teachers seek better pay

BY Nicole Lee

With the previous 3-year contract signed between the District Teachers Association and the district ending at the end of this school year, the union is now negotiating for a new contract for the upcoming year that they hope includes better pay and other work life improvements.

DTA president Jennifer Young, a math teacher at Los Gatos High School, said many teachers are facing struggles they should not have to face as professionals. According to Young, 71% of District Teachers' Association members supplement their

salary with a second job or activity, and only 15% of DTA members can afford to live within the district's boundaries. DTA's initial proposal regarding salary benefits during the Jan. 30 negotiations is for a 13% salary increase for the 2024-2025 school year. The two parties are currently negotiating when and how a potential salary increase will be implemented.

In Saratoga and Los Gatos, most of the district's revenue comes from local property taxes, which aren't growing in proportion to the costs of the school district, Young said.

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newsbriefs

New ASB Officers elected for 2024-2025 year

The results of a March 7-8 vote for ASB officers in 2024-25 were recently released. Junior Alan Cai will be the ASB president, junior Langdon Huynh will be vice president, sophomore Jena Lew will be secretary and sophomore Anthony Tran will be treasurer. The new ASB team then met to nominate junior Anisa Taymuree and sophomore Nirvan Shah to be next year's club commissioners. ASB is responsible for the stewardship of the leadership class, which consists of ASB itself, four class offices and four commissions. They also oversee all school student-led activities including clubs, dances, spirit weeks and rallies.

Class officer elections were set to be held from March 18 to 22, and results will be posted on March 23. The class officers are responsible for working with ASB on school events and organizing their own fundraisers to pay for events such as prom. Former ASB president Taylor Chu is excited for the future: "It's been really exciting to see how everything worked out throughout the past few years."

— Alan Cai and Sanjoli Gupta

2022-23 Falcon wins Silver Crown Award

The Falcon received a Silver Crown award, given by the Columbia Scholastic Press Association (CSPA) on March 15, for the '22-'23 newspaper. The award is one of the two major competitions for high school journalism programs, the other being the Pacemaker by the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA).

Late last spring, journalism adviser Michael Tyler submitted a printed and website version of the Saratoga Falcon newspaper to CSPA to receive critiques that the newspaper could use as a vehicle for growth.

The newspaper is critiqued and automatically entered into the Crown competition. Then, a panel of judges scrutinize and rank the submissions, deciding which entries are the champion contenders.

Still, the College/Scholastic Hybrid News had several critiques for The Falcon to learn from, including suggestions to create a form to submit corrections, allow for reader comments and encourage readers to submit content to include in the newspaper. With a shift to social media as many teens' news sources, the critique recommended adding social media policies to the website and improving use of photos and captions to draw readers into stories.

Tyler said, "I particularly like having an outside critique looking at the newspaper because I think it can provide some really valuable feedback."

— Sam Bai and Nicole Lee

Soundings exhibition fails to raise enough funds

The Soundings Art and Literary held its second exhibition on March 1 to fund the annual print issue. The exhibition was estimated to fundraise about \$2,000, but massively fell short at \$311. Money was raised through food and ticket sales.

Soundings doesn't receive funds from the school as it is an independent publication. Editor-in-chief Anika Kapasi said in previous years, funds were made from the sale of yearbook senior ads, which generated roughly \$20,000 for the Soundings and Newspaper programs.

Typically, the magazine produces one print issue each year in the spring; this year, the magazine expanded to include a winter online issue.

Prior to the exhibition, the Soundings staff spent three months gathering submissions, going through editing cycles and publishing the online issue.

This year, Soundings is looking to raise funds by asking for grants from outside organizations like the Saratoga Rotary Club and PTSD.

"Even though we didn't make as many funds as last year, I'm confident we'll find other ways to get enough for the print issue," Kapasi said.

— Florence Wei

Paths explored at Career Fair



Photo by RUIYAN ZHU

Hold that pose | Sophomore Adit Sharma planks for 3 minutes and 45 seconds in front of the US Marine's stall for a free water bottle during the Career Fair on March 12, which was held in the Small Gym.



Photo by RUIYAN ZHU

Kevin Korb, owner of a new business in Saratoga, Ping Pong Info Center, explains entrepreneurship.



Photo by RUIYAN ZHU

Military Sergeant Eric Lamoureux shares his experiences fixing radios and electronics to students.



Photo by RUIYAN ZHU

A firefighter explains careers with the Santa Clara County Fire Department to those interested in public service.

New finite math course has STEM focus

BY Alan Cai

In February, students finalizing their course selections for next year saw an interesting new addition to the list of mathematics offerings: Finite Math.

The newly offered course is intended to be an inclusive class designed to improve mathematics fundamentals.

Finite Mathematics aims to replace College Prep Statistics, currently taught by math teacher Seema Patel, a class that has struggled to have strong enrollment. Math department chair Kristen Hamilton said the course will cover optimization, matrices and statistics. It is suited for anyone who has finished Algebra 2 or higher.

Hamilton added Finite Math can serve as a stepping stone be-

tween Algebra 2 and Precalculus. It will also help prepare students for Calculus or Statistics, filling in possible knowledge gaps and honing fundamental mathematical skills.

For Calculus students, Hamilton said Finite Math can help them transition to applied mathematics. Finally, for statistics students, Finite Math will help refresh key algebraic mathematical concepts.

"The class can be important for people who still want to go into STEM but need to fill in gaps," Hamilton said.

Finance specifically will be a key feature of the class. Before College Prep Precalculus was offered here, the Trigonometry Math 4 class covered finance topics in its curriculum.

Finite Math hopes to bring

back financial literacy topics, including education on simple and compound interest, percentages and more.

In accordance with the school's open enrollment policy, the course is not restricted by grade level, but participants are encouraged to have completed either Algebra II, Precalculus or Calculus their previous year. Students who have completed the class may take Precalculus or Calculus afterward.

The class's teacher is not yet confirmed, but it will likely be either math teachers Jennifer Mantle, Lisa Ginestet-Araki, Julie Scola or PJ Yim, who are all part of the committee planning the class.

"I hope students sign up and we will figure out [who's teaching it] after Spring Break," Hamilton said.

TEACHER SALARY

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That necessitates measures such as asking local residents to approve a \$128 parcel tax in a mail-in ballot that must be returned by May 7.

"The best thing parents can do right now is help pass the parcel tax," Young said. "We will need our entire community to rally together and get the word out that this parcel tax is necessary to attract and retain quality educators in our district."

According to Young, the district is ranked No. 6 in Santa Clara County for certificated salaries, behind Mountain View-Los Altos Union High, Santa Clara Unified, Fremont Union High, Palo Alto Unified and Los Gatos Elementary. She mentioned the district used to be ranked No. 2 in the county, but other districts have surged ahead in recent years.

History teacher Margarita Morelle, special education teacher Brian Elliott, math teacher Kelly Frangieh and several teachers from Los Gatos High School are representing the DTA in negotiations. Since January, they have been working with district officials to negotiate a new agreement.

Besides increased salaries and benefits, some of the changes asked for by teachers include a cap on class sizes for most classes,

extra pay for coaches who take their teams into the playoffs and work more hours and new provisions regarding providing high-quality special education services.

On the other hand, district officials have proposed changes to other items such as teacher evaluations.

Young said the group can't reveal details of the bargaining process since negotiations are still ongoing. However, she said she appointed each member of the bargaining team to ensure they were representative of all of the district's teachers.

Typically, the negotiation sessions take place during work days, and DTA bargaining members organize a substitute to teach their classes.

Board members do not participate directly in the negotiations but may give guidance to the superintendent during closed session board meetings.

"Any member of either team can speak up," Young said. "Each team determines who on their team will present proposals, ask/answer questions, etc."

Behind the scenes, the DTA's executive board has been collecting information from members since September through surveys, workgroups and general membership meetings.

Using the collected feedback, the board then directs the bargaining team, who continues the process by writing the proposals.

This process is time consuming but necessary, Young said.

So far, the general membership of the bargaining unit has only had a few informational meetings this year due to difficulty gathering 190 members together at the same time.

Thus, the bargaining team doesn't have regularly scheduled meetings and instead tries to get most of their information to members via email. They do, however, have monthly representative council meetings for their 20 reps and 6 executive board members to discuss action items.

"We will need our entire community to rally together and get the word out that this parcel tax is necessary."

DTA PRESIDENT Jennifer Young

"My personal thoughts on negotiations are not relevant as we are bargaining on behalf of all members of our bargaining unit," Young said. "We are also learning about the district's finances so the process for asking for anything economic is transparent on

both sides."

In 2021, the teachers were in a similar situation as this year, the main difference being that the only article brought up was article 5 (salary & benefits). At the end of those negotiations in 2022, the teachers and board settled a 3-year agreement that allowed each side to re-open up to 2 articles each year for negotiations.

So far, the team has had several bargaining days and plan to continue these negotiations for as long as needed. The last scheduled date for these negotiations ends in March, but Young says the group is willing to go past the initial planned schedule.

Waving posters with pro-education messages, dozens of teachers made an appearance outside of both schools in late January to raise awareness about the ongoing negotiations and the issue of declining teacher pay.

"I don't have any predictions, but I'm hopeful that DTA and the district will be able to come to an agreement that is in the best interest of addressing student needs and supporting our educators," Young said. "The landscape of education has changed drastically over the last 5-10 years and we are losing quality educators not just from our district, but from education completely. We have to find a way to make this profession more manageable and honor the work that is being done."

Speech and Debate teams qualify for national tournament

BY Alan Cai & Bryan Zhao

As the regular debate season wraps up on March 10, two public forum debate teams will be making their way to the Tournament of Champions (TOC) this April, preparing to articulate eloquent arguments, fiery speeches and creative angles they hope will impress a panel of expert judges.

The TOC is a prestigious national tournament that most debaters see as their end goal in high school; often, it takes years of preparation and practice to get in.

The first team, juniors Leonardo Jia and Ashish Goswami, will be representing the school for the third time. The second team, junior Skyler Mao and sophomore Anthony Luo, qualified for the first time this year.

To qualify for the TOC, public forum debaters need two Gold bids to enter the Gold Division and two Silver bids or one Gold bid to enter the Silver Division. Bids are earned through participating in national invitationals scattered throughout the season and by clearing elimination rounds.

Both teams this year have qualified for the Gold Division, the older team qualifying last April and the cross-grade duo qualifying this February.

The first team, consisting of Goswami and Jia, already received a qualification last year when they gained three gold bids and an automatic qualification after making it to the Octafinals of the Gold TOC. They made Triple-Octafinals at the Stanford Invitational in February and quarterfinals at the TOC Digital Series #2, a qualifier tournament for this year's TOC. Their largest accomplishment is their semifinalist run at the Annual Berkeley Invitational on Feb. 18, the deepest run the school has ever seen in this tournament according to past Tabroom records.

The second team, composed of Mao and Luo, attained two Gold

bids and qualified for the Gold Division with a narrow win at the TOC Digital Series #2. They made quarterfinals at the tournament on Feb. 25 to snag their second gold bid. Both Luo and Skyler started debate in their 6th and 7th grade years, respectively, and this is the first time that they have qualified.

"Honestly, the feeling was great," Mao said. "Before the judges announce their decision, the atmosphere is usually tense.

However, my partner and I were overjoyed once the decision was made in the round."

Two other Varsity Public Forums teams were unable to qualify for the TOC. Sophomore duo Jet Tsang and Bryan Zhao made Triples in the Stanford Invitational but lost to the champions on a 2-1 decision.

Freshman Sanyukta Ravishankar and Tanvee Tirthapura could not make it to the elimination bracket at the Stanford Invitational and will be restarting their opportunity for a bid next year. Many incoming JV teams will make their way up to varsity next year, paving a strong start for the upcoming school year.

In addition to the star-stud-

ded debate team receiving the most coveted invitations in the debate world, the speech team has matched their counterparts' speaking prowess by also sending several individuals to the Tournament of Champions, like Sophomore Anagha Vitaldevara, freshman Ovee Dharwadkar and many others.

The transition from JV to varsity is difficult, as JV teams don't compete in the same division at tournaments; the JV division is seen as practice for debate newcomers, leading to a less competitive nature.

Jia, who often helps the JV teams, said he is shifting his focus to the TOC by actively on the evidence search for writing cases for the tournament to ensure accurate data and analytics. Both he and his partner are doing drills to prepare for all sorts of rounds at the TOC, including technical and layman rounds.

"My goal for the TOC is to prepare well enough to win and advance my debate skills at the tournament," Jia said. "Looking past the TOC, my goals for incoming varsity teams is to get them to as many tournaments as possible and also make them self-sufficient and send them on their path to qualify for TOC."



Jia

WE Inspire! traces district roadmap

BY Sarah Thomas

A new vision for how the two schools in the district will deliver education over the next decade is coming into fruition this year thanks to a combined effort of dozens of teachers, students, parents, community members and administrators.

The district's Strategic Planning Initiative (SPI), which began last spring and was accepted by the board in October, aims to "improve education outcomes" for students. On Oct. 17, the Board of Trustees adopted the 2022-2023 Strategic Plan, titled WE Inspire! To ensure students fulfill graduate profiles and goals for community growth, WE Inspire! outlines strategic focus areas for district-wide growth.

"This strategic plan is the roadmap for our school district," superintendent Bill W. Sanderson said.

Goals outlined at the beginning of SPI meetings include creating graduate profiles, or outlines of what a successful student leaving Saratoga and Los Gatos High might look like. This included individual steps like "igniting student's passions for learning and empowering them to achieve brilliance," "transforming our classroom and school expectations, relationships and practices to more fully align with [the district's] values" and "nurturing caring communities that develop student's full identities," with an emphasis on balancing linguistic, cultural and academic excellence with social emotional health.

"This strategic plan is the roadmap for our school district"

SUPERINTENDENT Bill W. Sanderson

When creating these graduate profiles, the SPI defined student success using traits like "preparation to succeed in the global

world," "ethical and responsible leaders," "creative and critical thinkers," "global communicators and collaborators" and "thriving and healthy people: mind, body and character."

The goal of the strategic plan was to allow students to more effectively reach these goals. Steps toward achieving these goals have resulted in "strategic focus areas," which include action items the plan hopes to help achieve, such as "student voice, engagement, success and well-being," "professional practice, learning and innovation," "culture, leadership and accountability" and "strategic family alliances and leadership."

The SPI team has collaborated to outline which concrete steps could be taken to achieve these outlined goals.

bigidea

Goals of the Plan

- Student success**
Igniting student's passions for learning
- Caring communities**
Communities should develop and nurture a student's identity
- Social emotional health**
Thriving and healing people with mind, body and character

Some concrete steps that the Strategic Plan details include a commitment to "build and support a global leadership team who value and practice equity and inclusion" as well as "implementing a robust and coherent professional development program for teachers, support staff, and administrators."

"So much of education, our community, and the world has changed since the district last met with our community and had created the components of a strategic plan several years ago," Sanderson said in a press release. "I'm thrilled with the priorities our Strategic Plan Design Team came up with and look forward to beginning the next stages of implementation."



Courtesy by ASHISH GOSWAMI

Tsang, Goswami, Garg, Luo and Jia after their Berkeley tournament

Music groups kick off spring season with competitions, concerts and performances

BY SaachiJain & SanjoliGupta

Band: Members of the Symphonic Wind Ensemble (SWE) finished their performance at the California All State Music Conference (CASMEC) at the end of January and transitioned into the concert band format completely following the ending of the marching band season in November.

Alongside the orchestra, they also performed at the California Music Educators Association Band and Orchestra Festival held at the school from March 14-16. The festival includes numerous middle and high school orchestras and bands who perform in front of a panel of judges, most of whom are distinguished music educators from across California. One of the major pieces the SWE performed was the "George Washington Bicentennial."

"The Bicentennial is very patriotic and celebratory," Zhou said. "It was a nice change in style from the rest of our repertoire at the concert."



Courtesy of ISABELLE GECILS

Orchestra: Following the results of the annual Concerto Competition hosted by the music program each December, seniors Chloe Lee and Tejas Tirthapura and junior David Kim were selected to perform this spring. Lee and Tirthapura will be performing their concertos at the end-of-year concert in May, but Kim performed at the group's spring concert.

"I'm so excited to play David's concerto because I've been friends with David for so long and it was so amazing to hear him play so well and such cool music in front of everyone for the whole orchestra," Tirthapura said. "I remember in August during rehearsal we always had our inside jokes; it's really the people in the orchestra and the program that makes the orchestra so enjoyable."

Senior saxophone player Vidhur Sanghi was also one of the winners of the Concerto Competition hosted in December and will be performing his concerto at the band's end-of-year concert.

All the orchestra groups also performed at the CMEA Band and Orchestra Festival from March 14-16.

"Playing the concerto forced me to adopt a more strict practice schedule," Kim said. "I gained a better understanding of how to work well with an ensemble."



Courtesy of LUCAS CHOI

Baritone players juniors Jeremy Zou, Julius Zhou and sophomore Spencer Thomson perform the piece "George Washington Bicentennial" by John Philip Sousa at the school's Band Spring Concert on Feb. 29.

Winterguard: The team had a competition on March 16 at Live Oak High School, culminating in the California Color Guard Circuit Championships at Dayton High School on April 6.

Junior Andrea Zhu especially enjoyed this season, saying, "During water breaks and post practice we would sit, talking to each other and joking around; when we're folding up the picnic blankets we played monkey in the middle once and it's a nice way to end rehearsal and reconnect with friends."

They ranked 2nd out of 5 senior teams at the competition. "Jazz in the Plazz" tells the story of a group of pedestrians who are walking in a park when they become entranced by jazz music playing nearby. It features jazz-style dancing, music and is set to the song "Another Day of Sun."



Courtesy of LUCAS CHOI

Members of the varsity Winterguard ensemble warm up outside Fremont High School on March 2 for the performance of this year's show, titled "Jazz in the Plazz."

All the orchestra groups also performed at the CMEA Band and Orchestra Festival from March 14-16.



Courtesy of ISABELLE GECILS

Bass drum players junior Ruhan Periyacheri and sophomore Aiden Jang perform during the Winter Percussion premiere show taking place at James Logan High School on Feb. 4.

Winter Percussion: The team is split into two ensembles, World Class and A Class. World Class is treated as the varsity group and is traveling to Southern California from March 22-24 for the "SoCal Power Regional," and to Dayton, Ohio, in mid-April for the Winter Guard International Winter Percussion Championships.

"The rehearsal load has very much increased due to us being in a higher competition division and flying to finals this year," junior snare drum Logan Gecils said. "It has been a lot more stressful as we have had more to learn but overall it is still a very fun activity." ♦

Modern Mystery Club 'solves' old murder cases

BY IsabelleWang & FlorenceWei

Walking up to the whiteboard, senior president Elsa Fang reads aloud a brief paragraph that sets up a murder mystery featuring serial killer Edmund Kemper, who murdered at least 10 people in California between 1960 and 1970. Fifteen students listen attentively to catch every detail, and fierce discussion soon echoes around the room as they attempt to solve the puzzle.

"I love watching 'Criminal Minds' and have been reading Sherlock Holmes since fifth grade, so I decided to create this club," Fang said.

The Modern Mystery club was created

two years ago by Fang, senior vice presidents Zhekai Feng and Carine Chan, senior secretary Isabella Wang and junior treasurer Shawn Wong. With weekly lunch meetings in room 105, the club analyzes evidence and psychological perspectives to find the suspect in unsolved murder cases or puzzles.

Throughout their meetings, the officers include detective puzzles and real-life cases. Cases are selected from connecting online materials to a specific forensic skill or concept. Typically, the officers either make their own puzzles or base them on real-life cases, such as the Zodiac Killer or other past murder cases. The serial killer of the Zodi-



Fang

ac Killer case from 1968 to 1969 involved five murders in California, which were never solved. The serial killer was known for leaving bizarre letters and ciphers at each murder scene, but only one was solved out of the five.

After introducing a new case at the beginning of their meetings, the members work together and share ideas to solve the case. Each puzzle takes around 5 to 15 minutes. When the puzzle takes too long to solve, the officers reveal the answer before lunch ends to explain the solution.

"[Our club includes] basically just fun interactive games for students to enjoy," Fang said.

One of the activities Fang found interesting was finding a spy among the club members. Club members then use clues and camera evidence to determine who the spy is. To make the game more interesting and interactive, the officers replace the people's names in the puzzle with the member's names.

"The most fascinating thing about puzzles is the logical reasoning behind it," Feng said. "I feel like it's a kind of methodology like in calculus where you have to use existing evidence to come up with a conclusion that is logically satisfying. Solving mysteries might have just started as a hobby, but because of this club, we're able to share it with anyone who wants to learn." ♦

BRUCE

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He said he has consistently defied the odds in competitions throughout his life.

"If you don't fight and you let [Pelosi] cruise to victory, she really believes that she's entitled to the seat ... This race is an excellent platform to raise awareness of some of the issues that are the most pressing," Lou said.

Lou pinpointed his most important goals in San Francisco as tackling homelessness, crime and the high cost of living. On the national stage, he mentioned securing the border, reforming education to focus on real-world skills, cutting government spending and bridging instead of deepening political divisions.

Specifically, he highlighted the ongoing fentanyl crisis, which has caused opioid-related deaths to skyrocket nationally to over

112,000 last year.

Lou proposed tackling the problem at its source, using the RICO Act to target organized drug rings from Honduras or El Salvador that end up selling these drugs all over the Bay Area.

Now that Republicans and Democrats are more polarized than ever, Lou emphasizes moving past party labels and instead focusing on what's better for the country as a whole.

"If we continue to run on this factional and very divisive style of politics, we don't stand a chance to last another 100 or 200 years," Lou said. "I don't want people to define me based on my labels. I want people to judge me by what my character is, what my policies are and what I'll do for the city."

Lou graduated from UC Berkeley with a computer science degree and worked in software engineering before starting his own business, Stingray, a consulting firm that helps people find or transition between

jobs.

His campaign has earned endorsements from the California Republican Party, the California College Republicans, Equal Rights for All and Senator Rand Paul, among others.

"I'm proud to be the standard bearer of all these organizations," he said. "And I feel like I do embody many of their values, which is why they chose me in the first place."

When he was a senior at SHS, Lou gained notoriety for leading the History Bowl team in a historic sweep of the national championship, in addition to winning the National History Bee for himself.

In school, his talents in memorizing facts, figures and historical dates earned him the nickname "Bruce Almighty" from history teacher Jerry Sheehy, whose mock "Jeopardy!" competitions were constantly dominated by Lou.

Lou is finding that between campaigning, attending public events and doing a

host of other activities, politics has consumed almost all of his time, and becoming a public figure has also taken away his former anonymity.

Although the political lifestyle is fairly draining, Lou still finds time to engage in some of his old hobbies, like watching football in a sports bar in the San Francisco Marina or reading books.

Additionally, Lou can always lean back on memories he made in high school and college, such as watching the sun rise the day after his high school graduation or cheering on the Cal Bears' football team as they played against Stanford; he advises current students to make the most of their youth.

"Enjoy your time in high school, and try to have a true college experience," Lou said. "Don't live life with any regrets thinking about things you should have done. Enjoy the present, because it really doesn't come around again." ♦



From left to right are selected submissions of Melanie Lee's "Time Carousel," Isabelle Wang's "Past Reflections," Amy Pan's "Transcend" and Nicole Hao's "Mind-space." This year's theme explores being "In Transition" from childhood to adulthood. The artworks will be displayed at the upcoming 2024 ArtNow Exhibition in the New Museum of Los Gatos.

Courtesy of MELANIE LEE, ISABELLE WANG, AMY PAN and NICOLE HAO

Four students to showcase at ArtNow exhibition

BY EmmaFung, SkylerMao & ZackZhang

The New Museum of Los Gatos (NUMU) selected 82 submissions from 45 different high schools for its upcoming 2024 ArtNow Exhibition, which starts April 27.

Of the 810 total submissions, four Saratoga High School students were selected for the exhibition: sophomore Nicole Hao, junior Melanie Lee, junior Amy Pan and junior Isabelle Wang.

This year's theme is exploring being "In Transition" from childhood into adulthood.

Junior Melanie Lee: "Time Carousel"

Lee discovered the ArtNow exhibition through online research for art competitions.

"Originally, I wasn't planning on applying, but my art teacher outside of school said that she saw potential in my piece and encouraged me to put my work to different competitions whether or not I win," Lee said.

Lee's submission, titled "Time Carousel," is a colored pencil composition meant to encapsulate her experiences through the stages of growing.

She used vibrant acrylic colors and familiar fairytale-like characters from her childhood to illustrate youthfulness and the cycles of life. The different stages of life are represented by carousel animals in the drawing and symbolize how life is an endless loop.

"I started [the background] as if it's a full colored pencil drawing, and it was more tedious than I'm used to because you have to layer a lot to make it realistic. It takes a lot of details. Afterwards I used some acrylic paint to fill in some contrast," Lee said.

Lee worked on the piece for a month. Al-

though the project was time-consuming due to the number of intricate details, she found the process helped her de-stress and allowed her to reminisce about her childhood.

"This piece is a part of my general portfolio idea, which is growing up in fairy tales," Lee said. "The message I want to convey is how our past selves essentially lays the groundwork for the future, and the childhood fairy tales we grew up in translate into who we are through time."

Wang created a portrait of her current self overlapping with older self, which presents the idea that childhood impacts who we grow up to be in teenage years.

Her younger self is painted with charcoal, while her older self was painted using acrylic paint.

found it very touching and emotional to look at old photos of herself and visibly see the progress of growing up "In Transition."

"I was very proud when I received the email that I was selected," Wang said. "The experience of reflecting on my identity and appreciating the journey I grew up in is very meaningful to me."

Junior Amy Pan: "Transcend"

Pan's artwork, titled "Transcend," portrays the moment when she realized she had lost the memories of her cherished childhood during her immigration experience. She used acrylic paint for her project.

Positioned in front of windows with curtains blowing in the wind and lively purple butterflies in between, Pan's self-portrait is half in a dreamy purple and gold color scheme and half in darkness.

The painting symbolizes the transformation into the new immigrant life and the loss of connection with her native roots respectively. Pan initially discovered the competition through Tarbox. The piece took her around three weeks to complete and was a unique experience for her.

"I focused on a lot of 3D art and haven't painted for a while before entering the ArtNow competition, and 'Transcend' is my first big painting of the year," Pan said.

The art piece helped Pan reflect on her experience as an immigrant and how the transition affected her as a person.

"The main takeaway from my painting is about transforming adversity into meaning," Pan said. "I wanted to spread this message to the community."

Sophomore Nicole Hao: "Mind-space"

Hao drew a self-portrait of herself with colored pencils, depicting various elements from her thoughts in the background, such

as clocks, a scenic view and distorted shapes.

"I tried to convey my identity and something unique about myself, so along with it being a self portrait, I added several abstract aspects," Hao said.

Originally, she had spent a month making the piece for a separate art competition but later realized the work's main theme of identity and growth fit well with the ArtNow competition.

While creating the artwork, Hao was able to explore unique art decisions that she hadn't tried before.

In the center of the artwork is Hao's realistic portrait, complete with detailed eyes and wrinkles on her hands.

The left side of the page depicts an uncolored, white pile of objects that symbolize little details in her life, including a lamp, clock, robotic arm, desk, volleyball, cat, rolled out alphabet, and other indistinguishable shapes and shadows.

On the right side of the image, Hao incorporates a more expressive and dreamy color scheme to depict abstract scenes: Simple-geometry-shaped cartoon characters jump around on top of a pink castle; a beautiful lake under sunset surrounded by mountains and forests; and a dimension full of purple flowers and floating chairs and desks.

She feels proud that this piece reflects both the reality and imagination aspects of her journey growing up, which works really well in capturing and conveying her understanding of self-identity.

"The piece shows my vision of myself as a teenage artist through just one simple self portrait in front of a split background between reality and imagination," Hao said. "It's something that's very personal and unique and is a representation of my worldview." ♦

Junior Isabelle Wang

Her piece is painted on yellowed paper, which depicts the flow of time on her journey of growing up. She used more monotone colors to enhance the nostalgic emotions in the painting.

"My AP Art teacher [Joel] Tarbox introduced me to the competition, and I immediately found it to be a great fit since I've done art on similar themes before," Wang said. "I worked on the piece for around 10 hours, and I really liked drawing for a concept that I can personally connect to."

While preparing to draw the piece, she

want, then we start taking it to other teachers and classrooms, which is fun, because [you can] share the joy," Haggerty said.

The basic ingredients of a crepe include flour, milk and eggs, which are combined to form a thin batter then poured over a crepe griddle. Crepes can be made both sweet and savory.

However, in France, it is more common that they are made sweet. During the French classes, strawberries, bananas, nutella and whipped cream are used to flavor the thin crepe.

Students bring the ingredients themselves, and some are chosen to make and bring batter to the classroom, leading to a variety of different batters in the crepes.

"I would definitely say that the crepe parties motivate me to learn since it's fun to try and communicate with my teacher and fellow classmates [about the ingredients],"

BY AmeliaChang & AnnikaGho

As French students walked into their classroom on Feb. 13, the smell of crisp



Haggerty

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to make batter for his 17-person French 2 class, spending around one to two hours on it the night before.

"It's a great experience because it's really fun to see everything come together, and sometimes my friends will come over and help so it's a great time," Khanna said.

After eating the crepes, students spend the rest of class watching a culturally relevant movie.

For the party on Feb. 13, French 2 students watched "Romuald et Juliette," a movie about a CEO of a yogurt company named Romuald who finds out his wife is having an affair. Furious, he teams up with a woman named Juliette to get revenge.

"My favorite thing about crepe parties is how I actually get to bond with my classmates," Vudali said. "Usually the class is very fast-paced and we go from activity to activity really quickly, so it's a nice change of pace to just relax and talk to others while making crepes." ♦

"I would definitely say that the crepe parties motivate me to learn and communicate."

SOPHOMORE Mridhula Vudali

While the official National Crepe Day is on Feb. 2, Haggerty said it doesn't fit into the class schedule as well as Mardi Gras.

Junior Krishen Khanna volunteered

Long-standing tradition of crepe parties in French classes continue to spark interest in the language

sophomore Mridhula Vudali said.

Crepe parties are held twice a school year, on Mardi Gras in February and All Saints Day in November. All Saints Day is similar to Halloween, while Mardi Gras celebrates the last night of fatty foods before Lent. Lent takes place in the 40 days before Easter and during this time, Christians observe fasting and abstinence.

"I would definitely say that the crepe parties motivate me to learn and communicate."

SOPHOMORE Mridhula Vudali

While the official National Crepe Day is on Feb. 2, Haggerty said it doesn't fit into the class schedule as well as Mardi Gras.

Junior Krishen Khanna volunteered

Maintenance clears pipes to prevent future flooding

BY FlorenceHu

This winter, strong El Niño conditions have brought heavy atmospheric river storms, sometimes causing areas on campus to experience minor flooding from puddles around congested drains. While maintenance staff members and contractors have worked to clear the pipes, officials have determined excavation may be necessary this summer to replace some sections of pipes to prevent flooding.

In addition to its full-time maintenance staff, the district usually keeps in touch with workers from Ciari Plumbing and Heating, a local public works company that also services other hospitals, libraries and campuses across the Bay Area.

General maintenance worker Joseph Nufer said the main issue with the drainage system comes from tree roots.

"Roots, which feed on the water flow, have grown into our drainage systems and getting them out is difficult," Nufer said.

Nufer said workers discovered the location and causes of the blockage by using augers, a coiled metal corkscrew device with a spring on the end. The augers were fed down into the pipes to unclog them, which alleviated some of the blockage but was hindered by larger roots.

Workers have also sent down cameras to investigate the causes of the blockage — they were able to see the roots in the water. The cameras were equipped with location-tracking systems indicating where the pipes are located to workers above the ground, areas marked by spray paint.

After chasing pipes, Ciari's workers recommended plans to excavate the area in front of the library to remove roots, which will likely happen during the summer. Nufer said the project is still in early de-

velopment, as projects of this scale usually face obstacles in the process of receiving approval and funding.

For projects of this size, Nufer said, the process can be convoluted since it requires a lot of money. If the project is implemented, old pipes made of cast iron or terracotta would be replaced with heavy duty plastic, which Nufer said will last "at least a lifetime." According to plant supervisor Paul Weir, the cost could range from \$25,000 to \$50,000 and will depend on factors such as whether or not the planned excavation will require concrete to be torn up, in which case there will be additional expenses in having to replace a sidewalk.

Weir said the project isn't guaranteed to be approved, since clearing out pathways has already helped alleviate the situation.

In addition to interfering with the main drainage system, the roots affect other places that tend to flood slowly, which include the area in front of the 300s wing, the hallway leading to the engineering room and a section in the back parking lot. When there is excessive rain, plumbers typically send down augers to chase the pipes or push aside some of the debris.

"Plumbers have been out here probably 10 times in [January]," Nufer said. "I think that the work they've done has really improved our drainage because we haven't flooded [following recent rainfall]."

Assistant Principal Matt Torrens also said the recent plumbing work has cleared up a lot of the pipes, and minor blockage is always an effect of the seasonal rainfall.

"There are always concerns as we are dealing with biological, living variables such as tree roots clogging pipes, branches and leaves clogging rain gutters, and people who may kick over something," Torrens said. "It's a constant battle." ♦

New earthquake drill goes past duck and cover

BY NikaSvzhenko

Prior to this year, the school's yearly earthquake drills only simulated "duck and cover" before all classes evacuated to the upper or lower fields; however, an all-school drill during tutorial on March 14 simulated the other effects of an earthquake including an evacuation to the football field, injuries to students, panic attacks and the necessity of parents picking up their children and all classes evacuated to the lower field. These simulations are set to fully replace the regular earthquake drill either yearly in October or twice a year in October and March, principal Greg Louie said.



Louie

"We want to make sure that the classes know exactly where they're supposed to go."

PRINCIPAL Greg Louie

One day prior to the drill, students were appointed to act injured or speak a language other than English during the drill. Staff were trained to deal with these situations by listing whether they are CPR and first aid certified and what languages they speak.

Parent volunteers were trained to attempt to pick up their students to ensure staff members followed reunification rules.

During the drill, parent volunteers assessed staff performance according to a rubric.

Staff were assessed in three categories:

evacuation, emergency and response and reunification. According to Louie, feedback was generally positive with room for minor improvement in all three categories.

"We want to make sure that the classes know exactly where they're supposed to be," he said. "There was a little confusion in terms of where they should be. We're also looking to have sign holders that teachers can carry with them and hold up."

The drill revealed areas for minor additions in safety procedures.

According to Louie, staff's emergency checklists are to be revised with space to track if any injuries occur. Louie also said he hopes to ensure all staff members will in the future be able to wear different vests according to their post-earthquake role.

Though staff followed all proper procedures during the reunification process, Louie noted the process could be optimized.

"We want to just make sure that we have more people who can be able to go get students for us," Louie said. "We started with only four [teachers in charge of reunification], but there were only 10 parents who came through. If we have only four [teachers] with 500 parents coming through, it will take a lot longer."

In his five years as principal, this is the first year actual earthquake emergencies have been simulated.

"It always makes me nervous that we don't necessarily really practice for something that is inevitable at one point," he said. "Hopefully [an earthquake] doesn't happen in the next 10 years, but as a school and a community, if we can practice it and it does happen, we're that much more ready in terms of getting students back to their families." ♦

How to minimize impact of new P.E. policy on freshman athletes

For many student athletes, P.E. exercises like squats, push-ups and running laps are relatively simple and good to do. In the past, these exercises have kept them in shape for their sport's season, during which their P.E. class is replaced with a free period. This free period has provided the perfect opportunity to complete work or get extra sleep.

This change may shrink some of the school's already small and struggling sports teams.

Under the district's new interpretation of the California Education Code standards for physical education, this free period during a team's season will no longer be an option for the Class of 2028.

In January, the district announced sports will no longer fulfill the required freshman P.E. credit for the upcoming school year, a policy that has run into no problems in the past 20 years it has been in place.

Freshmen in sports will still need to take P.E. to satisfy graduation requirements. An exception are music students taking marching band in the fall and winter percussion or winter

guard during the spring. Not only has the change affected regular students on sports teams but also the selective elite athletes who take Independent Study PE (ISPE).

ISPE is for athletes at a state or national level. With proof that they are involved in an outside sport at a state or national level, they have been allowed to skip P.E. but, still receive the required credits. With the district's new interpretation, these exceptional athletes will have to take beginner's P.E., adding on to their already rigorous outside competitive training.

For students trying to explore or continue their love for a sport, this change to the overall P.E. policy is far from ideal, as participating in sports along with attending P.E. classes will overly burden their already busy schedules.

Worse still, this change may shrink some of the school's already small and struggling sports teams.

Currently, many freshmen choose to play a sport over taking P.E. This influx of freshman players provides a key base of participants for sport teams.

Even before this change, many teams have had significantly low numbers, which is likely to worsen next year when the policy is implemented.

The boys' lacrosse and girls' and boys' swim and baseball all lack JV teams this spring. The girls' volleyball team had an 11-person roster, consisting mostly of freshmen and former JV players. The boys' wrestling team had only one team of 10 students, five being freshmen, forcing them to forfeit 10 out of 20 matches each meet.

Doing any sport requires a big time commitment. Practic-



es take place almost every week-day, and games occur as often as twice a week. Basketball has six 2-hour practices each week; meets and game days for sports like cross country, track and field, swim and volleyball often take more than four hours.

Under the new P.E. requirements, student-athletes will lose the free period they have to do their schoolwork, giving them little time after practices and matches to be a student.

P.E. classes also tax the bodies of student athletes. With practices and games after school and workouts during P.E. class, athletes' bodies risk being overworked, resulting in constant soreness that increases exhaustion and affects overall performance.

As much as we disagree with the district's new interpretation of the state rules surrounding

P.E., the new policy is highly unlikely to change, so the next best thing will be making certain effective changes in the P.E. program that could help athletes.

P.E. teachers can design two separate workouts: one for athletes in season and one for non-athletes.

Athlete-focused workouts more fit their physique would help them improve and get stronger.

A separate, higher level class could also be created as an option for freshmen, like the existing strength and conditioning class, to help athletes improve their skill sets.

The negative effects of the policy change will not help the participation rate of school's sports teams, but perhaps the effects on athletes can be minimized by differentiating the workouts athletes do in P.E. classes. ♦

>> falconfigures

49 percent of freshmen enrolled in sports this year.

29 percent of students in sports this year were freshmen, which is more than students in any other grade level.

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief
Lynn Dai
Jonny Luo

Opinion Editors
Sam Bai
Sarah Thomas

Reporter
Bill Huang

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 33-1 in favor of this article.

Drivers need to slow down for the safety of students

BY GraceLin

After school ends, hundreds of students walk home down Lexington Court, one of the roads in front of the Herriman Avenue entrance to the school that leads into the Golden Triangle neighborhood.

Common sense would dictate that cars simply slow down on the roads around the school.

While it seems like common sense for cars to slow down near schools, I've recently noticed multiple cars quickly zooming down these roads, posing hazards for students. While the speed limit is 25 mph in the school zone, cars seem to go as fast as 35 mph.

To keep students safe, drivers should actually follow speed limits and an email should be sent to parents by the administration reminding drivers — both students and parents — to slow down on nearby streets. On top of that, speed bumps could be considered to further encourage drivers to be mindful of their speed.

With countless accidents already occurring in the Santa Clara County area each month, the community should not add to this toll by speeding in a school zone, and recent rainy and windy weather increase the odds of accidents.

Too often, cars recklessly speed past the crosswalk connecting Lexington Court and Herriman. You would think flashing yellow lights of a pedestrian walking sign would be enough to prompt other vehicles to slow down and stop.

Instead, some cars still zip past, paying no attention to pedestrians. Aside from rushing through the crosswalk, I've also noticed

frequent speeders accelerating down Lexington Court. There are also numerous parents parked on Lexington Court to pick up their children, and as students walk into the road to avoid these cars, they are put in more danger by the speeding vehicles.

Common sense would dictate that cars simply slow down on the roads around the school. While

we all have somewhere we need to go, slowing down could be the difference between reaching our destinations safely and avoiding potential accidents or hazards.

The roads around the school are bustling with pedestrians and cyclists after school, so taking a few extra minutes to slow down will contribute to a safer place for everyone in the community. ♦



Photo by GRACE LIN

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Maximizing opportunity: Taking seven classes a year is worth the extra effort

By Sam Bai & Lynn Dai

For many students, the option of taking six or fewer classes a year is a godsend: It could mean waking up hours later than normal, leaving school right after lunch or even skipping mosaics and rallies during tutorials. However, an often overlooked aspect of selecting courses are the numerous benefits associated with taking seven classes (yes, even as upperclassmen).

The choice of what to do with seventh period is always a tough one, whether students choose a free period to complete assignments or take another homework-intensive class.

As seniors who have taken seven classes for the past three years, we have found that taking seven classes is worth the extra time and effort.

With a set number of mandatory classes each year — five in freshman year, four in sophomore and junior year and two in senior year — students aren't left with many choices for electives. For those choosing to participate in a "series" of courses all four years, such as languages, art, drama, journalism or music, students may be left with only one or two truly free electives.

After dipping their toes into a course to fulfill a graduation requirement, students might find a new genuine interest blooming in one of those courses. The seventh period becomes the perfect opportunity to continue this interest, turning it into something to continue long after graduation.

More courses supplement new interests

Language courses such as Chinese or Spanish instantly come to mind, especially since they are needed for graduation. Although the first few years of a language are focused on grammatical rules, advanced level classes delve deeper into each respective language's culture.

While many choose to only take language for one or two years, taking it for all four can be beneficial: By opting not to take the advanced levels of these courses, students miss out on solidifying their skills and cultural appreciation.

Bai's experience: I found an interest in

learning the cultures of Spain and Peru and plan on continuing learning Spanish into college. Learning a new language will help me in the future, improving communication with a wider range of people without the use of a translator and allowing me to watch foreign movies without subtitles.

Students should also consider taking an elective that allows them to supplement an extracurricular outside of school.

Dai's experience: Having taken art classes outside of school since age 6, I found the addition of taking art courses at the school exposed me to a community I wouldn't otherwise have joined. Art 2, Art 3 and AP Drawing allowed me to explore different mediums and styles of art. Occasional check-ins, where the teacher and other classmates would comment and give advice on each other's work, were also an incredibly helpful resource that exposed me to different perspectives.

That's not to say, however, that students cannot join one of these "series" of courses if they don't partake in them freshman year.

Many classes offer a smooth integration into the course material. Student-led classes such as newspaper often see an influx of juniors joining the elective, who then continue as an editor during their senior year.

Take advantage of limited-time courses

In other instances, sacrificing one course — by postponing it by a year to make room for a course this year — is necessary.

Dai: During the 2022-2023 school year, I took the Advanced Science Research (ASR) course offered at Los Gatos High School, which helped me develop laboratory and project design skills for research. Choosing to take ASR in my junior year proved to be a lucky choice: The course was discontinued in June as teachers felt "overwhelmed by the large enrollment that year."

With the school population fluctuating, the electives offered each year are different, and it's uncertain whether a course offered this year will be available next year. Therefore, if students see a course they're interested in, they should take advantage of them

— these opportunities are worth sacrificing a free period for, especially since the course might not be offered forever with dwindling school size and resources annually.

Develop connections with other students through joining new communities

Bottom line: Through taking courses such as journalism, we have come to appreciate the community they've become a part of as well. For those taking multiple "series" courses, taking seven classes a year is often inevitable.

High school is a time to form bonds with other students; this should be enough of a selling point to consider spending seventh period joining one of these student-run courses. The value of making friends from different grades and communities can not be understated. Talking with seniors regarding difficult courses or learning more about a specific sport by talking with another classmate are invaluable parts of the high school experience.

Bai: Many of these classes also provide opportunities for leadership roles. Through being an editor on the school newspaper, I have found significant improvement through my ability to manage time and assist younger staff members. Through the presentation of story ideas in information discussions my co-editor and I lead, I have also greatly improved my presentation skills.

Through interviewing sources, I have been able to think faster on the spot, thinking of follow-up questions to learn more about a specific topic. This has helped me greatly through my other time commitments such as the school's TEDx club, where I had to reach out to speakers, and difficult classes such as Physics C where I use my improved ability in asking questions to learn more about conceptual ideas.

Ultimately, the decision to take a seventh class should only be made once the benefits and costs are scrutinized. Despite our increased workload, heavy stress and potentially later bedtimes, we don't regret taking seven classes each year for our past three years. The memories, skills and experiences we've gained from each additional elective will last us a lifetime. ♦



Graphic by SAM BAI

Drop deadlines for classes do not make sense

By Annie Liu

Ensuring I am interested and capable of succeeding in the courses I've signed up for at the beginning of each year has always been incredibly stressful.

Fueling that stress is the restrictive drop deadline, usually 7 weeks after the semester begins. That time frame sometimes does not provide enough time for students to know where they truly stand in a class. As a result, drop dates prevent students from actually exploring their interests, especially in harder courses.

This year, the last day to drop a class during the first semester was Oct. 6 and for the second semester the last day to drop a class without grade penalty was Feb. 23. The last day to change course levels (dropping from honors to regular courses) for the first

semester was Sept. 8, and for the second semester, it was Jan. 26.

A deadline for a course change is reasonable — it's extremely difficult for a student to join a class in the middle of the year. However, this same logic doesn't apply to class drop dates.

Since dropping a class past the deadline results in an instant F, many students choose to stay in a class they might be struggling in. They then must survive a class they have little or no interest in, which is not good for them or the teacher.

Not only is it bad for students' mental health, it's also a waste of time for both parties.

The school should allow students more than those first few weeks to decide whether or not they want to stay in their courses, especially when it comes to AP, Honors or

elective courses, which can take longer to get an accurate feel for. As long as a class is not a graduation requirement, students should be able to drop the class any time throughout the year.

In a competitive environment like this one, students often bite off more than they can chew, egged on by external pressures. The mindset goes: "If everyone is doing it, why can't I do it too?" This forces students to compete with their peers in terms of course difficulty, and many end up prioritizing keeping up with others over their actual success in the class.

With such a toxic mindset, it's difficult to know one's strengths and genuine interests. The fear of falling behind or not being able to compete makes it difficult for students to admit they dislike the course or the course is too advanced for them, and restrictive drop

deadlines exacerbate this issue by putting the student on a tight schedule.

It sometimes takes more than seven weeks to know if a course is right for you or not. It's different for each class, but there are cases where teachers don't put in assignment and assessment grades until the drop dates.

For example, some teachers might grade everything at once, making it hard for students to gauge where they are at. When the grades are put in, the delusion of "I'm doing OK" wears off, and that's where students start panicking.

Dropping classes is really difficult with the fear of falling behind other students, and it's hard to assess if a class is really for you in just seven weeks. There should not be a deadline for dropping courses unless they're mandatory in order to graduate. ♦

COURSE CHANGE & DROP DATES

SEPT. 8
TO SWITCH

OCT. 6
TO DROP

JAN. 26
TO SWITCH

FEB. 23
TO DROP

SEMESTER 1

SEMESTER 2

Graphic by ANNIE LIU

Beware of rising online parasocial relationships

By Divya Vadlakonda

Internet users nowadays have become desensitized to a sobering truth: We feel increasingly entitled to others' private information. Such entitlement can be seen scrolling past a heated Instagram comment that offers startlingly disparaging input on a celebrity's appearance, TikTok videos of fans raving about the love lives of their idols as if they were close friends or even mundane news headlines that offer windows into what a celebrity is eating for lunch.

These interactions can be characterized as parasocial relationships, or one-sided relationships in which one party does not know the other party exists. Of course, these relationships existed long before the age of the internet. Yet in recent years, it seems as if the personal insights consumers are allowed into a celebrity's life have increased the intensity of these parasocial relationships tenfold. As such, more of us should become more self-aware about our relationship with social media and make efforts to decrease our reliance on it, familiar as it is.

Parasocial relationships should exist only in moderation: As a society, we can achieve this through limiting media consumption. In an era where it is almost impossible to exist on any platform without forming para-

social relationships, it is up to the consumer to moderate their own expectations and relationships with their favorite celebrities.

One of the most prominent examples of a collective parasocial response in recent years occurred when singer Rihanna stopped making music in 2017 to focus on her makeup brand, Fenty Beauty. Fans did not laud her for her business venture — instead, they seemed annoyed that she would dare focus on anything other than music, as if she was obliged to conform to their will.

Parasocial relationships can take a much darker turn, prompting fans to send celebrities death threats or even show up at their houses. While these interactions are obviously harmful for the public figure, they shed light on the severely compromised mental health of the consumer. Studies have shown that engaging too deeply in parasocial relationships can skew one's expectations for real-life relationships, potentially lowering overall happiness and life satisfaction. Additionally, investing too much time in parasocial relationships can cause individuals to feel less motivated to nurture their real-world relationships.

Consumers must assess the media with a more critical lens and acknowledge that what they see online is an incomplete picture. Shielding themselves from sensation-



Graphic by DIVYA VADLAKONDA

alism and clickbait by discerning the context of the information presented before having an emotional response to it is imperative.

The line between the consumer and public figure should be strictly defined through self-prescribed digital boundaries that allow more time for real-life relationships. It can often be hard to stop scrolling because of social media's addictive sense of familiarity, but making an effort to find new hobbies

that stimulate yourself and broaden your horizons can help break the cycle.

Those who do not carefully assess their actions online before crossing boundaries continue to normalize the perception of public figures as dolls to control or fictional characters to rag on. This is an unnatural and harmful tendency that, without intervention, will cause them to become victims of an illusion of intimacy. ♦

Stop scrolling: Please, take a break from social media

By Bill Huang

Taking a break from homework, I often find myself opening Instagram and scrolling through reels, or short-form, vertical content. One second, I could be watching an adorable clip of two dogs playing; another, I could be watching a highlight from the 2016 NBA Finals. Before I know it, an hour has passed. My homework remains undone, my brain foggy from the amount of information I've viewed. Valuable time that could've been used for valuable rest or productivity has effectively been stolen by these reels.

Although social media seems fun, it is harmful for the already short attention span of teens and exacerbates external pressure. In each app, the negative impacts on teenagers outweigh the positive ones.

Instagram: reels and pressure to post

For me and many of my friends, most of our time is spent on Instagram reels. This time spent scrolling has decreased my attention span tremendously. I get tired of reading a book after the first page.

Instagram posts are also overrated and

potentially harmful. I often see many of my friends posting about them having a good time in Europe during breaks or hanging out with their friends while I sit on my bed at home. These posts pressure myself to be somewhere and also post something. It took me three years to realize that this pressure is completely unnecessary: Not going out and staying at home during break is completely normal, but Instagram has placed an incentive to also travel and share it online. Many teens have shared that Instagram has created unrealistic standards not only for body image but also the life they lead.

Snapchat: a lot of useless features

Snapchat seems fun to use, but ultimately, it is just another waste of time. The snaps you send are automatically deleted after 24 hours unless you save them, so the pictures are forgotten, with no memories created.

There is also a "streak" feature: If you snap someone and they snap you back every day, a streak begins. Some people use the app just for streaks, often sending a picture of their wall or a black screen to keep a streak alive. Many stress over having streaks

with a large number of people or keeping a long streak, which makes no sense.

Snap Map is another feature where you can see where your friends are on a map or see when they are last active. Sometimes, I get annoyed when I send someone a snap an hour ago, but the map displays they were active five minutes ago. These pointless features harm friendships and attention spans.

TikTok: a platform aimed at addiction

TikTok is an app I used an enormous amount during the pandemic. Like Instagram reels, TikTok employs short videos and constant scrolling, diminishing your attention span and conditioning you to depend on instant gratification.

Creators also often split videos into multiple parts to increase engagement and thus profits, which wastes time by making users watch useless information in the first parts without showing the results.

Sometimes, I lose track of time and realize I am already on part 54 of a useless storytime. Endless scrolling is easily addicting and very time consuming. Like reels, you won't remember most videos.

Today, many TikTok videos are either AI-generated or contain fake news. Many comments and videos spread misinformation on true crime cases, where users purposely post false stories about a specific case for attention, making their story believable and gaining thousands of likes. Because TikTok is so popular, these videos are incredibly harmful and have real world impacts.

Other videos containing AI-generated voices and deep fakes — really realistic videos of celebrities saying things they have never said before — can easily trick many viewers on the platform. Those deep fakes are even scarier in the political realm as we head into an election this November that will set the direction of the country.

While these apps can help you connect to your friends and greater society, social media is overrated. Spending too much time online can affect your attention span and waste your time. With the world becoming more reliant on the internet, social media is something that teenagers around the world need to claw back control of, whether that means setting a time limit or deleting the app entirely. ♦

Heroic artists wage techno-chemical warfare against AI

By Jex Popov

It has already been a hot minute since the inception of AI picture-generating sites like Midjourney and DALL-Es, and AI "artworks" have started looking more and more like cohesive images instead of hallucinations out of a bad acid trip. Consequently, most artists have been consumed by a wave of concern regarding art industrialization.

The existential questions facing us include: Will artists be taken over by robots? Will corporations use free AI art over human artists, who they have to actually pay and give benefits to? Will hypercapitalism be the death of human art?

Then there's the inherent problem of art theft. AI "art" models are trained using databases filled with art whose creators have not consented to having their work used. The AI algorithm then replicates an artist's style or artwork by rearranging pixels and shapes

together to create approximations of what would most likely go where.

Rather than taking inspiration to create something unique, AI desecrates both the medium it's trying to piggyback off of and the artists that allow that medium to exist, only serving corporations who want free art they can advertise with.

AI programs rip apart authentic human artworks and sew them back together into a soulless, Frankenstein-esque amalgamation (usually with weird pseudo-pin up proportions that are too disturbing to be visually appealing).

Now, actual human artists with over a decade of learning under their belt are expected to compete in the market filled with mass-manufactured robotic art. The sole reason for art is to inspire emotion and understanding between artist and viewer, to leave an imprint of the artist's soul on the world, to loudly announce,

"I'm here! I existed! I lived, and loved, and lost!" The commodification of these integral human experiences is a downright insult not only to the medium of art as a whole, but to the humanity it stemmed from.

Luckily, programs such as Glaze and Nightshade are the start to artists fighting back against non-consensual usage of art in AI training data, and helping to restore the integrity of art again.

Glaze, created by Ben Zhao and his team at the University of Chicago, uses algorithms to subtly change pixel arrangements on submitted artworks to confuse an AI "art" model trying to scan it.

Nightshade, also created by the same team, takes this a step further. Pixels in the artwork are tweaked to make the AI model think the image is something different from what it actually is, while the drawing remains unchanged to the human eye.

When artworks poisoned with Nightshade or Glaze make their way to these AI models, it causes them to start malfunctioning and spitting out images different from the input. If enough poisoned images are fed to the model, the AI model basically becomes a useless brick of code.

Human artists have been trying to take down AI "art" systems from the legal side as well: Illustrators Sarah Anderson, Kelly Mckernan and Karla Oritz filed a copyright infringement lawsuit against the companies behind Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and DreamUp on Jan. 13. However, technological aids such as Glaze and Nightshade will be a great support to the pushback as well. Perhaps this is one of the cases where it really is best to fight fire with fire — and tech with tech.

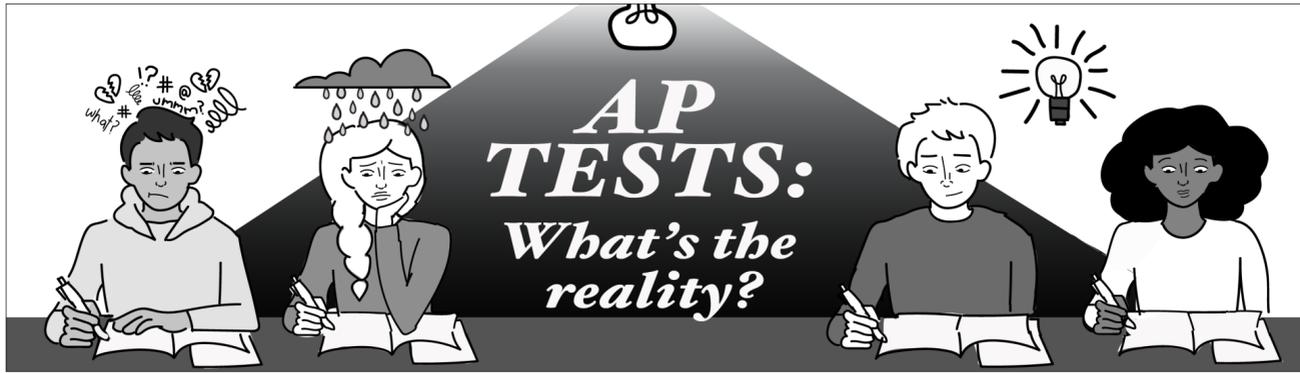
It is incredibly exciting for artists and nonartists alike that the blow-up of hate for AI art online is finally being translated into tangible change.

It's definitely a hopeful start for artists and other creatives afraid of what this hyper-innovation without soul or merit will do to their job prospects, how it might integrate their own art into its bulbous, abhorrent collective and make them a contributor to its system.

So if you're an artist and you're posting your work online, protect yourself, protect your artwork! Spread the word about Glaze and Nightshade, and together we can make the internet a safe space for artists again. ♦



Graphic by JEX POPOV



Stifling students' creativity Combating grade inflation

BY AlanCai

It's no surprise many students consider AP testing an excruciatingly tedious process that yields little educational value. Education is meant to nurture the creative sides of young minds and encourage new ideas that often challenge the status quo. A quick glance at almost any AP test reveals the exact opposite: Test takers are encouraged to follow formula writing and bubble in the correct boxes.

AP tests reward memorization

In this system, students are too often rewarded for "gaming the system" and see little gain from genuine creativity not measured on a standardized test.

To conform to the standards College Board sets for its tests, AP courses are forced to skim required material and spend an undue amount of time to teach students how to format their writing.

This pure absurdity is exemplified by the weightage placed on argumentation. Although this emphasis could bring added value in critical thinking, history is an objective study of the past, not a subjective interpretation of what happened. This teaches students to generate gibberish. For students in classes such as AP Biology and AP U.S. History, excelling at writing or having a grasp of what AP readers are "looking for" will give them an edge regardless of their true understanding of course material.

For students in classes such as AP Physics or AP Statistics, memorizing more "test tricks" like thesis formulas and analysis abbreviations will help achieve the highest scores.

As a result, test scores are often not reflective of students' true understanding of subject material so much as their test-taking skills. From the perspective of many college professors, the excessive premium

College Board places on using buzzwords and completing checklists is detrimental for success in higher education.

System exacerbates inequality

If all of the negative sides of AP testing were not enough to render it a fundamentally flawed system, recent studies have shown that AP testing fosters educational inequality.

Even with fee waivers and other measures attempting to mitigate the effects of educational inequality, AP exams still expand the divide between wealthy and less fortunate communities. Schools with inadequate funding are unable to offer APs, and those which do offer AP courses without the robust resources required often find themselves unable to provide the necessary resources.

Students in less fortunate communities have less time to focus on studying when they have other commitments to helping out their family financially.

Wealthier school districts can invest in workshops and other resources for their students. Under-served districts should reallocate their resources towards strengthening their core curriculum rather than pushing for more AP classes.

Additionally, College Board content is overwhelmingly Euro-centric, with AP U.S. History and AP European History being laser-focused on history from a Western perspective. Although AP World History brings additional perspectives, large swaths of its curriculum are still dedicated to Western narratives. AP African American Studies is a step in the right direction, but College Board has much more to do in diversifying its course portfolio.

As far as I'm concerned, America would be better off without AP tests and College Board as a whole.

BY NikaSvzhenko

AP tests offer a standardized way to measure a student's understanding of college-level material. Colleges should use them for their intended purposes by requiring AP exam scores to be submitted.

Testing for understanding is essential

Even though universities favor rigorous course loads that often include multiple AP classes, students are not required to self-report their AP exam scores when applying for college. Effectively, students can withhold scores they don't like and submit only those they do.

If a student has an A in an AP class but receives a score less than a 5 on the AP exam, they might not want to submit their score. With a high grade, this student comes across as though having complete mastery of the AP material. Unlike AP exams, grades are far from standardized across schools, resulting in some classes being significantly easier than others despite teaching the same material.

The average grade across nation-wide high schools has risen from 3.22 out of 4 in 2010 to 3.39 out of 4 in 2021 over the past few years, while the average ACT score has fallen from 21.40 to 20.17. Though the ACT isn't a perfect measure of knowledge, it covers basic English, Math and Science skills, and low scores signify students are not learning material covered in school despite achieving high grades.

Two teachers who taught AP classes at Individuals Dedicated to Excellence and Achievement (IDEA) public schools admitted that "[their] lessons rarely even began to approach true AP rigor," creating essays which under-performing students would copy word for word. Through their system, students not meeting AP standards

would still receive high class grades.

In AP Computer Science A at our school, a student's final grade is entirely based on classwork completion, reflection questions and projects. Sadly, these can be easy to cheat on with online resources.

All AP exams, excluding Computer Science Principles, also do not require a score above 90% (a typical A) to achieve a grade of a 5. Calculus BC required just 58% and English Language and Composition required 75% in 2020 for a tester to receive the highest AP test score.

With extremely generous curves, there is no doubt that a student who cannot achieve a 5 does not have college level understanding in that subject.

Exams encourage long-term retention

Comprehensive AP exams also force students to review material they learned in both semesters, while most finals often review only one semester's material. This helps them review prerequisite knowledge for future, more difficult courses.

For example, many students who take AP Chemistry go on to take the more difficult college courses General Chemistry and Organic Chemistry, both required for admission into medical school.

It's also important to note that colleges look for work ethic as well. Having low grades with high AP scores speaks to a student's poor work ethic and can be valuable information for colleges evaluating whether to admit a student.

To prevent rewarding students who benefit from grade inflation, colleges should require students to self-report every AP score in the application process. Having a complete view of students' scores, colleges will be able to easily recognize students who got away with breezing through an easy class that just so happens to be labeled as an AP class.



Freddy Falcon @freddy_falcon

The definitive guide to navigating Toga and SHS accounts **100** **100**

BY GraceLin

Instagram is the hub of out-of-pocket "toga" accounts. In addition to pre-existing accounts that keep students updated on school news and events, there are dozens of non-school affiliated accounts.

Due to the sheer amount of accounts, it's hard to decide which to actually pay attention to - let's run them through, in order of importance.

1. Your class's account

Following your class's account is essential. While following leadership accounts can also be important, your class's account covers important class-specific activities and other major upcoming events.

For instance, the Instagram account for class of 2026 (@toga.2026) advertised several December spirit events.

Your class's account has all the necessary information needed to stay updated for any occasion. The class-specific accounts are important, considering they have posts about class meetings or homecoming practice

dates.

For winter formal this year, @shsdance.co posted about specific details such as the price of tickets and date of the event, while @toga_tech posted a video to promote the event. This felt redundant, as the separate posts could have been consolidated.

2. "Not affiliated with SHS" accounts.

While these accounts are fun, most of them don't last for more than a couple months. Recently, however, many of these accounts have resurfaced.

Most students are familiar with these accounts already: @togaistired, @toga_goofy_shoes and @togabadparking. Many of these accounts have the infamous bios "Not affiliated with SHS," meaning they aren't officially associated with the school.

I follow most "not affiliated with shs" accounts I come. In the end, these accounts end up becoming inactive quickly.

To determine which accounts will last, check the number of followers it has - an account with over 400 will last longer than those with only 100 to 200. Another meth-

od to determine how long an account will remain is by referring to the account's topic. Accounts like @toga_goofy_shoes will only last so long (what will they do when they run out of goofy shoes?).

On the other hand, an account like @togaconfessions_ can consistently post for a considerably long time. Even though they may not last for over 2 months, it is worth the time to follow these amusing accounts while they last!

3. Sports accounts

Follow if you want to support your fellow athletes, but it really isn't necessary if you don't plan on attending any games.

Many sports have an Instagram account dedicated to posting game day reminders and senior spotlights. Following the accounts may not be necessary, but showing your support for fellow students never hurts.

During a particular sport's season, you can also try to follow a sport's Instagram account to stay updated. Another method to combat this problem is the school creating a central account for all sports news.

4. Club accounts

Most club accounts have roughly 200 followers, but don't have as many members attending meetings. The only valid reason to follow a club's Instagram account is if you're actually a member or if you're interested in joining, so you can keep yourself updated on meetings and fundraisers.

When most students already follow hundreds of accounts on Instagram, it's hard to decide which of them are necessary. While it's easy to follow all of them that come your way, filling your feed with countless posts just gives you an excuse to continue scrolling through your phone.

Try to see whether an account's posts just clog up your Instagram feed. Do you find the posts from the account negative or annoying? Or are the posts informative and entertaining?

The general rule of thumb is to follow accounts which are actually most relevant and important to you - like the clubs you're a part of or the class you're in - and then to go from there.

All graphics by SARAH THOMAS and ANNIE LIU

MUKBANG: SPICY NOODLE CHALLENGE

NOODLES, NOODLES BURN THE TONGUE, WHICH IS THE SPICIEST OF THEM ALL?

Browsing along the endless aisles of food in H-Mart, junior Nicole Lee's eye caught sight of a variety of spicy cup noodles. From this wide assortment of selections, she decided to buy an assortment for her and fellow juniors William Norwood and Divya Vadlakonda to try, hoping to see which were the tastiest and which lived up to their expectations of being unbearably spicy.



#1: Shin Ramen Red: Original spicy

Nicole: 5.5/10 spice — After eating a few bites, I found myself wanting to eat more. They were light enough that I could probably finish the whole cup if I wanted to.

Will: 4/10 spice — I took my first bite and expected to be underwhelmed; however, the spice was nice and had a burst of flavor.

Divya: 5/10 spice — It was flavorful and umami without the spice being overpowering. I took seconds of this MSG delicacy.



#3: Buldak Spicy Noodles: Chicken

Nicole: 9.5/10 spice — These were even spicier than the cheese noodles. It felt like a bee had entered my mouth.

Will: 8/10 spice — I expected an intense artificial flavor. I had little time to even consider the flavor when the spice hit my tongue.

Divya: 6/10 spice — There was no chicken in these noodles, but they might have forgotten the spice as well. I found these noodles to be the most flavorful and least spicy.



#2: Buldak Spicy Noodles: Cheese

Nicole: 8/10 spice — Because of the cheese, I took my first bite with the false preconception the noodles weren't going to be spicy. I was wrong.

Will: 7.5/10 spice — I felt betrayed after these noodles only got spicier as they rested in my mouth. I was in an internal battle between the spice and the cheese.

Divya: 8/10 spice — I can still taste the cheese in my nose. It was some synthetic flavor that literally inflamed my taste buds.



#4: Buldak 2x Spicy Noodles

Nicole: 10/10 spice — After eating a single noodle that was only half-drenched in sauce, my tongue felt like it was on fire.

Will: 9/10 spice — The noodles felt like flames in my throat, and water did nothing to quell the spice. We had to buy some chocolate milk, but that didn't even help.

Divya: 10/10 spice — Will is lying, it was a 10. My throat was on fire, and tears threatened to fall. I would recommend these noodles if you consider heartburn and emotional turmoil enjoyable.

To our surprise, however, most of the noodles generally weren't as bad as we expected them to be — they were actually addictingly tasty. If you're interested in testing out multiple ramen flavors to find your favorite brand or flavor, this is a great way to be able to compare all flavors at once — and know which one or ones to avoid like a 7-alarm firm.

EVERYONE FALLS AGAINST THE SPICE.

Watch Next:



EXTREME SPICY NOODLE CHALLENGE | 2x SPICY S... WATCH >



SPICY NOODLE MUKBANG BULDAK CRAZY WATCH >

Goodbye seasonal depression; hello sunshine

From the months of December to February, the cold and dreary weather practically begs me to stay indoors and be unproductive. All I want is a hot drink while watching a movie under a weighted blanket. When someone tries to persuade me to do something more than being a couch potato, I become frustrated and snap at them.



Annika Gho

I had assumed all this was just me being overly sensitive and trying to find an excuse for not wanting to study for upcoming finals on top of my extracurriculars. But as I complained more about gray clouds and how I wore the same hoodies every day, I realized this was something more than just being overly sensitive.

Turns out, such a thing exists. Seasonal Affective Disorder (ironically abbreviated to SAD) is an actual medical diagnosis that falls under depressive disorders. It can result in drowsiness, anxiety, weight gain and trouble focusing.

According to Hopkins Medicine, when it's dark outside, the body makes more melatonin, a sleep-related hormone, hence

explaining why and how people are more easily tired during the winter. On the other hand, longer days with more sunlight help increase serotonin levels. Serotonin is a chemical in the brain that acts as a messenger between nerve cells and the rest of your body and affects your mood.

While I haven't been officially diagnosed with SAD, I think we can all agree that the weather seems to dampen our spirits.

When I was younger, I read storybooks that portrayed winter as a season of drinking hot chocolate or building a snowman in my front yard — descriptions that are a bit unrealistic when California only reaches the low 40s on a regular winter day.

Nevertheless, I used to enjoy winter for the somewhat cozy feeling.

These days, I just want spring to be here, but the rain seems to drag time out as long as possible.

If a year is a book, March is indefinitely a new chapter of its own. A new season, a new feeling of positivity. In fact, the Roman calendar actually began with the month March, and to this day, some cultures and religions still celebrate the new year in March. This makes sense: Why would you welcome the beginning of the year with storms or blizzards and the resulting inconvenience?

With all that said, I now appreciate spring much more. March also comes with Daylight Savings, giving an extra hour

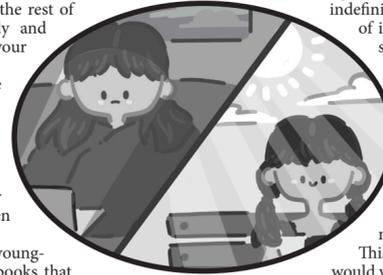
of light to be productive. The light brings awareness to the body and forces me to focus on my work.

Despite my Rudolph-red nose and beary eyes from the pollen, seeing all the flowers and bright green trees gives me an overwhelming sense of relaxation and peace.

I can now get a drink of water or tea and study outside for a change of environment or take a break and meet up with my friends for a chat under the sun. Even short walks home or runs up to Villa Montalvo brighten up my mood.

Spring is also the best time to travel, as it's a perfect equilibrium that's neither scorching hot nor piercing cold. The week-long April break in second semester seems precious because the weather is nice all over the world. The entire season feels precious; it's one of the few times we get the right amounts of sunshine, productivity and positivity.

I cannot wait to leave behind the cold and dreary mornings for longer days of sunshine and blue skies. It's a well-deserved break after the winter's cold and gloom.



PUFFER VEST: A MUST-HAVE IN YOUR CLOSET

Imagine this: It's a bitter rainy morning with icy air. A couple of hours later, the skies clear and the sun beams down on your thick coat that the early rain had tricked you into wearing. My solution: Wear a black padded vest.

My favorite piece of clothing, hands down, is my black padded vest.

I purchased it at Mango, a clothing brand from Spain that's similar to H&M, and it's been a great addition to my closet. Not only does it keep me warm, but it serves as a versatile piece for layering as well. Better yet, I scored it 50% off at \$30.

You can also wear a puffer vest any time of the year: during an early summer morning jog or on top of a thick sweatshirt during the winter. It gives just enough insulation

but isn't as heavy as a traditional jacket. This makes the vest perfect for any weather, so it won't be sitting in your closet for six months before being worn again. This way, you'll definitely get your money's worth.

You can also wear a puffer vest any time of the year. It gives just enough insulation but isn't as heavy as a jacket.

BY RuiyanZhu

Its design also allows your arms to move freely. Vests are designed to keep your core warm. While I usually feel constrained with a bulky-sleeved puffer jacket on, I'm able to have a full range of motion with a vest. If you told me to chop wood, I'd be able to do it with a vest, arms free and core warm. Ready to take a chemistry test? Do that warm and with little to no friction against the table.



Rating: 5 Falcons



All graphics by ANNIE LIU and ISABELLE WANG



With college applications behind me, I have more time on my hands than in the past couple of years. As a result, I recently decided to take up beekeeping, starting a small honey farm in my backyard.



Sam Bai

Once the season became warmer, I bought basic hive-making materials, which consisted of a solid bottom floor, 16 frames and two hive bodies that I stacked on top of each other. Following Los Gatos' ordinance, I ended up putting the hive on the far end of my deck to give it the most amount of sunlight.

To start populating the boxes with bees, I had a few options: buying entire groups of bees through packages, nucs — pre-established colonies living on frames — or the third option I went with, asking a neighbor to split their preexisting hive into two. Once my box received a split of their bees, the hive took a few days to grow a new queen, who lays all the eggs. Once the pheromones of the old queen disappear, new female larvae are fed royal jelly, which turns a would-be worker into an egg-laying queen.

The first hurdle I overcame to become the beekeeper of my dreams was the bees themselves. Their painful stings and swarm-like movement initially scared

me. Surprisingly, this fear was extremely easy to subdue with the help of a bee suit and smoker which I got from my friend. The smoker, a small device that pushes smoke, makes the bees assume that there's a fire, and they focus more on eating honey than attacking me.

Learning more about the bees also decreased the fear I had of them. During a visit to a family friend's hive, I found myself playing with the wings of a bee who had (unfortunately for them) made their way onto my gloves. In an attempt to learn its movement, I ended up crumpling the wings of the bee with my gloves. Although I can now comfortably move around the hives without the entire bee suit on, I still wear the veil to prevent the occasional sting to the head. If a sting does occur, the pain dissipates if I simply don't think about it.

After being around bees long enough, they stopped looking like mini wasps (which I still garner a deep hatred for) and more like fluffy balls of black and yellow. It's no wonder Batman loves the combination of black and yellow so much.

In the future, I might learn to capture my own swarm. Through organizations such as the Santa Clara Valley Beekeepers Guild, beekeepers can volunteer to capture honey bee swarms. Although I still have a long way to go before trying that, I look forward to doing so someday.

My routine now consists of checking on the hives every couple of weeks, looking at honey levels and scraping off any excess wax. I'll only begin harvesting the honey next year, as the bees need their honey reserves their first year.

Initially, I thought the rodents around my house would pose a problem, but to date, nothing has happened. Bees can be seen buzzing around the front of the hive and are fairly friendly, as long as I approach from the back of the colony to not disrupt bees entering and exiting their hive.

Luckily, there hasn't been an infection or mites — a common problem among

keepers — and the war by wasps haven't waged a war on my bees yet. Since my hive has only been around a few months, I haven't had an opportunity to harvest the honey yet, but I'll be looking forward to seeing the fruits of my (bees') labor in the coming weeks. ♦



Florence Hu

In the past, I have sometimes awoken up to the rustling and jostling of riled up squirrels scurrying across my family's roof, squeaking and clicking at each other. Recently, however, the yard had been quiet, and I started wondering how the squirrels were doing. I decided I wanted to see the squirrels again. I was onto some-

thing, and it would be an interesting challenge — what if I could summon a squirrel on will?

I began by leaving a tangerine peel out on the backyard fence, adding in an unopened walnut for good measure. The next morning, I could tell from a distance the fence was empty. My hopes had risen too fast — I realized that the squirrel had only taken a few nibbles before swiping everything else onto the ground.

After several days of seeing no activity, I decided to try somewhere else. Perhaps the front yard would work better; this way, I would notice if any of them came by. Standing outside and looking up, I suddenly remembered a handful of squirrels lived in the cluster of dead branches that hung down from the palm tree.

Kneeling down next to a bush before my window sill, I cracked two different types of walnuts open and arranged the colorful assortment

Even though I find studying in silence effective, I am sometimes unable to focus without audio stimulation. So, I decided to try something I'd seen online: white noise.

White noise is a random signal having equal intensity at different frequencies, giving it a constant power spectral density. Though I was cynical about its effectiveness, the second I turned on the YouTube video, I locked in like never before. I was on a roll, getting so much homework done that I would be a very happy and free junior for the next week — no, the next year.

After listening to white noise, I became acquainted with its family. There is a whole color spectrum of noises that inhibit different frequencies, all named after colors that have similar wavelengths. In turn, they have distinct characteristics. For example, blue noise sounds like a hiss, whereas green noise sounds like a calming, faraway rainstorm. My favorite is brown noise. It is reminiscent of that warm feeling you get inside when you drink rich hot chocolate on a cold day.

As



Divya Vadlakonada

added bonus, each color has its own benefits. According to medical writer Po-Chang Hsu, brown noise can aid in reaction time and organizational skills.

When I found this goldmine of sound, I was convinced I was going to be a relaxed and focused academic weapon. Though I'm still waiting to become an academic power, I now possess a superpower: My productivity has gone up, and I am more focused than ever while doing homework. ♦

"I want to learn how to play electric guitar because electric riffs sound cool."



Junior Melanie Lee

"I want to skydive for the rush and excitement."



Junior Shreya Raghuvanshi

"I'd like to try woodworking to learn how to craft timeless pieces."



Senior Dhriti Rachepalli

BETRIENDING A SQUIRREL

MAP juniors tour movie-making LA landmarks

BY FlorenceHu

From March 7-10, 42 juniors in the school's Media Arts Program (MAP) toured parks, studios and museums around Los Angeles. The annual trip, which started in 2013, marked the second year back from trips that were canceled due to pandemic restrictions.

Coordinated by MAP teachers Natasha Ritchie and Joel Tarbox, the trip gave students the chance to learn about the culture, technology and opportunities in the world of film.

Day 1: De Anza College's Film department

The first stop on March 7 wasn't far from the school: At De Anza College, students went on a studio tour guided by educators and directors of the program, visiting state-of-the-art animation classrooms and sound studios. Students were given a glimpse into the equipment used by community college students.

For those who wish to continue pursuing TV and film in college, guides advertised the option of attending the community college for two years before transferring to universities such as New York University or University of Southern California (USC) to continue their studies.

Day 2: USC and Universal Studios tours

At USC, Class of '19 alumna and USC graduate Kitty Huang gave students a tour around the School of Cinematic Arts, which contained several different stages used regularly by film and media students. Within the Robert Zemeckis Center for Digital Arts, students explored a motion capture studio, several soundstages and an IMAX theater.

As someone who studied film and has worked in the industry, Huang gave advice to students, explaining what colleges look for in students who wish to continue doing media arts.

"We were told [specifically for film] that

for a lot of [colleges], they're not looking for your technical abilities because they can teach you that," junior Niraali Garg said. "They're not looking for you to be already proficient [in technical aspects], because the whole point of going to college is to learn about it. They're looking more for your ability to tell stories and come up with original, creative ideas."

Next, the group took the Universal Studios tram tour, which drove them past a range of sets and studios, including those of previous famous films and sets in active use. Through 3-D glasses, students watched scenes from movies like "Jurassic Park" and "Fast and Furious" jump out toward them from the side of the tram.

Day 3: Warner Brothers, Academy Awards Museum, Pantages Theatre and others

At the Warner Brothers studios, students took another tram tour that brought them to outdoor facades, soundstages and sets from famous shows such as "Friends," "The Big Bang Theory," "Barbie," "Gilmore Girls" and "Abbott Elementary."

At the studio, a production sound mixer demonstrated the layers of sound step-by-step through individually adding dialogue, character speech, music and Foley sounds (sound effects like footsteps, shuffling or tapping recorded separately), showing how each added a different effect to the final scene.

The studio also featured interactive exhibits where smaller groups could record lines from famous movies and put them into the scene as film editors would. Some groups made up lines for the scenes from "The Matrix" and "Harry Potter." Other themed exhibits included the DC comics and "Fantastic Beasts," the latter of which featured a collection of Herbology ingredients, sorting hats and potion making items.

At the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, the juniors explored galleries dedicated to "The Godfather," which had many of



Courtesy of MAP LEADERSHIP

MAP juniors visit famous film sets during the Universal Studios tram tour on March 8.

the movie's props. One exhibit also featured Pedro Amoldóvar, detailing the impact that his foreign films had on social movements. The museum also displayed many of the costumes, props and set designs from famous movies.

This year was the first time students visited the LA County Art Museum, a facility that is right next to the Academy Museum. Exhibits included Dining with the Sultan: The Fine Art of Feasting, which displayed plateware among other culinary items from the Middle East, and War Stories: World War I Print Portfolios, containing the artwork of German artists' depictions of the war.

Each year, students watch a performance at the Pantages Theater, often dubbed the "Broadway of Los Angeles." This year's production was the musical "Chicago" — "an exaggerated story sort of about murder, mayhem and jazz," Ritchie said — which had an orchestra playing on stage and dancers

executing advanced choreography.

Day 4: Artwork in The Getty Museum

On the last day of the trip, the group visited The Getty Museum, which showcased the architecture outside and artwork inside. Students walked through exhibition rooms that preserved centuries-old manuscripts, reimagined French palaces, displayed Impressionist paintings and much more.

"There's a whole exhibit that's set up to essentially mimic Versailles, and so you walk around one of the buildings to see parquet floors, the crown molding and Parisian furniture," Ritchie said.

Though she said the trip left them exhausted, junior Anneliese Shab said that it was a rewarding bonding experience.

"At every single stop we had, there were moments that were just super fun," she said. "We all got to know each other, and it's an opportunity that we wouldn't have been able to do if we were just at school." ♦

My comfort game: 'Animal Crossing: New Horizons'

BY AnnieLiu

In a cute cozy house made of dark logs, an inflatable blue bunny sits on the ground drinking a can of orange soda. This is Hopkins, my favorite Animal Crossing villager. I look at his little log bench, and he says, "That chair fits my butt perfectly." That's Hopkins' life in a nutshell.

The hype for Nintendo's Animal Crossing (AC) game peaked about four years ago when it first came out on March 20, 2020, when people needed a sense of community and belonging during the pandemic. The game is available on Nintendo Switch and Nintendo Switch Lite and costs \$59.99. The game gives the player an island with adorable neighbors of their own that can be decorated and interacted with. "Animal Crossing: New Horizons (ACNH)," gave people the fulfillment they needed during uncertain and lonely times. Yet, even now that the hype is over, I think its reputation as a therapeutic and fulfilling game still stands true.

The premise of ACNH involves living on a fully customizable island with cute animal friends. The animals' villagers have likes, dislikes and different personalities. You get to give them gifts, visit their houses and talk to them. Villagers become extra happy if you give them something of their favorite color, or something that suits their personality. The main activities in the game

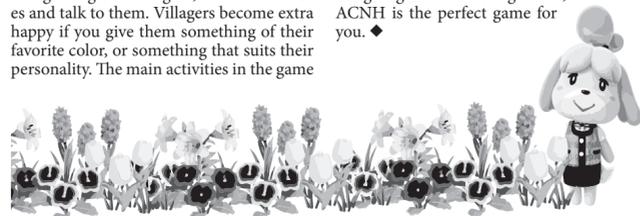
are fishing, mining, farming, tending the island and interacting with these villagers.

The game is slow-paced and more in sync with real-world time than most games. If you like collecting items, you're in for a treat if you play ACNH. Players can collect sets of furniture, rare bugs, fish, artwork and dinosaur fossils, with different items for purchase each day.

If you don't feel like doing any of these things, you can go around the island and enjoy the relaxing ambiance and details of the graphics. A tiny button on a patchwork coat, the little bit of light reflecting off of a little kettle or the sound of walking on tiles can all make me happy.

I especially love to visit villagers' houses (even if I'm not welcomed there); each one has different styles and themes. Some may have a cafe theme, some may have a cozy, floral cottage-core home and some may have a New York apartment sort of vibe for their interior. The wonderful color combinations and themes make each villager stand out and inspire me to decorate my own house in my own ways.

If you're looking for a getaway vacation to a cute island away from the cold and cruel world or if you like interior or outdoor designing and collecting items, ACNH is the perfect game for you. ♦



VIDEO GAME GALORE

Graphic by DIVYA VADLAKONDA



'Library of Ruina': the painful process of learning new games

BY SamBai

"Library of Ruina," the 2021 sequel to the 2018 management simulation game "Lobotomy Corporation" by Project Moon, is a mix between a strategy, card and visual novel game with bits of psychological horror sprinkled throughout.

At its core, it's a deck-building game similar to "Hearthstone," a turn-based player versus player army building game, but it plays more like a strategy board game with a single player commanding a team of units strategically. In the game, the player explores a mysterious Library that has appeared in the middle of an urban city.

The difficulty of the game keeps me coming back. There will be times when the enemy seems indefinitely stronger than my librarians, always rolling a higher offensive dice roll or killing my librarians before they can do any significant damage. No matter what combination I try, it seems as though the enemy inherently has stronger abilities. Although this burned me out a few times, I always come back to try again.

Either through brute forcing a solution or reading guides online, I figure out the weaknesses of my enemies and plan accordingly, slowly making my way toward the end of the game. Although some might say reading the Wiki page for "Library of Ruina" is cheating, I think of it more as self-learning.

The game naturally encourages attempting new strategies for each level. To unlock every single card a certain level offers, the same level must be replayed multiple times. Newly unlocked cards can then provide the solution for the next level.

Graphics for "Library of Ruina" are also drawn beautifully, with cartoon-like characters placed in a dystopian future to create an unsettling atmosphere. The music is eerie and increases in speed with every emotion level of the librarian, making each fight increasingly intense.

Although the game is difficult to learn and frustrating at times, the storytelling and feeling of accomplishment after finishing each level are definitely worth the \$30 price tag. ♦



Courtesy of STEAM

'Candy Crush': nostalgia and comfort all in one app

BY IsabelleWang

Through hectic school days and busy school nights, one consistent routine has stayed constant since 2020: playing "Candy Crush" on my phone as I snuggle in bed before I go to sleep.

As I mindlessly swipe at bright yellow gumdrops and blue lollipops, a deep masculine voice reads "Delicious!" and "Tasty!" while cheerful yet calming jazz music plays in the background.

Despite going through this motion thousands of times, my heart still jumps with excitement as I swipe five purple flower-shaped candies in a row to form a chocolate truffle right next to a striped candy. Swiping the chocolate truffle with the striped candy, the screen explodes with color as the striped candy duplicates and strikes dozens of candies across the board.

I was introduced to "Candy Crush" when I was 8, mindlessly searching the App Store on my mom's phone as we waited for my brother's swimming lesson to end. At the time, I reached level 23 before I got bored and moved onto a different game. When quarantine started in 2020, I found myself aimlessly scrolling through the app store on my phone. When I came across "Candy Crush," I immediately downloaded it for its nostalgic music and simplicity. (The free mobile game was developed by King in 2012, a video game company founded by Riccar-do Zacconi.) With the abundance

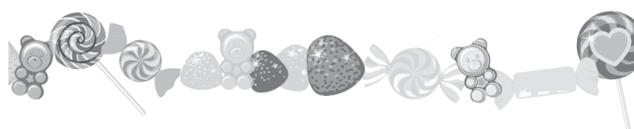
of time I had during quarantine, I soon found myself spending hours a day playing it. Each game has a goal to accomplish in a certain amount of moves, like matching 30 blue candies together or unlocking the license — tasks that required minimal thinking. This made "Candy Crush" the perfect game to play during history class on Zoom, car trips or ending the day on a good note by winning 20 levels.

As my addiction grew, I unlocked more levels. While "Candy Crush" starts at a simple pace that anyone would understand, it slowly builds up the levels by giving you a larger board, incorporating more candy designs and creating obstacles.

For instance, chocolate squares swallow and replace your candy pieces before you can swipe them. In order to get rid of the chocolates, you have to swipe candies that are placed adjacent to them. Other levels have cherries or chestnuts that you have to drop at the bottom of the board by swiping away the candy.

I've even created a tradition for screen recording my milestone levels, such as levels 1,000, 2,000 and 3,000. For each 1,000 milestone, Candy Crush even designs the levels so that there are chocolate truffles that write out "1K," "2K" and "3K" and special music plays.

While I'm only on level 3154 and there are over 16,000 levels on Candy Crush, with new levels released every week, I hope to reach at least 10,000 someday. ♦



'Oppenheimer' leads enthralling night at 96th Oscars

BY ChristinaLabban

On March 10, six minutes past the expected time, the 96th edition of the Oscars began with Jimmy Kimmel taking the stage for his fourth turn as Oscars host.

Highlights of the night included John Cena announcing Holly Waddington's award for best costume design while naked other than a strategically placed piece of paper, and Ryan Gosling delivering a memorable performance of "I'm Just Ken" from "Barbie."

For my money, this year's show was much more interesting than most previous years.

The "Fab Five" format, where the previous five winners of the award would present the nominees, was refreshing yet, at times, monotonous. "Oppenheimer" emerged as the big winner, capturing seven Oscars, including some major categories like Best Director, Best Actor, Best Cinematography and Best Picture.

"Barbie" scored a total of eight nominations, but only got one win for best original song: Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell's "What Was I Made For?" Cillian Murphy won Best Actor for his performance in "Oppenheimer," Emma Stone won Best Actress for her performance in "Poor Things," and Robert Downey Jr., expectedly, won Best Supporting Actor for his performance in "Oppenheimer."

"Barbie" was most notably nominated for Best Picture, Best Production Design and Best Costume Design.

Stand-out nominations for "Poor Things" include Best Cinematography and it won in the category of Best Costume Design. "Killers of the Flower Moon" was nominated for Best Cinematography, Best Director, Best Costume Design, Best Film Editing, Best Music (original score), Best Picture and Best Production Design but didn't take home any Oscar wins.

Notably, Lily Gladstone made history by becoming the first Native American to be nominated for Best Lead Actress for her role in "Killers of the Flower Moon."

With its interesting and suspenseful plot structure, first-rate casting, complex characters and original music by Ludwig Goransson, "Oppenheimer" deserved its seven Oscars and its nominations in 13 categories. It was riveting from the start, and I argue that it was one of Christopher Nolan's best

works.

Somehow, Nolan was able to create a 3-hour biopic and make it enthralling to the end.

Despite the few victories "Barbie" recorded, the movie's impact on the industry and culture generally was oversized.

Even though "Barbie" won nine Golden Globe nominations, Ryan Gosling being nominated for Best Supporting Actor — but not the director Greta Gerwig or Barbie herself Margot Robbie — was proof that the Academy had "missed the point" of the film.

While Nolan deserves the Best Director award for "Oppenheimer," Gerwig deserved a nomination.

As for the "Barbie" soundtrack, Eilish is the youngest person in history to win two Academy Awards, making history at this year's Oscars.

This award was well deserved; Gerwig showed Eilish and O'Connell the song's scene, and O'Connell created a piece that perfectly resonated with Barbie and the movie as a whole.

While the other nominees, "I'm Just Ken" (Mark Ronson and Andrew Wyatt), "It Never Went Away" (Jon Batiste and Dan Wilson), "Wahzazhe" (Scott George) and "The Fire Inside" (Diane Warren) were all outstanding pieces, Eilish and O'Connell's "What Was I Made For?" stood out through its poignant lyrics and Eilish's astonishing vocals.

Wearing a gem-embroidered pink suit and sunglasses, Gosling took the stage performing "I'm Just Ken" from "Barbie."

Though Gosling did not receive the award,

his performance was the most memorable of the evening.

Emma Stone won her second Best Actress Oscar following her first for her performance as Mia in "La La Land." If I had to describe "Poor Things" in two words, it would be a crazy rollercoaster.

The extremely uncomfortable premise and deluded characters created a one-of-a-kind film that surpassed my expectations.

Stone embodies her character Bella Baxter, a young woman in Victorian London who has a brain transplant to resurrect her life, perfectly.

Eilish is the youngest person to win two Academy Awards, making Oscars history.

Over the course of the 2.5 hours of the movie, Stone creates a character that is simultaneously curious, eccentric, hilarious, childish, touching and completely freakish — a beautiful depiction of human development.

When Michelle Yeoh handed Stone her Oscar, she looked completely flabbergasted — as there were many people convinced that Lily Gladstone would take the award for her performance as Mollie Burkhart in "Killers of the Flower Moon."

Yet, I would argue that Gladstone should have won Best Supporting Actress, instead of lead. When you think of "Killers of the Flower Moon," Gladstone isn't the first person to come to mind; but Stone perfectly embodies her character in "Poor Things."

Ultimately this year, a lot went right with the nominees and, for most categories, there were many rightfully deserved awards. ♦



Cillian Murphy wins Best Actor.

Courtesy of COCOPOLITAN



Graphic by FLORENCE WEI

Finding YOUR Groove

HOW TO: ✨ Succeed ✨ as a:

[These stories have been cut substantially to fit in print]
Scan here to read the full stories at saratogafalcon.org



Freshman: Explore what the school offers

With fewer academic pressures, it's the perfect time to join a club or a sports team. You can start understanding what your interests are and build some strong friendships along the way.

Joining a sport is one of the best extracurriculars you could do. While exercising, you learn lifetime skills that'll guide you far beyond high school and even college. Being a team player is useful in many applications, including research teams and future employment.

With the plethora of clubs offered, there's no limit to what you can explore. Want to help your community? Join the Red Cross Club. Want to argue? Join the debate team. Do you like working with technology and your hands? Join robotics. The truth is that you never know what a club is about until you join their meetings.

Get out there and learn some new things. ♦

— Bryan Zhao and Ruiyan Zhu

Sophomore: Don't be peer pressured into classes

My advice to rising sophomores: Choose classes you genuinely like and assess how much work you can manage. No one wants to be left out, leading to widespread peer pressure that blurs the line between the subjects you like and dislike.

While it might sound cliché, you won't do something you don't like well. For example, take art if you like art. You're not going to be a starving artist, and even if you are, at least you'd be a happy starving artist. ♦

— Annie Liu

Junior: Don't be afraid to ask your teachers for help

If you find yourself needing to stay up excessively late to finish your homework, or simply in need of a break, don't be afraid to talk to your teachers. They do not bite, and they are only there to help you. Don't — ever — make excuses to skip work, but you may be able to get an extension on an assignment or two if you don't abuse the requests. ♦

— Saachi Jain

Senior: Don't be too easily swayed by prestige

When it comes to consulting others about college applications, everyone seems to have a different opinion. Between my mom, various counselors and other parents, I was bombarded with a stream of ever changing information. When it came to compiling my list of colleges to apply to, opinions were polarized and varied: Some suggested applying only to schools outside the top 50, while others suggested I lean toward predominantly Ivy League options.

While I chose a sort of middle-ground, it's important to listen to others and understand their perspective, but ultimately stick to your own decisions.

While outside perspective and editing is useful, ultimately, the person who writes the application (you) should be the one making the final calls. ♦

— Aiden Ye

Pair seeks to spotlight passions through non-profit organization

BY IsabelleWang

"What sparked your passion in political science?" junior Melanie Lee asked junior Anushka Tadikonda during an interview about her interest in political science.

Tadikonda responded by explaining the key role a history teacher played in calling her attention to the Black Lives Matters movement in eighth grade.

This video was one of eight on Lee's nonprofit organization Career Compass, which she started in August to help students discover their interests by listening to fellow high school students' experiences.

The organization is run by Lee and sophomore marketing head Jena Lew, who aim to post on Instagram and YouTube at least once a week.

"I was thinking about how to start projects about things I'm interested in, and I realized I had a lot of different areas of interests like marketing, journalism and art," Lee said. "I wanted to talk to different people about how they discovered what they wanted to do and how they narrowed it down."

During interviews, Lee asks questions about the interviewee's interest and any advice they have for others pursuing a similar career, including passions, motivations and current projects. Some discuss internship opportunities. Others discuss how AI can be implemented into their career interests.

After Lee schedules and records the interview, she communicates with Lew to split the work between them. Typically, Lew edits the footage together on her computer, spending one to two hours editing the video, while Lee spends two hours designing graphics.

"It's really cool to show what students are passionate about and what they're doing to reach their goals," Lee said.

With each YouTube video around four minutes long, Lee and Lew initially struggled to gain more exposure, averaging around 40 views per video. By switching to Instagram reels that included shortened clips from the interviews, the videos were able to reach a larger audience, averaging

1,300 views per reel.

Lee also found that reaching a wider audience not only helped people learn about different fields, but also allowed students to share their passion and experience.

"I started interviewing my friends and their passions, and the reels and videos allowed more people to be interested in getting interviewed," Lee said. "Jena and I plan to reach out to a more diverse group of people to

interview people of different ages and opinions."

While she started with students, Lee began interviewing random people at Westfield Valleyfair and gained a wide perspective on adults working in industry. Through interviewing people who grew up outside of Saratoga, Lee said she realized the abundant amount of resources and opportunities here. Lee also noticed how growing up in a tech industry influenced many Saratoga students to pursue technology fields.

"It was super inspiring and eye-opening to realize not everyone has the luxuries to do what they want to do in the future," Lee said.

Lee said she found it hard to have a consistent schedule coordinating interviews with various people. While she considered having people record themselves, she decided against this.

"I feel like having a conversation with someone is more valuable, as I can ask questions I didn't write down and have them elaborate on stuff I want to learn more about," Lee said.

Tadikonda noted the conversation-like interview allowed her to better elaborate on certain aspects of her interest in political science.

"The best way to understand what you're passionate about is to talk about it, as it helps you pinpoint where your passion lies," Tadikonda said. "When you talk to someone and see their reaction about your passion, it really helps you understand what you specifically love."

In the upcoming months, Lee and Lew plan to reach out to a wider range of ages, such as kids, community college students and parents.

Lee and Lew have also been

working with College and Career Center counselor Brad Ward to create a workshop for parents to talk about their jobs and how they got there during school tutorials.

Lee hopes their organization becomes an online platform for anyone to gain some guidance.

"We want to help people who don't have the opportunities to figure out what they want to do, either by pointing to specific on-line classes or giving advice," she said. "It's cool to have a network of students and professionals to connect with each other on a platform to ask questions and have discussions."

After interviewing 11 juniors, Lee learned there isn't a specific, universal eye-opening experience where students discover their passion and stick through it. While she initially thought the students were set on one passion, she learned that multiple hobbies could add to passions.

For instance, junior Anisha Rahut, who is interested in computer science, has found ways to combine her passion with her other interests. Rahut initially focused on computer science, but began taking an interest in medicine and found ways to implement coding in biomedical engineering.

After learning from the students she interviewed, Lee became interested in interdisciplinary studies, a major that allows students to combine different studies.

"I've realized that while a lot of people know what they want to do, they are also interested in other things," Lee said. "You don't have to know exactly what you want to do, and it's OK not to." ♦



togatalks

What kind of career are you interested in?

"I want to be an electrical engineer because my dad is an engineer."

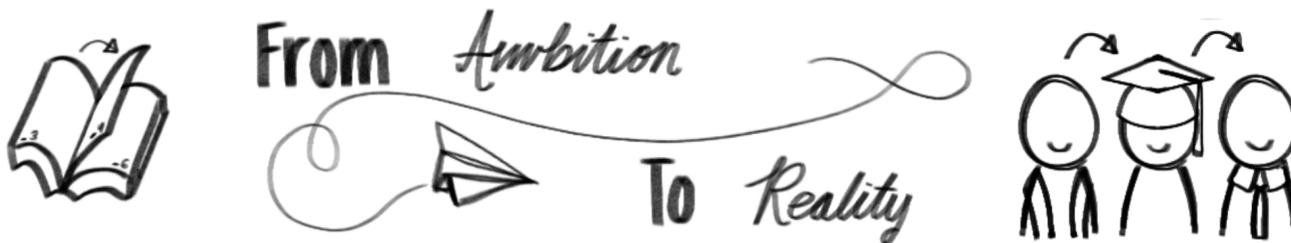


junior Vera Fung

"I want to be a researcher in a subject I enjoy learning about."



junior Lydia Li



Senior gains experience in Career Tech Program

BY AnnieLiu & IsabelleWang

When senior Angela Luo signed up to participate in a Silicon Valley Career Tech Education Veterinary Science class, she knew she would be doing hands-on work, but she recalls one instance in particular that involved more than she expected.

She and two other students had to collect a dog's urine, but they ended up having to chase the dog around to get the sample they would later analyze.

"It was a very unique and just silly experience for two of us [students] to be following the dog trying to collect the urine, and three others on the side cheering us on," Luo said.

With dreams of becoming a vet after getting her dog during the pandemic, Luo enrolled in a Veterinary Science course this year through SVCTE, a county program offered to district juniors and seniors to do hands-on study in a field of interest. So far, the course has earned her 500 hours of lab time and the title of veterinary assistant. The class also functions as a nonprofit clinic, giving students hands-on experience with patients along with typical lectures.

Starting in August and ending in June, the program runs every weekday from 7:30-10:30 a.m.

On a typical day, Luo begins by placing animals into their kennels and attending lectures. She and the other 30 students then tend to the animals before ending the day with more lectures. Since the program is partially a nonprofit veterinary organization, Luo said the clinic receives a variable number of animals every day, each for different treatments.

Since the program runs early in the morning, Luo is taking only four SHS classes this school year and comes to school at 10:30 each day. With less school work compared to previous years but the addition of the veterinary classes, Luo finds her workload similar to how it was before, with no significant changes.

"The workload really depends [every day], but typically it is similar to school,"

she said. "The beginning of the year was more relaxed, and the work has slowly been piling up."

Luo said her interest in animal science was sparked in the summer of her sophomore year at a summer program held by the Boston Leadership Institute Veterinary Science. There, she learned about different specialties within the animal science field, performed a few dissections and shadowed at the Boston Blue Pearl Vet Hospital.

As co-founder of the Animal Science Club, Luo dove further into her interest: creating presentations on common illnesses in animals. Learning topics in the club helps her better identify some of the conditions at the clinic.

"At this [SVCTE] class I've seen a lot more different conditions, which I talk to the members about, and I've also learned much more in depth like the anatomy of animals," Luo said.

Luo initially discovered the SVCTE program when she created a presentation about opportunities for high school students in animal-related fields. So far, Luo has learned how to treat a variety of animals, from cats and dogs to chickens. She has also experienced how to diagnose diseases, such as a condition called bumblefoot, which causes chickens' feet to swell.

"It's really cool to be surrounded by people with the same passions and come from so many different backgrounds and experiences," Luo said. "It's very inspiring to see them pushing towards their goals and motivates me to do so as well." ♦



Senior Angela Luo works on urinalysis at Silicon Valley Career Tech Education.

Junior uplifts voices through several media

BY NicoleLee

In middle school, junior Annette Li enjoyed learning new skills for potential use in the future — ones like photography, video editing and art. This range of skills has come in handy when it comes to her latest interest: raising peers' voices about the serious issue of mental health in a website.

Li decided to research mental health last summer and found a new deeper desire to take action to remove mental health stigma. She wanted to use the growing audience of social media to make work that allowed her to be creative while also being impactful to her community.

"I really want to create meaningful projects," she said. "I like to say my academics enhances my creative projects while my creative projects give me an outlet for my academics. My academics allows me to create meaningful work."

Li's website, still a work-in-progress, will allow people to submit their stories through memoir-formatted articles, giving them a space to anonymously talk about their journeys with their mental health without the pressures of sharing in a public space. Her knowledge of programming has come in handy, and she is currently adding more ideas for the technical aspects of the website through an eye for aesthetics she developed through her past experiences with drawing, painting and photography.

"I think it's important to look at all the aspects of the website [such as the design and accessibility], and make sure that people can comfortably share their experiences," Li said. "I hope I'll also be able to post resources for people still facing mental health struggles."

Similarly, Li also hopes to allow others to creatively express themselves through their own photography and videography, especially women in STEM. Since Sept. 8, she has been hosting regular meetings with students from multiple schools around the Bay Area to arrange the annual Girls' 3 Minute Science competition, where participants from all around the world submit their videos related to STEM. As co-pres-



Courtesy of ANNETTE LI

A photo junior Annette Li took during a sunrise walk at Hunter's Point hiking trail.

ident, Li coordinates the competition and her team's work.

Together, they organize these videos and send them to be judged internationally by university professors, after which the team will compile the results to determine the winners.

By hosting an event where women can bring more attention to their STEM projects through digital submissions, she wants people to be able to more freely express their passions. Like how she harbors a great love for photography and video editing, Li hopes her peers will also be able to integrate their interests in STEM through a creative outlet.

"As somebody who intends to major in STEM, I hope that this will be able to raise women's voices in a field that is typically male-dominated," Li said.

When Li first started experimenting with videography, she was mostly editing videos for fun to encapsulate moments of her life in short film-like stories.

As she got more practice with editing posts, she transitioned into more mainstream media, and she has been part of SHSTV since her freshman year, where she helps host, edit and shoot videos.

Now, she plans to use her multimedia skills as a versatile addition to her future projects, both in and out of school.

"I think it's really important to uplift people's voices, and I hope that by working on these projects, I'll be able to help people share their thoughts without having to fear being judged or unheard," Li said. ♦

Music teachers' friendship evolves as roles change

BY NicoleLee

On most Blue Days, music teachers Michael Boitz and Jason Shiuan make time to collaborate and discuss future projects together. More than a decade ago, they shared similar conversations on the same campus, but as teacher and student leader instead of professional colleagues.

Shiuan, a Class of '11 alumnus, has had the opportunity to learn from Boitz as a mentor and colleague, which he said has allowed the pair to foster a strong friendship

"I started teaching here and then you know, obviously naturally just the amount of time we spend [has brought us closer together]," Shiuan said.

Boitz recalls how when he recently had surgery at the back of his throat in late 2023, inhibiting his ability to fully express his thoughts and instructions. Though there was no way Shiuan could have understood his words, the duo was still able to understand each other. After listening to just a few of Boitz's well-intentioned grunts, Shiuan was able to decode Boitz's meaning successfully and give detailed instructions to his students.

"I can read his brain sometimes from his teacher [perspective]," Shiuan said. "And he can as mine because we have spent so much time together."

One of Boitz's favorite moments from their friendship took place at the orchestra's

trip to Vienna, Austria, in 2022. Surrounded by waves of potential dangers ranging from COVID-19 to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the two teachers were filled with anxiety for the 400 students in their care. When they finally arrived safely and had the technicalities of the trip solidified, the two teachers were overcome with relief.

Even on trips that aren't bedazzled with such hardships, Shiuan and Boitz still enjoy each other's company through their shared love of food.

"Whenever we travel somewhere, it is kind of a priority," Boitz said. "We'd be much wealthier if we didn't spend so much money on food."

Shiuan remembers a time in Strauss, Austria, when the teachers and their students were at a market full of food. For a full half-hour, the two teachers sat under a stand offering any students passing by to eat a sau-

sage, which he deemed delicious. Outside of school premises, Shiuan often visits Boitz's house. According to Boitz, Shiuan acts like an uncle to Boitz's daughter and two twins. Still, it's their shared love for music that has brought them together.

"We bond over the pursuit of musical excellence and we hold each other to a high standard," Shiuan said. "And because of that, it pushes us closer and, closer because we aim for the same things."

As Boitz says the musical world is relatively small, they often hear about each other and each other's reputations at large musical gatherings. "We talk about it with our students and we talk about it with all of our colleagues and our friends," Shiuan said. "We really believe music has brought a lot of us together that we probably wouldn't have met without it." ♦

I CONFESS...

WHILE CONFESSION PAGES DO PROMOTE FREE SPEECH, THEY TAKE ON DARKER NOTES AND CROSS INTO CYBERBULLYING.

BY GraceLin & RuiyanZhu

Confession #120: It always feels like none of my 'friends' ever want to talk to me outside of school and it's ruining me mentally. I don't have a place anywhere.

This is one of the confessions on "toga-confessions," a popular student-run Instagram account that has gained over 600 followers since May for its anonymous content about students at the school.

Though the account claims to be "not affiliated with SHS [Saratoga High School]," nearly all of the account's followers are SHS students. Users fill out an anonymous Google form — linked in the account's bio — to rant about anything.

Anonymous users who run the account "moderate" the submissions; however, since all submissions are completely up to the interpretation of the account administrators, few modifications, like blacking out full names and explicit words, are usually made. Even then, through context, the referenced person can be identified.

Rants vary from parking lot complaints to inappropriate and libelous claims about other students. This is where the opportunity for online harassment — cyberbullying — arises. Despite repeated attempts from school administrators to shut down confession-type pages, these accounts have managed to reappear under multiple different names over the five years they have been in use.

History of SHS confession accounts: from platforms like Facebook to Instagram

Confession pages at the school originated in 2019 with the Facebook account "toga confessions" — formerly known as "shs confessions" — which served as a platform for many students to discuss topics like sexual assault, self-harm and academic or relationship advice.

Supporters tout confession pages as a space for students to exercise free speech and expression. Users who often feel isolated turn to these anonymous pages to express their emotions. With 54% more teens using Instagram instead of Facebook in 2021, more confession pages are now transitioning to Instagram. In the meantime, these pages have become more akin to a platform that spreads rumors and explicit content.

In some posts, students felt frustrated by the toxicity of the account.

Confession #576: Why the hell do you talk

*s**t on my name. You don't even know me and I've actually done nothing to you.*

To prevent cyberbullying, moderators of the Facebook account "toga confessions" did not post anything explicitly targeting a person and instead aimed to publish only appreciation posts. Still, some posts on "togaconfessions" feature call-outs using students' initials. Instead of self-confessions, many posts contain explicit language, dissing and mockery about appearances.

Freshman Emily, a pseudonym used to protect her identity, said she has already been posted about five times across various confession-type accounts. These accounts, like "togaconfessions," all claim to be unaffiliated with SHS and have strayed far from the original Facebook account's positive tone. Much of the content is personal.

Instead of self-confessions, many posts contain explicit language, dissing and even mockery about appearances.

"I was kind of surprised and a little bit scared that a lot of people were going to see [rumors about my private life and mental health]," she said.

When Emily tried to contact the accounts' administrators, she said they simply told her that it "wasn't their fault" people were saying things about her.

"They're only saying these things because they can't say it to my face," Emily said. "It just brings people down and it's basically online bullying."

Lack of accountability provides grounds for cyberbullying and harassment

Confession pages are hardly new. These private pages on social media, where students can post their secrets and thoughts anonymously, have been circulating for more than a decade. After a confession page called "OMG Confessions" went viral in 2012 on Facebook, more have spread out nationally and internationally. Students in universities such as Stanford also have their own confession accounts, which discuss topics ranging from post-graduation plans to relationship advice.

The lack of accountability may be one of the reasons confession pages have become so toxic. Because submissions are anonymous

through a third-party platform, respondents are almost impossible to identify. Researchers from Cornell have found that people are more likely to self-disclose and act aggressively under the cloak of anonymity without fear of any repercussions. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines cyberbullying as the use of technology to inflict harm. By the APA's definition, many confession posts are considered cyberbullying. Profanities are directed at people that can be discerned in context of the post, even if they are referenced with only their initials.

Its follower count also dropped from about 668 to 600, as did the number of likes on some previous posts.

However, the email has not eliminated the presence of confession pages. In January, a new confessions page — @toga.confessionss — was created as the old one became inactive. Its follower count has already exceeded 100, as of March 15. Numerous students have begun submitting to the new Google Form, and the account has thus far featured four posts, as of March 15. In some cases, creators of confession pages may intend to make a healthy outlet. However, once inappropriate content gets posted, the page quickly turns toxic.

"I think there is potential for the intention of a healthy outlet," Louie said. "There's potential for good, but when there are confessions that are inappropriate and border on bullying, that's when it's turned dark. Inevitably, there really isn't a healthy place for [these confessions]." Louie added that the school is doing what they can to maintain a safe and healthy school environment. He suggests if students want to get something off their chest, the Wellness Center should be their go-to place.

"Ultimately the question is, what was their intention when they started this account? If they're moderating those pages, why are they putting forward the ones that are negative and that could be constructed as hurtful to other people?" Louie said. "Inevitably, I'd have to believe that most of the people are doing it for the fun of it. It is hurtful, dangerous and unnecessary." ♦

Following Louie's email, "togaconfessions" has stopped posting. Its last post was published on Oct. 7 with the caption "dm [direct message] if you want to take over account," with about half the number of likes — 47 — their posts usually receive. Its follower count also dropped from about 668 to 600, as did the number of likes on some previous posts.

is doing what they can to maintain a safe and healthy school environment. He suggests if students want to get something off their chest, the Wellness Center should be their go-to place.

♦

Under Pressure

MENTAL HEALTH AT SHS: STUDENT TIPS

Tip 1: SELF-LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE!

I know it's really easy to just come out here and say "you have to love yourself; you have to accept yourself no matter your achievements!" But it really IS something that will help you in the long run, mental-health wise.



Jex Popov

Both the culture at school and home can directly link academic achievement to your self-worth.

The message is too often something along the lines of "you're only as good as the grades you get and the things you can achieve; if you can't do everything at once (especially academically) and do it with excellence, you're a failure and deserve shame."

But none of us are machines, and we can't perform well at every moment. We're human, we fail, we come short, we excel in some things and we struggle with others. The thing is that you WILL fail at some point in your life, and you have to know how

to be okay with yourself and move forward from those failures.

You're worthy even if you fail, even if the artificial letter on your report card isn't the one you wanted, even if you can't make friends, can't run the mile in 10 minutes or can't ace AP Physics.

You're worthy of love and acceptance from yourself and others, because you're human. You're just

learning how to live, and you have to be gentle with yourself about that. This mindset doesn't change the fact that your parents might expect straight A's from you or expect you to do 12 extracurriculars, but it'll lead you to have a stronger foundation of self-worth.



Tip 2: Have a trustful support network.

As humans, we're all social creatures. Some of us might dream of running off to be an isolated shepherd in the mountains of Scotland (especially during finals week), but realistically, what we need in such a high-stress environment is human connection and support.

When you have too many academic responsibilities, it's sometimes hard to text your friends or acquaintances because you're too tired and can't handle more social interactions, or you can't make plans

to meet up over the weekend because of cramming for a looming test. We've all been there, it's OK.

These circumstances can really lead to isolation, and if you're someone who struggles with depressive symptoms especially then it can all quickly compound into a lot of mental anguish for yourself. The fact is, if you can't do something 100%, you should still try and do it at least 10-25%.

Chatting with your deskmate in chemistry class is better than not talking to

anyone the whole day, and making jokes with your groupmates in a MAP project is better than working in stoic, isolated silence. You can have little chats with your teachers or the people next to you in line at the cafeteria. You get the point.

Do little things to make you feel less alone. Sharing moments with others reminds you there are people out there with the same struggles as you and everyone is doing the best they can. These repeated interactions can even turn into friendships. Everyone needs someone like that.

What's helped for me is starting with self-neutrality — try starting to shift the "ugh, I can't do well in this hard math class," and "I'm so awful I'll never amount to anything" to "hey, this is a hard class, and I'm struggling"

I've learned to be a little softer with yourself, you know? You deserve to have empathy for yourself.

Maybe try broadening your scope, from "I'm terrible at managing these five extracurriculars I'm taking; this is an individual problem and I just need to Toughen Up" and get over it," to something like "I'm taking five extracurriculars, and I don't have enough time to do things I enjoy."

No WONDER I'm finding this hard, I'm being deprived of something human beings need!

There's no need to beat myself up over it." Maybe not SO clinically, shifting the way you think can be good in the long term.

Tip 3: Get proper rest! (Please really sleep)

There's a saying that goes, "If you don't decide a rest day for your body, your body will decide the rest day for you."

It's very true! It's like your body passing out when you exercise too much — put yourself under enough stress, and eventually your brain will give out on you. It can happen at

REALLY inconvenient times, too.

When you REALLY need to get something done, but all your brain is capable of doing is staring at a word doc and not writing your articles for the newspaper, (not that I would know anything about that, of course).

Of course, getting proper sleep is absolutely a given. Duh. The recommended amount of sleep for the high school age range is 8 to 10 hours per night, and if you can afford to, I would ALWAYS prioritize

getting at least seven hours of sleep per night over whatever assignment you have to get done.

My rules for rest are personally to have ONE HOUR of rest/leisure time per day, and ONE DAY of rest/leisure time per week.

It's up to you what day that is, but either way, your leisure time allows you to wring out the sponge of your brain from all the stress. Sometimes during finals week I use that hour per day to have a little cry, which is especially effective for releasing energy.

Tip 4: Enriching your big brain.

Adding on to the previous tip, enriching the monkey brain is QUITE effective against stress and being overloaded. This usually involves consuming new media or engaging in a hobby (probably outside of school and not as an extracurricular, reducing your obligation to take it seriously). Go outside. Touch grass.

For times where you REALLY have no time for personal hobbies, what I usually

go with is walking home while listening to new music and simply enjoying the weather. The main point is to try and engage the creative side of your brain that forms new ideas and experiences — school encourages a framework of mechanical repetition, where you do essentially the same thing. It's easy to get stuck in a loop like that and become slightly dead inside. Sometimes engaging in brain-stimulating activities like these are even better than rest, I find.



Tip 5: Eat your veggies. (seriously)

Do it. Do it. Stop gulping down Celsius by the gallon and get some god**** protein and vitamins into your system, you contrarian; your body can't function without them. And it'll make you more energized in the long-run! Who would have thought.

For our chronically sleep-deprived companions especially it is VERY important to drink PLENTY of water (LOTS of it!), and to try to eat meat or tofu to get a protein

kick. (Heavy sweets and carbs will just cause an energy crash later instead.)

I know sometimes you just forget to eat when you're swarmed with work, or when your body doesn't naturally give off a lot of hunger cues (like me aha), but in situations like that I WOULD say that routines are your friend.

How I personally arrange it is that I always have my breakfast at around 7:40-7:50 before school, and then I eat lunch at lunch

break, and then I have dinner somewhere between 7-8. I find that the school structure really allows for a more rigid, routine approach to eating which personally helps ME with remembering to eat.

If you bring your own lunch to school and prepare it the night before, it might help to try and pack something a little bit more healthy and organic, and then for dinner you can may eat a treat. As a little treat, you know? For getting through the school day.

Mini Tips: Rapid Fire tips and tricks

To top it all off, here is my lightning round of mini-mental-health tips that I found are useful to know, but don't require a revamp of your whole lifestyle and all.

I haven't mentioned the Wellness Center so far, because I assume everyone's already on board with that. The counselors there are really nice, and it's better to talk to them than to have a panic attack in class!

If you can't get out of your chair and go to the Wellness Center for whatever reason, stimming — doing repetitive movements with your body as a way to relieve stress — is a good alternative to relieve a bit of tension.

Another focusing tip — if you need something a bit more effective, teach yourself ujjayi breathing. It's basically the way you breathe when you fog up a mirror by squeezing that little section in the front

of your throat. It stimulates your vagus nerve, which controls the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous system is basically the "resting" state of your body, as opposed to the sympathetic nervous system, which controls your fight-or-flight. Stimulating the nerve that controls it acts as a bit of a shortcut to get your body to switch over to its "resting" state again.

Square breathing works too! You

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A F***

MARK MANSON

The problem with entitlement is that it makes people need to feel good about themselves all the time, even at the expense of those around them. Entitlement is another high; it's not happiness. Once people have developed the thought pattern to constantly construe what happens around them as self-aggrandizing, it's hard to break out of it. Who you are is defined by what you're willing to struggle for.

THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

Stephen R. Covey

First seek to understand, then to be understood. This habit means that you should diagnose before you prescribe. First, seek to fully understand. There are three elements necessary for deep understanding: personal credibility, emotional resonance and reason. A good teacher will assess the class before teaching. A good student will understand before they apply.

Atomic Habits

James Clear

Environment is the invisible hand that shapes human behavior — every habit is initiated by cues. Make the cues of good habits obvious in your environment. These small changes in context can lead to large changes over time. The most common form of change is not internal, but external: We are changed by the world around us. Every habit that you have is completely context-dependent.

How to win friends and influence people

Dale Carnegie

Everybody in the world is seeking happiness — and there is one sure way to find it. Happiness doesn't depend on outward conditions. It depends on inner conditions. When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity.

— Divya Vadlakonda



Sports gambling fuels underage addictions

By SamBai
& VictoriaLin

Cell phones and ultra convenient apps, combined with major companies and their slick advertising campaigns, have resulted in sports gambling becoming a popular outlet for as many as 19% of Americans. Some use it as a hoped-for source of income while others enjoy simply backing their favorite sports team when they play.

It's little wonder that addiction to sports gambling is a major issue, and an equally concerning issue is the growing number of teens now betting illegally on sports because the safeguards in apps are so easy to evade.

Sports betting playbooks transition online

Most bets are carried through third parties known as sportsbooks, which track wagers. In the 1900s, bettors would physically reach out to a sportsbook to place a wager, allowing corrupt practices of players and coaches betting on their own teams. In 1919, members of White Sox, grossly underpaid at the time, were accused of betting against themselves to purposefully lose the World Series and earn between \$70,000 and \$100,000 through stakes.

With the rise of the internet, bookmakers are moving online. Popular websites such as DraftKings, which was established in 2012 and went public in April 2020, reported a revenue of \$1.2 billion in its latest quarter.

Technology has allowed gambling to be feasible on mobile devices, making it even easier for people to gamble away entire life savings with the click of a few buttons.

Teens are the demographic most at risk

This ease of gambling has led to a serious problem where teens and illegal gamblers ages 18-21 use online gambling apps to fuel their addiction. A National Collegiate Athletic Association study found 58% of 18- to

22-year-olds have participated in sports gambling. Teens who bet between \$1 to \$50 typically lose \$10 to \$300 per day.

One student, who asked to stay anonymous, told The Falcon that they have spent at least \$5,000 on gambling in the past two years, though only \$400 was spent on sports gambling. The rest was spent on cryptocurrency and video game skin gambling.

"I started sports gambling on the Super Bowl [LVIII] after seeing a TikTok on three leg parlays," the student said.

In a three-leg parlay, three bets are held at the same time. If all three succeed, the multiplier for the initial bet is increased substantially.

The student lost \$125 betting on a three parlay on the Super Bowl this year. The parlay included San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Brock Purdy rushing attempts, Kansas City Chief quarterback Patrick Mahomes rushing attempts and San Francisco 49ers wide receiver Deebo Samuel rushing yards. Due to Samuel's injury in the game, the three leg parlay didn't pay off. If all three events happened during the game, the student would've received \$1,000 from his initial bet.

ID policies unable to prevent teen gambling

To prevent youth from accessing these online websites, many sports gambling applications such as FanDuel employ a "strict identity authentication process to sign-up." However, many of these guidelines do little to prevent underage gambling, as it is easy for teens to take their parents' or older siblings' IDs to bypass security.

The student who lost \$125 used his older brother's ID to bypass the 18 year old age requirement. Since then, he has gambled on 10 separate games. Recently, he made a bet for the Lakers vs. the Warriors but lost when star player LeBron James got injured before the game.

"I believe sports gambling puts even more enjoyment into watching the sport," the student said. "Because of how often rosters change, rooting for a certain team isn't extremely exciting. When gambling becomes involved, you become more excited to watch the game."

The student believes underage gambling is OK as long as teens only gamble money they have earned themselves. His parents are aware of his gambling habits and are concerned about his addiction worsening.

Said the student: "I believe gambling has actually improved my academics as it has encouraged me to pay more attention to my math class. Through my math class, I am able to learn more about my odds of winning. Gambling has, however, made me lose a sense of money. On these websites, I see people who win big and the large numbers make me think less of large sums of money. I will, however, bet less on parlays."

Efforts towards preventing teen addictions

Preventing addictions at a young age is vital. Youth facing high pressure situations are more likely to develop addictions to distract themselves from these stresses. Addictions can easily lead to an increase in worsened academic performance and strained relationships with family and friends, Wellness Center lead therapist Shobha Vaidyanathan said.

"If it is a teen gambling, then they have

schools that they miss out on. They give up their activities," Vaidyanathan said. "It results in a high where sometimes you win, and sometimes you don't."

From a therapy point of view, gambling can be considered a disease, resulting in a need to get high which can be fulfilled through gambling. However, the root problem itself can be extremely difficult to resolve. If left unattended, the effects can leave a lasting impact due to youth's lack of neurocognitive development.

What makes sports gambling problematic is the easy access to online sportsbooks. Because online sportsbooks do not have an easy way to prevent youth gambling, experts say parents need to take an active role in monitoring their teens' behavior. The open question is whether gambling companies will ever do enough, or care enough, to make sure teens are not among their customers. ♦

>> falconfigures

1.2 billion in earnings by online betting website DraftKings

58 percent of 18-22 year olds bet on sports in the past year

300 dollars in losses per day for teens who gamble on sports

150 billion is estimated to be bet through online gambling

Alves teaches Intermediate P.E. curriculum

By DivyaVadlakonda

The California Physical Education Code has eight mandatory areas of content that Intermediate P.E. must cover throughout the year: aquatics, individual and dual sports, team sports, gymnastics and tumbling, combatives, dance and two knowledge-based areas (the effect of physical activity upon dynamic health and mechanics of body movement). Before 2022, the school's Intermediate P.E. curriculum, intended for sophomores and upperclassmen, didn't cover all eight areas, instead placing an emphasis on weightlifting and CrossFit workouts.

Since taking over the class in 2022-2023, teacher Liz Alves is reshaping the curriculum to cover these areas of content while simultaneously allowing for some degree of fluidity.

"The curriculum is student-driven while also checking the necessary boxes, whereas before it was loosely based on what the teacher wanted to do at the time," Alves said.

P.E. CREDIT

continued from pg. 1

While some skills in these sports are taught through sports participation, the Education Code specifies students should be competent in all eight domains, which would be difficult to achieve as part of just one sports team, Louie said.

This new requirement is also going to impact those in the Independent Study of Physical Education (ISPE) program, where a student participates in an outside of school sport to meet the minimum hours to exempt them from PE. However, ISPE will no longer qualify as a replacement for PE, and even athletes competing at the national level in a sport such as figure skating or fencing will be required to take the class.

Alves conducted a survey at the beginning of the year to assess which activities students wanted to do and how much time should be spent per activity. For example, during an aquatics unit last semester, Alves gave students a choice between focusing on water polo, water aerobics or swimming. Water aerobics got substantial votes but wasn't in the majority, so Alves planned for a single aerobics day amid a four-week swimming unit.

This voting-based model means the curriculum can deviate from year to year based on student interest, she said.

The class finished a combined self-defense and dance unit in February. While the units were previously separate, the change was made due to declining interest in dance this year.

The units' similarities are the main reason Alves paired them together: Both incorporate a sequence of moves and involve working with a partner — either through dancing in time with them or coordinating punches and blocks.

All sports will be impacted by this change in interpretation; however, programs like marching band remain unaffected due to their existing policies — students who participate in marching band and winter percussion are already mandated to take a marching band P.E. class that the district says meets the Educational Code Standards. Many students believe that this change in policy will negatively impact the already weak athletics programs at the school.

For freshman quarterback Anson Hulme, the idea of making P.E. mandatory for freshman athletes will have a negative impact.

"It's nice to have an extra period to get homework done, or eat before practice," Hulme said. "Especially on Red Days, it's nice to get out before 3:45 and be able to

Real-life application was also emphasized during the self-defense unit, with Alves teaching students what to do in situations when a drink is spiked or if they get cornered in an alley.

"The curriculum is student-driven while checking the necessary boxes."



TEACHER Liz Alves

"I want this curriculum to be useful. I don't want it to be just another class that they have to take and then forget about. A lot of them will go away to college — they will be exposed to parties, potentially contaminated drinks, and potentially unwelcome attention. I want students to feel pre-

take a break."

Hulme played three sports this year — football, basketball and volleyball — but said mandatory P.E. wouldn't have changed the amount of sports he participated in, even if he would've been much more tired during the day.

"I think that this mandatory P.E. would mess up a lot of sports, especially football," he said. "A lot of freshmen try out football in order to skip P.E. and end up continuing doing it if they enjoy it. We probably won't get as many people trying it out next year."

These anticipated impacts are serious to the administration and all faculty involved in school sports, as declining enrollment and already shrinking participation in school sports have threatened

many teams.

"One idea that we've come up with for our freshman athletes is organizing some type of study hall," principal Greg Louie said. The study hall would help make up for the free period to study in-season athletes will no longer have.

Although this proposal hasn't been finalized, and the resources to support this program aren't finalized, it's one of many options the administration has considered to support incoming freshman athletes.

"Right after or before practice, giving athletes a place to study and providing food to add value to being a student athlete, adding structure to help them go through their six or seven period weeks," Louie said. "We also want all student athletes to have assistance to focus on their schoolwork, get their homework done and be fed." ♦

What is behind the low Asian-American racial demographics in American sports?

By FlorenceHu
& BryanZhao

While Asian Americans make up 6.3% of the U.S. population, only 2.2% of active student-athletes in the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) are Asian. This underrepresentation, combined with few major Asian American collegiate superstars, has resulted in the depiction that Asian athletes are "weak, fragile, and biologically 'unsuited' to modern sports."

The perpetuation of the model minority myth has also exacerbated stereotypes that Asian Americans only excel in examination rooms. In the college application process, Asian Americans have historically had higher GPAs, standardized test scores and extracurricular involvement, showcasing the emphasis Asian households place on academics.

This mindset is also seen in the Saratoga community, according to sophomore Oliver Su, who said many Asian student-athletes face high pressure to focus more on their academics than sports.

"There are Asian students who care about grades, who have parents that are strict on them about grades while playing sports," Su said. "Their parents can be really against them playing sports."

Su said he felt pressured by his parents, who discouraged him from playing football. One major factor was his parents' experiences: While Su has many teammates whose parents grew up playing sports, his parents never had that same experience, having spent most of their childhood in China or Taiwan.

Because of this, his parents didn't consider sports as an extracurricular to be taken seriously — at least, nowhere near the commitment they wanted him to dedicate toward academic performance.

By maintaining a high academic performance throughout high school, he was able



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

Although there are comparatively few, the number of Asian-American athletes is on the rise.

to convince his parents to allow him to continue playing football.

Pro sports lack role models

The lack of Asian representation in sports can be discouraging. Su said there are very few professional Asian athletes in football he can look up to.

Defying all odds, there have been a few Asian American athletes who have succeeded in their respective sports, including Jeremy Lin (who is Taiwanese) in basketball, Tiger Woods (who is Afro-Asian) in golf and Kristi Yamaguchi (who is Japanese-American) in figure skating. Additionally, the Olympics feature many Asian gold-medal athletes in certain sports, such as Lü Xiaojun in weightlifting and Quan Hongchan in diving. This demonstrates it is not the ge-

netic or racial makeup that determines the Asian makeup in sports, but rather the stigma that surrounds sports.

One of the largest Asian American stars, former NBA player Jeremy Lin has spoken about the blatant racism he has received throughout his career in interviews and on-court. When entering competitive basketball, he described insults directed at his eyes and other aspects of his culture, like Chinese takeout. One infamous dig at Lin was when an ESPN article referred to him as the "Chink in the Armor," using one of the slurs toward Asian Americans.

Though he has few role models to look up to, Su said he continued playing because it equipped him with the mental fitness to endure a stressful environment. He also hopes more students will learn to embrace

the environment that football teaches such as teamwork and perseverance.

Rising representation

Even with all this negative stigma toward sports, there are large differences in the racial makeup of different sports. According to the NCAA, gymnastics, volleyball, swimming and tennis have historically higher numbers of Asian American representation, with others, such as basketball and football, having significantly lower percentages at 0.3% and 0.4% respectively.

Asian NCAA participation is also rising: Athlete numbers have almost doubled from 6,859 in 2012 to 11,326 in 2023, highlighting the increased participation in sports alongside the ebbing of stereotypes in sports. With this increase came more professional athletes — for example Purdue Boilermakers center Zach Edey, whose mother was Chinese, was named Big Ten Player of the Year and National Player of the Year in 2023. As of March 14, Edey is ranked as the No. 1 in men's basketball.

This trend can also be attributed to the support multi-generational Asian parents are providing their children with, such as training facilities, practice equipment and moral support. Unlike many immigrant parents, who were "hyper-selected" for academics out of the enormous populations of their home countries, second-generation Asians tend to have a more open view toward athletics and non-academic activities.

Instead of buying into the stereotype that Asian Americans aren't capable of doing sports, aspiring Asian athletes find themselves navigating cultural, societal and familial obstacles.

"My parents are not keen on me playing — 'you've got to focus on your academics. You can't be you can't be doing football,'" Su said. "It's like an uphill battle. You gotta talk it out with them." ♦

SWIMMING

Roster sinks from 40 to 30

By MitchellChen
& FlorenceHu

On March 8, the Falcons took on Gunn at home. The girls won 95-81, and the boys lost 107-71. At their first meet against Homestead on March 1, the girls team won 83-81, while the boys lost 111-59. At Homestead, sophomores Kelsey Zhang and Taewon Yim both made CCS cut times in their respective individual events, the 100-yard fly and 200-yard freestyle.

"Hopefully, we can make a relay team for states like we did last year."

SOPHOMORE Kelsey Zhang

The more swimmers a team has, the more events they can fill with their swimmers. While only the top three swimmers from each school can score points in each event, a larger team is able to fill more events with their swimmers and thus score more points, as swimmers are limited to four events per meet.

The swim team began practices on Jan. 31 with 30 swimmers on the roster, compared to the 40 last year.

They are currently focusing on sharpening techniques such as their underwater kicks pushing off the wall.

After losing 11 seniors to graduation, the team faces lower numbers and is mainly composed of underclassmen, with only four seniors. Because of low numbers, there are no JV teams this year.

Attendance at practices has also been an issue: Many swimmers either are not present or late, which has impacted the performance of the team.

"We are still working on building our team morale but because the majority of swimmers on the team swim for outside clubs, it can be hard to get everyone practicing together," senior Amaris Charton said.

So far, the Falcons are still building morale and excitement as many new swimmers are unsure what to expect in their first year of swimming.

"This is my first year swimming on a high school team and while the practices are definitely hard, I like being able to swim with my friends," freshmen Isabelle Jadali said.

The team's goal this season is to encourage and build on the skills of the new swimmers and for each swimmer to meet his or her personal goals throughout the season. Many of the club swimmers on the team who have been swimming competitively year-round have high hopes for the season. There are nine club swimmers out of the 30 swimmers on the team.

One of the new swimmers is freshman Kevin Chen, who swims on the DACA national team and has sights set on making CCS in the 100-yard breaststroke.

Palo Alto Star Aquatics sophomore Kelsey Zhang, who is ranked first overall in California, hopes to go back to states for her second state title in the 100 yard butterfly.

"Hopefully, we can make a relay team for states like we did last year," Zhang said. "The team has been working really hard, so we're just going to keep going." ♦

GIRLS' LACROSSE

Rebuild of program begins

By GraceLin

After the sport was canceled last season, the team's biggest struggle has been playing at the varsity level: Out of the 25 members, 20 are new to the sport. Training these underclassmen is difficult; even basic skills like catching the ball require substantial time and practice to master due to the sport's steep learning curve.

With their first game six weeks after their first practice, players had little time to learn skills and implement them. The team lost its first game 11-3 on March 13 against Los Gatos High School.

To help further develop lacrosse skills, head coaches Sarah Brauer and Kate Cortese have been implementing conditioning and assigning specific drills to develop baseline skills. This includes throwing a lacrosse ball against a wall and catching it for 10 minutes a day on the players' own time to improve hand-eye coordination.

Through internal scrimmages at practice, players are learning to defend and attack as a team and communicate effectively. Brauer and Cortese also don't assign permanent positions — like attackers, midfielders and defenders — to the new players. This method has been useful for new players who are trying to get used to lacrosse's flow and dynamic, allowing players to improve on both attack and defense over the course of the season.

The main experienced players, senior Emma Green and juniors Riley Adler and Leena Elashmawi, are trying their best to guide the new players.

"We have to be patient with everyone

else because most of the starting members are going to be people who don't know how to play properly," Green said. "However, they've caught on quickly. There's definitely a lot of skill."

Sophomore Tina Mohr is a new player who appreciates the returning members' spirit and compassion.

"They do a good job at being really supportive. They take time to tell the group things they need to work on and the coaches what to prioritize so we can get better," Mohr said. "They really care about the team. When the coaches aren't available [for practice], they carry the team."

Regarding team bonding and team dynamic, the members are all passionate and motivated about the sport. Mohr said the team has "secret buddies" similar to Secret Santa, where each player is assigned another player to secretly gift candy to during home games. Members are also considering a "Tpumps Tuesday," where the athletes go to Tpumps after practice on Tuesdays.

"[Secret Buddies] definitely does help team bonding; you might get someone you're not close with, so you can grow a bond with them," Mohr said. "It's honestly really fun."

While the team will be going against other schools above their skill level, the athletes are hopeful in terms of their growth.

"I'm really hopeful because we have a lot of talent from the upperclassmen and a lot of spirit from the underclassmen. Combined, we have good chemistry and it will be a promising season," Adler said. "We might not get the outcome we want, but we are working to get there in the future." ♦

BADMINTON

Coach implements stricter practices this season

by SunnyCao & NikaSvizhenko

The Falcons got off to a strong start, winning their second game against Lynbrook on March 12 and 18-12 against Monta Vista on March 8.

Two star duos have been winning: Mixed doubles pair Samanvi Bopanna and Richard Li won their first match against Monta Vista 21-8, 21-8, and the Bopannas won their doubles match 12-15, 21-12, 21-15 against Lynbrook on March 12.

“The coach is more understanding and people are comfortable talking to him.”

SENIOR Sannidhi Boppana



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO

Sophomore Eliza Lin sits during a home game, watching the match and keeping score.

happy about that.”

The team saw little success in the '22 regular season with an underclassmen-heavy

roster and fared better in the '23 season after rebuilding with new coach Thomas Ching. Sannidhi attributed last year's per-

formance and the team's improvement to better coaching.

“The coach this year is more understanding and people are comfortable talking to the coach and asking him questions,” Sannidhi said. “He is actually teaching people what to do and how to do it and fixing people's [mistakes].”

This year, Ching is putting more emphasis on an improved work ethic, attendance and drills. The No. 3 boys' singles player, sophomore Ishir Gupta, said the lack of organization during practices compared to club badminton hindered the team's performance last year.

“I play club badminton, so I'm more used to having more organized practices, but that wasn't the case for school practice,” Gupta said. “I wasn't learning as much from school practice last year. However, we're having more drills, so I think I'm learning a lot more.”

According to Samanvi, players switch events according to which school they are playing.

“I'm confident in our team and I really do expect us to win four or five games this season. We've been training a lot, and I'm really confident in our players this season,” Sannidhi said. ♦

TRACK

New coaching change cues a season of adjustments

by SunnyCao & AnnikaGho

At their second meet of the season against Monta Vista on March 14, the varsity boys tied the Matadors 54-54, and varsity girls lost 84-33. Both teams lost their first home meet against Fremont High on March 7: Varsity boys lost 71-50, and varsity girls lost 76-40. As this was their only home meet of the season, the team also celebrated their senior night on that day.

With sprints coach Rick Ellis stepping down, the team has had to adapt to the new sprints coach Andy Legeti, who also took over as head coach from previous coaches Archie Ljepava and Ian Tippetts. A previous history teacher at High Bluff Academy and a former cross country head coach at Cal-

abasas High School, Ligeti has coached the sport for more than 40 years.

“It's a little harder to progress, but we are still doing great.”



FRESHMAN Neha Sharan

However, Ligeti has mostly been a distance runner, which makes coaching sprints a new experience for him. This has led to many communication issues within the

sprints team. For example, Ligeti doesn't do endurance workouts nor block starts, a major change from what many sprinters do.

Since former head coach and distance coach Ian Tippetts is training for the True Grit 100 mile mountain bike race and is less available this season, distance runners usually do an easy “on their own” run on Blue Days and speed workouts with Tippetts on Red Days.

“Since [Coach Tippetts] isn't here, it's hard to maintain a good work ethic,” freshman distance runner Neha Sharan said. “Without him, it's a little harder to progress as we would be doing, but we are still doing great.”

The team is facing a decreasing number of upperclassmen and also lost several star players to graduation. This year, the team is

down to 10 seniors, and only about 30% of the team are upperclassmen.

Despite this shortage of upperclassmen, there are several promising underclassmen who have picked up the baton: sophomore Jack Dong (1600m), sophomore Zachary Stanis (shot put), freshman Samarth Handu (800m), freshman Debesh Das Sharma (1600m) and freshman Benjamin Zinman (high jump).

With the addition of promising underclassmen and the team's resilient spirit, many are hopeful they will be able to overcome the several challenges.

“The new coach's coaching policy is a lot more hands off than coach Ellis's was, but I think that I have great confidence in our sprint teams, and I think they will adjust nicely,” sophomore Kyle Li said. ♦

BOYS' TENNIS

Players hopeful with addition of freshmen and capable veterans

by LawsonWang

The tennis team has its sights set on going far in CCS; they have many strong upperclassmen and only one major loss to graduation, doubles player Julian Berkowitz-Sklar. The team has added three new freshmen in varsity: No. 3 doubles player Joshua Amirineni, and Sina Mohtaj-Khorassani and Mason Cheng. These two will rotate into the lineup as needed.

“This year will be better than the other three years I've played.”

SENIOR Luke Stratakos

“We have lots of experienced players,” said senior captain Luke Stratakos, who plays No. 2 doubles with junior Teddy

Kosei's brother, sophomore

Kosei's brother, sophomore

O'Yang. “Other high schools have lost some pretty good players, so I think this year will be a better year than the other three years I've played.”

As a sign of a strong season to come, the Falcons won 4-3 on March 12 against Homestead, beat Los Altos 5-2 on March 7 and defeated Gunn 5-2 on March 5 Gunn. Their record as of March 13 was 3-0.

Although senior Kosei Ogata is not planning to come back to the school team as he does club tennis since it is part of his dream to one day play professional tennis, he helped provide guidance to players as an informal assistant last year. Players hope he is willing to help out again this year.

“He [Kosei] helped out a lot last year, showing up to some practices and matches,” junior doubles No. 2 Teddy O'Yang said. “He was like another captain.”

Kosei's brother, sophomore

Somei Ogata, is set to play No. 1 singles for the Falcons as he did last year, with sophomore Nikhil Srivatsa at No. 2 and senior Johan Amirineni at No. 3.

Thankfully for the team, the weather has been improving recently, with rain occurring less frequently. Due to heavy rain in the start of the season, tryouts for tennis that were originally supposed to be three days were extended to two weeks. The frequency of rain has also caused practices to get canceled often, since playing tennis in the rain is too dangerous, and the ball bounces differently than when it's dry.

Going forward, Stratakos hopes to improve their teamwork to become a more cohesive team.

“We need to make sure we keep up the energy. While tennis is not usually a team sport, I believe focusing on working as a team would help improve the whole,” Stratakos said. ♦

SOFTBALL

CCS in sights as pitcher recovers from injury

by ChristinaLabban

With a similar roster following a CSS qualification from last year, the softball team is hoping to repeat that success again this year.

Early in the year, the team was impacted by junior pitcher Saira Ramakrishnan's knee injury she suffered during a basketball game on Feb. 9 as she was going for a rebound. She was taken off the court for the remaining few basketball games and couldn't pitch for a few weeks.

As for Ramakrishnan, she said the freshmen on the team have helped inspire her.

“The new freshmen have really helped us and stepped up a lot. Freshmen Alayna Eva Cleland and Alaina Retamoso are our new shortstops,” Ramakrishnan said. “Alaina is a backup pitcher, so she

will be pitching a little bit more and kind of help ease the load for me.”

Ramakrishnan, who has been playing softball for 10 years, is looking for a future playing softball in college. She hopes to get recruited this summer.

Luckily, through rehab and physical therapy, her time on the softball field was barely impacted.

Ramakrishnan is slowly recovering, and has been pitching through her injury during the last few games.

Besides her injury, this upcoming season is bright for the team, as the new

freshmen are adapting well.

“The team dynamic is great, the freshmen are awesome and everyone is getting along so well,” junior shortstop Sydney Rivera said. ♦

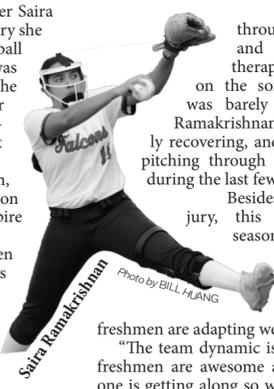


Photo by BILL HUANG

Saira Ramakrishnan

BOYS' LACROSSE

Fresh team faces rebuilding

by NikaSvizhenko & MitchellChen

The boys' lacrosse team lost their first game 15-1 against Palo Alto on March 7. While they were able to keep up with the physicality and aggressiveness throughout the game, they fell short due to weak offense. This performance exemplifies the team's main weakness this year: a lack of experienced players stemming from a senior-heavy roster in the '22 season and a canceled season last year.

This year, the Falcons are looking forward to rebuilding the lacrosse program. With only a handful of players who have prior lacrosse experience, the team hasn't been able to work on advanced drills and strategies.

Instead, the upperclassmen have been coaching underclassmen on basic skills such as catching and throwing. Senior defender Kyle Scola and midfielder Daniel Cordova, both veterans of the sport, often work with underclassmen and new players on making sure their technique is optimal.

“We have a lot of players who are already athletes in football and basketball and are playing lacrosse for the first time,” Cordova said. “For the most part, we have a lot of players in shape physically but lack the technical skills to execute during games.”

Sophomore midfielder Brennan Pak joined the team this season after playing volleyball and football last year and club volleyball for four years. He said the risk of

injury was one motivating factor to join lacrosse over volleyball.

“I'm trying to spend more time with the seniors that are leaving,” he said. “I play a lot because of my friends, and a bunch of them are on the team.”

According to Pak, the Falcons struggled with offense and keeping the ball, leaving their defense tired.

“Since this year is mostly focused toward rebuilding the program, we might not have the skills and foundations other schools have, but I am happy I got to play one last year of lacrosse in high school,” Cordova said. ♦



Courtesy of EMMY PAK

Senior Cooper Call lowers his shoulder into a defender from Pacific Grove High.

BOYS' GOLF

Returning players contribute to strong start to season

by RuiyanZhu

The Falcons captured a victory against Lynbrook High School 199-224 at Los Lagos Golf Course on March 14. As of when this article was written, their record is 3-0, winning against Lynbrook High School, Gunn High School and

For the team's individual rankings, Aidan Smith is ranked No. 1, Nicholas Okada is ranked No. 2, and Oliver Pott is ranked No. 3.

Senior Ryan Lin said that the team won because of their consistent practice.

“Our chipping and putting were good, and my contact was pure with the ball when putting,” Lin said.

This season for boys' golf saw more boys than usual attend tryouts: 24 tried out, a major increase compared to last year where only 16 competed to be on the 12-person team.

“A lot of them were senior players who were just trying for fun,” junior Nicholas Okada said. “Most of them just wanted to explore a new sport.”

Okada added that most new players were unable to make the cut. Out of the 12 that did make it, only one was a freshman: Mars Chiang, ranked No. 12 on the team. Senior Jerrick Loo, ranked No. 11 on the team, also joined as his first year. The others are all returning players.

Coached by David Gragnola, who also

coaches girls' golf, the team practices Mondays through Thursdays at the Saratoga Country Club.

“For school matches we need the team to win. Your score actually matters for everyone.”

JUNIOR Nicholas Okada

Players use the driving range to improve muscle memory and the course to work on

course management and accuracy. For team bonding, students sometimes play together on the weekends and eat at Chipotle after practice.

Okada is optimistic about this season, as he believes this year's team is stronger than last season's; all players but two are returning.

He said the team has been practicing and improved from last season as well, and he feels pressure to do well for the team this season.

“Outside of the regular season, we have individual tournaments where we're just by ourselves, but for school matches we need the team to win,” Okada said. “Your score actually matters for everyone.” ♦

BOYS' VOLLEYBALL

Team starts league with winning preseason record

by BillHuang & BryanZhao

With the final set from senior libero-setter Sam Kau to a hit from freshman middle Ahmed Abdalla, Gunn's defense broke down, allowing the boys' volleyball team to secure third place at the Wilcox Tournament on March 2.

Despite losing four key seniors, the team of 13 has a very strong core this season with the addition of four new freshmen: middle blocker Ahmed Abdalla, opposite hitter Dawson Yeh and outside hitters Anson Hulme and Lawrence Hu. Although it was their first year on a high school team, the freshmen were caught up to speed and familiarized with the program.

The team is currently 2-1 in league after defeating Los Altos 3-0 on March 13, Fremont 3-0 on March 8, but losing to Los Gatos 0-3 on March 6.

Before the league started, the team also attended many preseason games. During ski week, the team focused on serve-receive and cohesion drills for their first two preseason games and their first preseason tournament at Wilcox on March 2.

The team won 3-1 against Santa Clara on March 1 following a 1-3 loss against Leigh on Feb. 27.

At the Wilcox tournament, the team

was able to win three out of four matches, winning 2-1 against Gunn and Milpitas and 2-0 against Westmont. The team suffered a 2-0 loss against Menlo-Atherton, currently standing with an overall positive record of 6-3.

“At Wilcox, we weren't playing our best. We missed a lot of serves, which threw off our momentum and cohesion,” Kau said.

“We have been making a few adjustments after [Duvvuri] returned.”



SENIOR Sam Kau

Overall cohesion and skills are projected to improve, as starting setter senior Kali Duvvuri attended the U.S. Men's U19 National Team Development Program.

After Duvvuri returned, Kau switched his role from setter to play as a libero.

“We have been making a few adjustments after [Duvvuri] returned, familiarizing with his sets and working on overall skills like blocking and covering more,” Kau said. ♦

BOYS' BASEBALL

With huge roster and no JV, team focuses on underclassmen

by SamBai & IsabelleWang

On Feb. 29 vs. Monta Vista, junior pitcher Aiden Chen tossed a no-hitter in a 6-0 win, striking out a remarkable 17 batters. The lefthander also hit a double and a triple. Junior first base Ben Huang later hit a home run. Chen closed the show by pitching nine strikes in a row to retire the side — a so-called immaculate inning.

For his performance, voters selected Chen as Athlete of the Week by the Bay Area News Group.

After the victory against the Matadors, the team gained a much needed boost in team morale.

To prepare for their season, the Falcons played two scrimmages against Oak Grove and Harbor High and two preseason games against Los Gatos and Lincoln.

The season officially began on Feb. 29, and the team record is at 2-2 as of March 15, with a 6-0 win against Monta Vista on Feb. 29, a 3-2 win against Lynbrook on March 5, a 8-0 loss March 7 against Milpitas and a 6-4 win March 12 against Fremont.

This year, the team includes 21 players on varsity, but there is no JV team.

Compared to last year, with 10 JV players and 13 varsity players, this larger varsity team ensures there are enough subs during a game.

Chen noted that on-and-off injuries are common throughout the season, so the larger roster ensures they will always be able to field players.

Still, he said, “Although there are some freshmen with promising futures, they are not varsity ready right now.”

In fact, more than half of the players this season are inexperienced underclassmen. “A lot of the freshmen have never played before, haven't played in a long time or are not really familiar with the game,” Chen said. “With a lack of experience comes a lack of skill, so we work on more basic techniques rather than focusing on advanced ones as a team.”

With junior shortstop Samanyu Ram and freshman center fielder and third baseman Eli Safine suffering injuries early in the season, the team is relying on some of these freshmen to step up. ♦



Courtesy of AIDEN CHEN

Junior Aiden Chen confidently steps up to bat during the Los Gatos game on Feb. 24.

snapshots



Photo by BRYAN ZHAO



Courtesy of EMMY PAK



Photo by ANDREW LIN

Sophomore Jack Dong and senior Jacob Merrill lead the boys 1600m event at their Senior Night against Fremont on March 7.

Junior Maggie Huesby plays at first base against Prospect, where they won 6-1.

Junior Alan Lu ducks and covers under his desk during the earthquake simulation drill on March 14, which now features post-tremor simulations.

THANK YOU FALCON FRIENDS

- Falcon Legacy (\$1000+)**
Saratoga Education Foundation
Heng Zhang
- Platinum (\$500-999)**
Hazel Dieh Amy Williams
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Contribute Now:



Sussing out new but overhyped Subway Sidekicks

Sidekickin sidekicks



Will Norwood and Isabelle Wang

On Jan. 22, Subway released its “Sidekicks,” a footlong churro, pretzel and cookie combination offering. People on social media went crazy over the Sidekicks, so we set out to see what the hype was all about.

We first tried the Churro. Made in partnership with Cinnabon, the churro is served slightly warm and dusted with cinnamon sugar. At only \$2 and 190 calories, it seemed promising until we took a bite.

Our smiles dropped immediately. The churro was very peculiar, to say the least. It had a funny after taste, and it tasted like it was microwaved instead of toasted like it should be. Even the best part — cinnamon sugar — was extremely underwhelming.

We give it 2 Falcons out of 5.

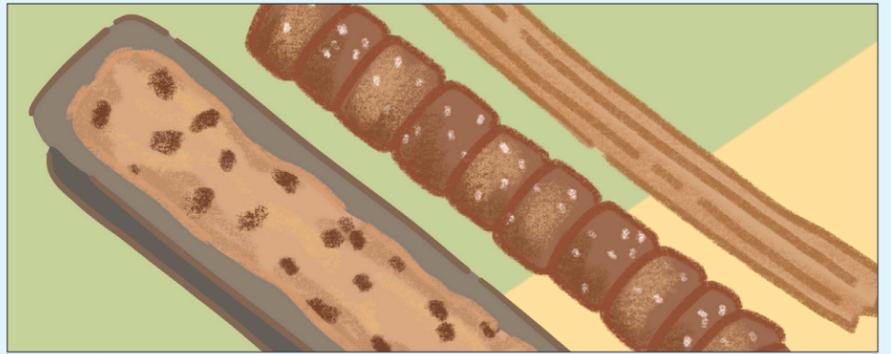
Next we moved on to the pretzel, which was another partnership with America’s favorite mall pretzel: Auntie Anne’s. The footlong pretzel was warmed in the Subway oven and then sprinkled with salt and covered in butter.

We dipped it into the honey mustard and took a bite, expecting it to be of similar caliber to the churro. Instead, we were nicely surprised; it was warm, tasteful and not overly salty. It earned 4 Falcons out of 5.

We finally moved on to the holy grail of Subway Sidekicks: the footlong cookie. This was a monster. Everywhere you look on TikTok, you’ll see videos of people trying the cookie.

While we were waiting for the cookie to be warmed up, we took a little look at the board.

We noticed the cookie was \$5, which was not too bad for the size, but then we noticed the calories. 1,440. In other words,



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG

the footlong cookie well exceeds a young child’s daily calorie recommendation.

We were stunned, but excited nonetheless. The first bite was pleasantly surprising: It was warm and soft, with a slight cakelike texture.

But as we ate the cookie got colder, and the excitement wore off. Each bite got worse and worse and eventually had to

take a break. During our break, we realized there was an odd metallic after taste. We give it 2.5 Falcons out of 5.

In the end, we realized that we had been lied to. The Subway Sidekicks are nothing to write home about. As often happens, we had been misled by social media, but at least Subway’s marketing team is doing a good job. ♦

Are we truly living in a simulation?

Victor-ya Lang



Victoria Lin

What if you woke up one day and your entire life turned out to be merely a dream or some kind of a simulation? In other words, while you are real, you are surrounded by friends and loved ones created by your imagination.

As a brain floating through an empty universe, you spend eons dreaming and forgetting, dreaming and forgetting, forever and utterly alone. Or perhaps you are just numbers on some future child’s AP Computer Science project, to be wiped out when they go to bed.

In a huge thought experiment done in

AP Lang, dozens of seniors spent days putting forward such arguments and generally having their heads spin as they pondered the implications.

Nick Bostrom, a Oxford professor, claims humanity would go extinct before creating our own simulations.

However, who’s to say we haven’t started our own simulations already and they’re playing out unbeknownst to us? What else do people use Sims 4 for? When I run my Sims 4 game, does that mean I’m creating a whole new world where I do end up at an Ivy League school?

If we learn somehow that we are in a simulation, then everything “alive” now is not truly alive. Are vegetarians just wasting their time trying to protect life that is not really life at all? Is it time to try those all-meat diets all over TikTok?

If, as many say, we are living in a simula-

tion now, this is not an encouragement for people to YOLO the heck out of their lives and do anything crazy — after all, you don’t know if you’ll be able to leave this simulation.

I heavily doubt Morpheus is going to show up in your dreams and offer you two pills. No one is going to become Keanu Reeves and break out of this matrix world.

If I got complete confirmation that our lives are a simulation, I’d probably enjoy my senioritis to the fullest.

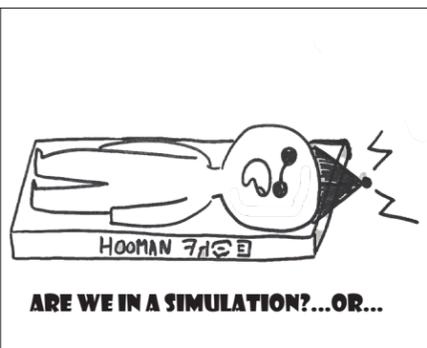
After all, senioritis is basically our own mini simulation: Grades don’t matter much, teachers aren’t as uptight and you start doing crazy things like joining track because it’s the last time you’d ever get to do a high school sport again.

That being said, if you do happen to wake up from a simulation one day, always remember to choose the blue pill. ♦

WHAT IS REAL?



BY MITCHELL CHEN



topten

THINGS TO DO AS A SENIOR

- 10 Senior Trip.** The long-awaited taste of freedom seniors wait for. To blow \$10K on vacation with their friends.
- 9 Scare juniors.** I love to explain how difficult college applications are.
- 8 Visit colleges.** Go see my potential homes for the next four years.
- 7 Show up late.** We might as well push the start time back.
- 6 Go hiking.** Everyone should touch grass before graduation.
- 5 Shame the underclassmen.** Laugh as they preparing summer applications as if it was college applications.
- 4 Try something new.** What else are you going to do to fill the empty void?
- 3 Graduation Night.** Nothing like having a night with friends you’ll likely never see all again.
- 2 Senior Prom.** Standing in the freezing cold with painful heels all night.
- 1 Graduate!** You’re a senior, this was the whole end to your journey!

>> Victoria Lin