



The Spectator

The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper
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of the
student
body.

Volume XCV No. 7

December 10, 2004

To The Stuyvesant Community

A School Divided: Double Standards for Hiring Teachers

By IMAN HASSAN

“Whatever magic happens in the school really happens in the classroom between the teacher and the student,” said Parent Coordinator Harvey Blumm, recalling a favorite quote he once heard.

Some Stuyvesant students may wonder how this magic begins. Exactly how are teachers hired in the first place?

According to Principal Stanley Teitel, under the guidelines of the United Federation of Teachers’ Transfer Plan, 50% of vacant teaching positions at Stuyvesant are filled based on seniority. This system gives preference to teachers who have taught for the most number of years. “A job is posted citywide, and it usually goes to the person with the most seniority and with a satisfactory record,” said Teitel. The Personnel Department then notifies Teitel of the prospective teacher who has met these requirements.

Coordinator of Student Affairs Matt Polazzo described another way in which teachers could be transferred into the school. He said that under diversity transfer, “minority teachers could come into a school” if the Department of Education decides the particular race or ethnicity is insufficiently represented there.

Assistant Principal of English Eric Grossman explained how the other 50% of teachers are hired. “I receive resumes all year long and phone calls as well. I am constantly interviewing people because I am never certain when I am going to need to hire someone,” he said. “Usually, I will have a handful of applicants with whom I have spoken to or whose resumes seem promising.”

Grossman then presents these candidates to Teitel, who has the final say on which teachers will be hired. A large part of his decision rests on the opinion of the APs. Said Grossman of his experience, “[Teitel] has been totally supportive of my decisions.”

AP of Chemistry and Physics Dr. Olga Livanis also interviews the teachers she helps to hire. Her process involves the faculty of the entire department. In addition, Livanis said, “One of the components of the interview

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A New AP Policy to Keep Your Head Spinning

Department of Education of the City of New York
Stuyvesant High School
345 Chambers Street New York, New York 10282-1099

ID: [REDACTED]

Expected Date of Graduation: June 2005
Official Class: SARKP Birth: [REDACTED] Address: [REDACTED]

Stuyvesant High School does not rank its students, most of whom fall at the high end of the distribution curve for academic achievement.

TRANSCRIPT			
Code	Title	Grd	Crd
School Year 2001 Term 0			
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	98	1.0
PS2	SPAN YB 1	95	2.0
School Year 2001 Term 1			
A1	ART	97	1.0
E1FC	FRES COMP	97	1.0
F55	SPANISH 5	90	1.0
H1G	GLB HIST 1	90	1.0
MQ1	SEQ MATH 1	96	1.0
PS1B	PE FR CY B	90	0.5
S51	LIV ENVIRN 1	95	1.0
School Year 2001 Term 2			
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	98	1.0
E2FC	FR COMP 2	99	1.0
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	97	1.0
F56	SPANISH 6	90	1.0
H2G	GLB HIST 2	85	1.0
MQ2	SEQ MATH 2	92	1.0
PS1B	PE FR CY B	95	0.5
S52	LIV ENVIRN 2	92	1.0
U1	MUSIC 1	80	1.0
School Year 2002 Term 1			
EJEL	JOUR LIT	97	1.0
School Year 2002 Term 2			
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	98	1.0
H4G	GLB HIST 4	85	1.0
MC51	INTCOMPSCI 1	94	1.0
MQ4	SEQ MATH 4	85	1.0
PS3B	PE SO CY B	95	0.5
SC2	CHEMISTRY 2	70	1.0
SC2	REGCHIMLAB	5	0.0
S55	SHORT STOR	97	1.0
ESXA	ENGAPCOMP	94	1.0
School Year 2003, Term 1			
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	98	1.0
PSX0	SPAN AP 10	98	1.0
H84	US HIST 2	98	1.0
MQ6	SEQ MATH 6	95	1.0
PSW6	JKWEIGHTB	95	0.5
SP2	REGPHYSLAB	5	0.0
SP2	PHYSICS 2	80	1.0
T2SV	VIDEO PROD	96	1.0
School Year 2003, Term 2			
EAJ	ADV JOURNL	98	1.0
PSX0	SPAN AP 10	98	1.0
H84	US HIST 2	98	1.0
MQ6	SEQ MATH 6	95	1.0
PSW6	JKWEIGHTB	95	0.5
SP2	REGPHYSLAB	5	0.0
SP2	PHYSICS 2	80	1.0
T2SV	VIDEO PROD	96	1.0

Department	Unweighted Avg	Weighted Avg (APs = 1.1)	Weighted DOE AP Bonus 'Avg'
Math	96.92	92.14	93.38
Foreignlang	94.75	8.0	
History	91.0	6.0	
Math	91.43	7.0	
Science	91.17	6.0	
Tech	92.33	1.5	
Art_music	98.5	2.0	
Health_ed	91.0	4.0	

Term	Avg	Crdts
2001, 0	95.0	2.0
2001, 1	92.5	6.5
2001, 2	90.71	7.5
2002, 1	92.38	7.0
2002, 2	89.43	7.5
2003, 1	92.13	8.5
2003, 2	94.25	8.5

NOT AN OFFICIAL Transcript Printed: December 01, 2004

Seniors received revised transcripts like the one pictured above on Wednesday, December 8, 2004, during homeroom. The new transcripts include an unweighted average, a weighted average, and a weighted “bonus” average.

By ROBIN LIPP

On Wednesday, November 10 a message was posted on the Stuyvesant High School Web site (www.stuy.edu): “...all

A[dvanced] P[lacement] courses will be weighted as 1.1 and will be averaged as such in their transcript....” Since this posting, many students have struggled to understand how the new policy

will affect their transcript grades. The new policy is a result of a Department of Education (DOE) mandate that had caught the school by suprise. The meaning of the message posted on the Web site has been the subject of debate, adding to the confusion about the actual system for averaging grades for AP classes.

This confusion resulted from two conflicting views on what the policy entails. One popular interpretation of the policy is that AP grades will be multiplied by 1.1, providing a 10% bonus for every AP grade. This system would boost any 90 in an AP class to a 99. However, other students interpreted the policy to mean that AP grades will be given additional mathematical weight. In this way, grades would be multiplied by 1.1, but then divided by an additional 1.1 in the student’s average. Using the weight method, the average between an 80 in an AP class and a 100 in a non-AP class would produce an 89.5 instead of a 90.

The new AP policy is perhaps even more confusing than either of these ideas. First, the original AP grading policy was changed by a DOE mandate to the mathematical weight system, and transcripts were altered accordingly. Then, a recent DOE decision changed the AP policy to the “bonus” system. As of now, the policy is still subject to change.

“Initially it was a pure mathematical weight. You’d multiply the grade by 1.1 and then divide by 1.1...it’s now a bonus of 10 percent,” said Assistant Principal of Technology Services Edward Wong, who posted the new AP policy on the Stuy Web site. “The thing is, the policy is still in transition.”

Both versions of the system have their inherent benefits and pitfalls. Although the “bonus” system would be an unconditional AP grade boost, many students are concerned that teachers would grade down to compensate for the inflation, which may end up being a temporary system.

The administration too has concerns about a potential “bonus” system.

“If it turns out that this in some way boosts a student’s GPA, my concern is that students will take AP classes instead of other classes that they would prefer to take...that is certainly not something we want to encourage,” said Principal Stanley Teitel.

In contrast to the bonus system, the mathematical weight system would affect students who feel that they have not performed as well in AP courses as they have in other, less rigorous classes.

“I got my transcript and it

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13 Proves an Unlucky Number For Speech and Debate Team

By RACHEL ENSIGN
and NOAH RAYMAN

For the first time in 13 years, the Stuyvesant Speech and Debate team failed to take first place at the Villiger Speech and Debate Tournament, a nationwide competition. The team won third place, trailing behind first place Holy Ghost Preparatory School, a school near Philadelphia, and Regis High School from New York City, one of Stuyvesant’s fiercest competitors.

The Villiger Tournament, held just outside of Philadelphia at St. Joseph’s University, is one of several major speech and debate competitions that the Stuyvesant Speech and Debate team participates in. This year, it was a two-day event that began on Saturday, November 20.

Speech and Debate members begin in preliminary rounds, in which they usually compete in groups of six that are made up of students from opposing schools. Judges rank each competitor within his or

her group and then students “break” into elimination rounds. Eventually six people go on to compete in the finals.

There were nine different categories in this year’s competition. Students in the Speech portion of the Stuyvesant team were given the option of competing in Declamation, Oral Interpretation, Duo Interpretation, Original Oratory, Dramatic and Humorous Interpretation, Student

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Students Snuff Cigs for Smokeout

By MAXINE SPEIER

For smokers, the word “quitting” is often accompanied by groans and heavy sighs and the acknowledgment that giving up their cigarettes is just one of those things that is easier said than done. But on Thursday, November 18, smokers across the country were given the support and motivation to put away their packs—if only for 24 hours.

The Great American Smokeout asks smokers to quit for just one day. A nationwide event sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the Smokeout takes place on the third Thursday of every November and attempts to raise awareness of the support and help that can be offered to smokers who would like to retire their habit permanently. According to the American Cancer Society

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A School Divided: Double Standards for Hiring Teachers

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process is a 15-minute presentation on any component of the topic the applicant wishes to present. That 15-minute presentation tells me a lot about a person: the way they hold themselves in a classroom, the way they speak, [and] their content knowledge.” Livanis also has a personal conversation with the prospective teaches and gives a second interview to promising applicants.

Nevertheless, the seniority-based system that is currently implemented at Stuyvesant contrasts with another hiring method known as the School-Based Option (SBO). Under this alternative system, a group of teachers and administrators chooses the teachers to be hired. The choice of teacher hiring system is “basically a union negotiated right,” said Blumm.

However, last fall, Stuyvesant faculty members voted to forgo the SBO and keep the old system of seniority.

According to Polazzo the current system was maintained for a number of reasons. Under the SBO system “[the committee] gives [prospective teachers] some sort of grade. Grades that pass are shuffled by seniority.” Therefore, seniority is still a factor in teacher hiring. More importantly, Polazzo said, “unqualified teachers who are

currently in a school must reapply if they change the system.”

The present UFT Transfer Plan has both its benefits and downsides. “People who have a lot of experience get first shot at available jobs,” said Blumm. However, he said, “The most senior teacher may not always

“The most senior teacher may not be the best, most effective teacher.”
 — Harvey Blumm, Parent Coordinator

be the best, most effective teacher.”

According to Blumm, another downside of this seniority-based system concerns newly-hired and often capable teachers who “haven’t completed verification. For a year or two, they are vulnerable and can be replaced by senior teachers.”

Grossman said, “I think every AP would like greater control over who joins the depart-

ment, but I’ve been very lucky in the teachers who have come here via transfer, and they have made great additions to the department.”

Grossman also appreciates the teachers who did not come by transfer, but whom he helped to hire. “I’ve hired the teachers I really wanted to. Of the teachers that I have hired, I’m thrilled with the way they have all worked out,” he said.

Students at Stuyvesant have mixed feelings about the current hiring system. Senior Max Elbert said, “there might be some teachers who are just out of college, who might be thinking on the same level as students, and who might make the class more interesting.”

Freshman Zach Manning disagrees. “When you get more experienced teachers, who know how to teach better and conduct lessons well, the students learn more,” he said.

As a suggestion, freshman Sara Mishra said, “[Stuyvesant] should screen teachers. Put the teacher in a classroom setting with other teachers and see how they do.” According to Teitel, demonstrative lessons are utilized under the SBO system.

In the end it all comes down to, as Blumm said, the “two key players [in a school]: the kid, how much he wants to learn, and the teacher.”

A New AP Policy to Keep Your Head Spinning

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made a difference...my grade went down,” said senior Gabriella Grisotti, referring to the first transcript alteration. There is also the prospect that students will be discouraged from taking AP courses for fear of hurting their grades.

“People will not take the challenging AP courses because they’ll run the risk of lowering their averages,” said senior Christine Tada.

Nonetheless, the weighted system would benefit students who tend to perform better in AP classes.

“It could work to the positive also,” he said.

Many students have their own personal troubles with both versions of the new system. “My main issue with the system is that it shouldn’t be retroactive. Teachers might have graded differently if they knew about the system beforehand,” said Grisotti.

“Technically, I don’t agree with either of [the grading systems] because an AP class shouldn’t count more than any other class,” said senior Patrick Alexander.

From the school’s perspective, the DOE mandate could not have come at a worse time; Early Decision and Early Action applications, which were already due for this year, include a copy of a student’s transcript. The grades and average on this transcript play an important role in the college admission process.

“I certainly know that our seniors are very concerned...our parents are just as concerned because depending on how things are done, people’s averages are changing,” said Teitel. The problem of how to appropriately handle

early application transcripts continues to vex the Stuyvesant administration.

“The problem for us is...we’ve already sent out transcripts for early admission students...we sent out a second transcript based on the initial change...if there should be another change we may be forced to send a third transcript...I’m reluctant to send a third because I don’t want to confuse [the colleges] beyond where they’re already confused,” said Teitel.

One solution would be to send out all three averages and shift the decision-making burden to the colleges.

“We’re sort of in a quagmire, we really don’t know what to do...we’ll probably end up putting three different averages on our transcripts: one normal, one weighted, and one with the bonus...it’s going to confuse the colleges like crazy,” said Wong.

According to Teitel, the school was not even informed of the policy change until it had already been put into effect.

“What I disagree with is not the system, per se, but how it was implemented. I don’t think it was fair to us as a school to implement the policy and then send me a one-line e-mail informing me that it has already been done,” said Teitel.

Sophomore Grade Advisor Sandra Miller agreed. She said, “It’s playing with an unfair deck in a way. We should wait for the incoming freshmen [to implement the new policy].”

In addition, Teitel clearly stressed the possibly transient nature of the most current policy. “I believe you’re going to see additional changes very quickly,” said Teitel. “...when they realize what’s going on here, somebody’s going to finally sit down and figure this out.”

Seniors Speak Out for Graduation Speaker

By KIRILL ALEKSANDROV

What do former president Bill Clinton, CEO of General Electric Jack Welsh, and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan have in common? They were all graduation speakers at Stuyvesant graduation ceremonies in 2002, 2003, and 2004, respectively.

From mid-October to early November seniors had the opportunity to go to the senior class’s Web site (www.stuy05.com) and vote for one of 10 candidates as the next graduation speaker. Candidate choices ranged from President George W. Bush, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Donald Trump, to Sasha Baron Cohen (also known as Ali G) and Jon Stewart. The candidates were decided upon in September by senior class officers. Of the 593 seniors who voted, 54% favored Stewart. 19% of the vote went to Baron Cohen, and 7% went to Rodham Clinton.

According to Senior Class President Maria Cheung, the SU sent Stewart a letter in late November asking him to speak at this year’s graduation. If he does not respond within six weeks, another candidate will be offered the opportunity to be speaker. If by the beginning of March the SU has not succeeded in engaging a candidate of their choice, Principal Stanley Teitel will step in to select a speaker. Teitel said

that he would like Stuyvesant alumnus Dr. Richard Axel, of the class of 1963, to be speaker. Axel is a professor at Columbia University and a winner of the 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine, which he received for his research of the olfactory system.

According to Teitel, there is no official rule that specifies who has the final say in the choice of graduation speaker. However, speakers chosen by the SU must be approved by Teitel.

Teitel holds that the graduation speaker should meet certain requirements. “There needs to be a reason that a particular person is addressing the class,” said Teitel. He believes that a speaker has to be a significant public figure, have a relationship with the school, or come from the world of academia.

“It is a privilege,” said Teitel, “[that] we do not just give to anybody.”

In response to a question about Stewart’s fulfillment of these requirements, Teitel said that he did not consider Stewart to meet these requirements.

However, Teitel later said that he would approve of Stewart as graduation speaker, Teitel arrived at this decision partly because seniors overwhelmingly voted for Stewart.

“I couldn’t say no to the senior class,” said Teitel. “It’s [their] graduation, not mine.”

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13 Proves an Unlucky Number For Speech and Debate Team

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Congress, or Extemporaneous speaking. Students competed in Lincoln-Douglas debate, which is a one-on-one debate over moral issues, and in Policy debate.

Of the nearly 200 students on the Stuyvesant Speech and Debate team, about 70 attended the event, and four made it to the finals. Of these four, two tied for first place in the Original Oratory competition. Senior Jimei Hon wrote and performed a speech about feminism, while senior Isaac Maddow-Zimet wrote and preformed a speech about the hidden rules of society. In the end, Maddow-Zimet took first place due to a complex system of tie-breaking called reciprocals.

This break from a 13-year-long tradition did not come as a complete surprise to the team. In the beginning of the school year, due to the budget cuts Stuyvesant experienced, the portion of the budget that was allocated for paying teachers to stay after school was cut. Coach Julie Sheinman did not know if there would be enough money to pay the other coaches.

Sheinman did not want to begin a season that might have had to end prematurely.

“We got off to a slow start,” said Sheinman. “It put us at a

disadvantage competitively.”

By the time enough funding did arrive and tryouts did begin in early October, it was already late to begin the season.

We didn’t have the preparation we usually have,” said junior and Speech member Allison Petrosino.

Not only had the team lost priceless practice time, but it had also missed an important novice competition earlier in the year from which many of the

Another noted change from last year is the departure of one of the team’s most talented members, Sheridan Johnson. Last year Johnson took home first place in two categories at Villiger. And although there were only a handful of seniors who graduated from the Speech and Debate team last year, Johnson left a spot to fill.

To some members, these were not relevant factors in the team’s slip from gold to bronze.

“I don’t know what happened, we were good,” said junior Debate member Waciuma Maina. “We had tough opposition.”

Maddow-Zimet agreed with this. “Holy Ghost was the better school, and they deserved to win,” he said. “They tried hard and had more talent.”

Although third place was a step down from the norm for the team, many of its members feel confident that this will be a successful year.

Some members are already thinking about continuing the team’s past tradition at Villiger ‘05. “We’re looking foward to next year,” said sophomore Speech member Warlito de Leon.

“We expect to keep doing what we have been doing for years: our best,” said junior Speech member Olivia Lau.

“I don’t know what happened, we were good. We had tough opposition.”
— Waciuma Maina, junior

newcomers would have gained some experience.

Nevertheless, the team put a lot of effort into getting back on schedule.

“They were rushing us...a lot,” said freshman Debate member Ishman Ibtida.

“Some of the new members should be commended because they worked really hard,” said senior Speech novice director Ritu Moondra.

Students Snuff Cigs for Smokeout



dents were asked to give their cigarettes to a health teacher with the assurance that they would be returned the next day.

“If you smoke, we just ask you to give up your cigarettes for a day. If you don’t smoke, you can renew your vow not to smoke. It’s less likely when you’re an adult, but teenagers and young people still might start smoking at any time,” said health education teacher Barbara Garber.

Many students involved in the Smokeout were juniors who are taking health class this term and helped organize and advertise the day through their class.

“It’s not just about quitting, it’s basically about awareness,” said junior Emily Su.

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(www.cancer.org/docroot/ped/ped_10_4.asp), of the 46 million smokers across America, over 15 million participate in this annual event in an effort to see what it’s like to spend a day without cigarettes.

Started in 1974 by writer Lynn R. Smith as a “Don’t Smoke Day” for the state of Minnesota, the popularity of the event grew until the American Cancer Society took hold of the idea and brought it nationwide in 1977.

Three weeks ago, Stuyvesant participated in the event. Signs were posted around the building a week in advance publicizing the Smokeout and

encouraging students, both smokers and nonsmokers, to take part in it.

On November 18, tables were set up at the first and second floor entrances to the building, offering candy and brochures to students and teachers who chose to participate.

“They can take candy if they take a brochure or if they quit smoking and they tell us that,” said one participant, junior Gizem Özcelik.

Student-made posters and T-shirts bearing witty slogans and pictures against smoking were a common sight around Stuyvesant’s halls as students showed their support for the Smokeout.

In order to participate, stu-

Results of Class of 2005 Graduation Speaker Poll

Jon Stewart
318 votes (54%)

Sasha Cohen
111 votes (19%)

Hillary Clinton
42 votes (7%)

Rudolph Guliani
38 votes (6%)

Donald Trump
23 votes (4%)

Oprah Winfrey
23 votes (4%)

Barack Obama
17 votes (3%)

George Bush
13 votes (2%)

Al Franken
7 votes (1%)

Michael Eisner
0 votes (0%)

Total votes: 593

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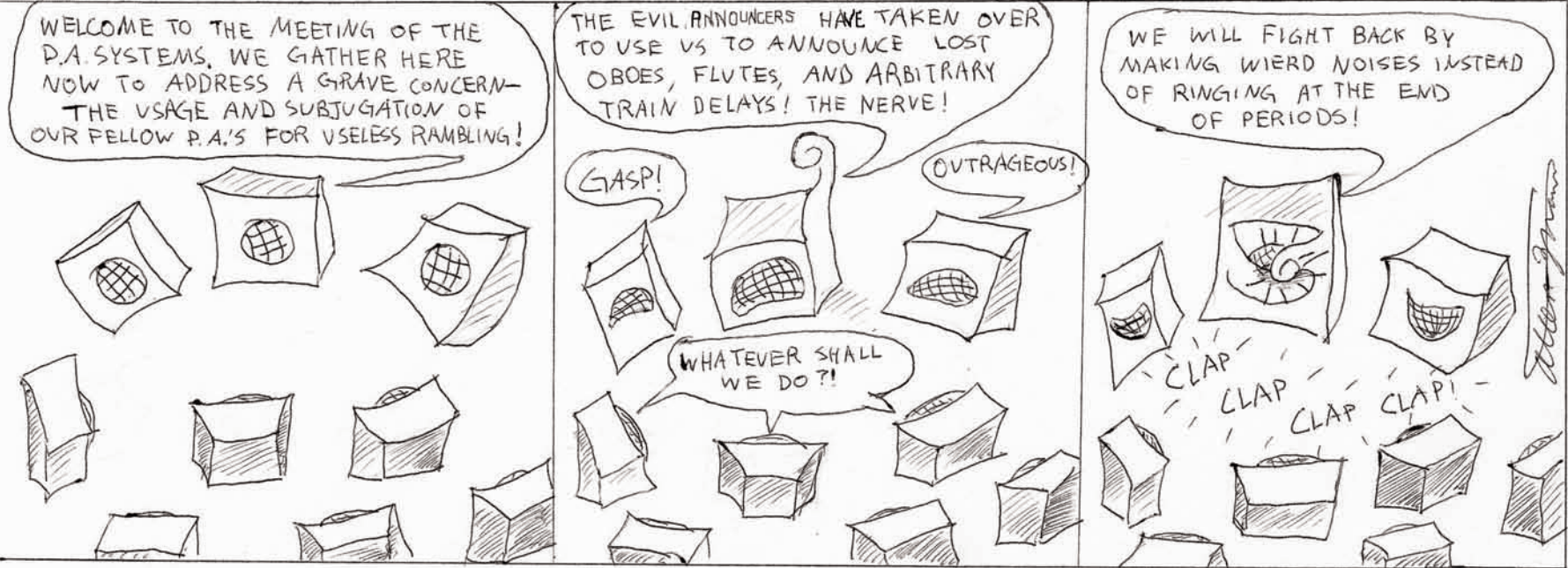
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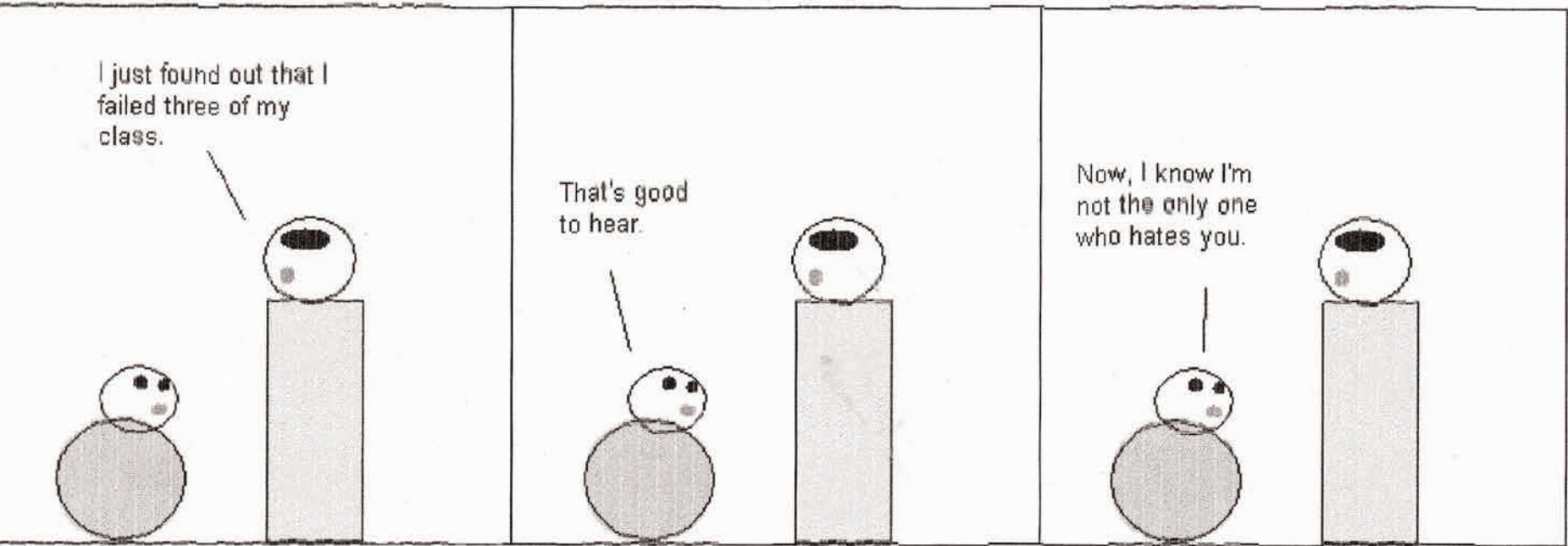
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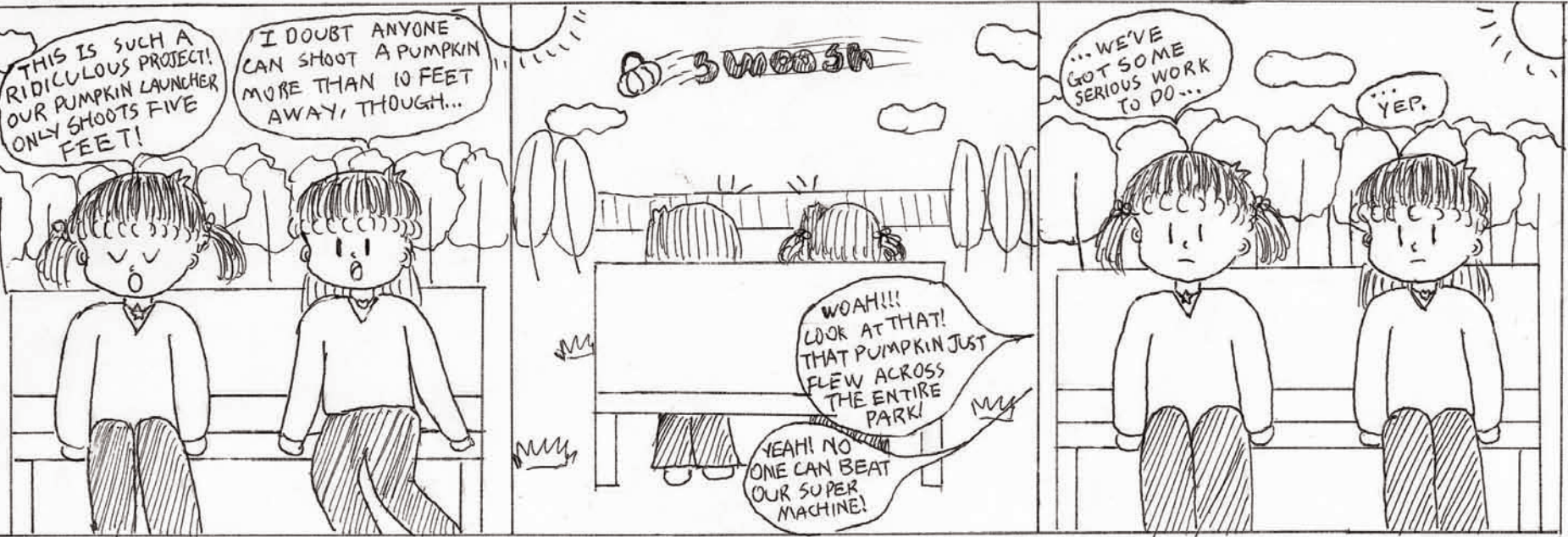
The Great Rebellion By Allen Zhang



Bob and Cornelius By Andrew Munfakh



KETCHUP - THAT PHYSICS PROJECT... Ye Liu



A TINY BIT DISTRICTING BY SARAH ANN HEAD



Editorials and Opinions

Time to Graduate to a New System

Much discord appeared in the selection of the 2005 graduation speaker, as Principal Stanley Teitel didn’t originally agree with the popular student choice from an online poll: Jon Stewart. This poll, set up by the Senior Class President and Vice-President, gave seniors a chance to cast unofficial votes for graduation speaker from a group of 10 candidates. Jon Stewart, leader by a 54% win on the senior class Web site, was not favored by Teitel, in whose power the choice ultimately lies.

Even though Teitel has officially approved the senior class’ choice, he favors Dr. Richard Axel, Nobel Prize Winner and Stuyvesant class of 1963. Stewart does not meet Teitel’s personal preferences for graduation speaker. Teitel enumerated these preferences as a speaker’s affiliation with Stuyvesant or with the academic world, and a reason that the speaker is addressing the senior class.

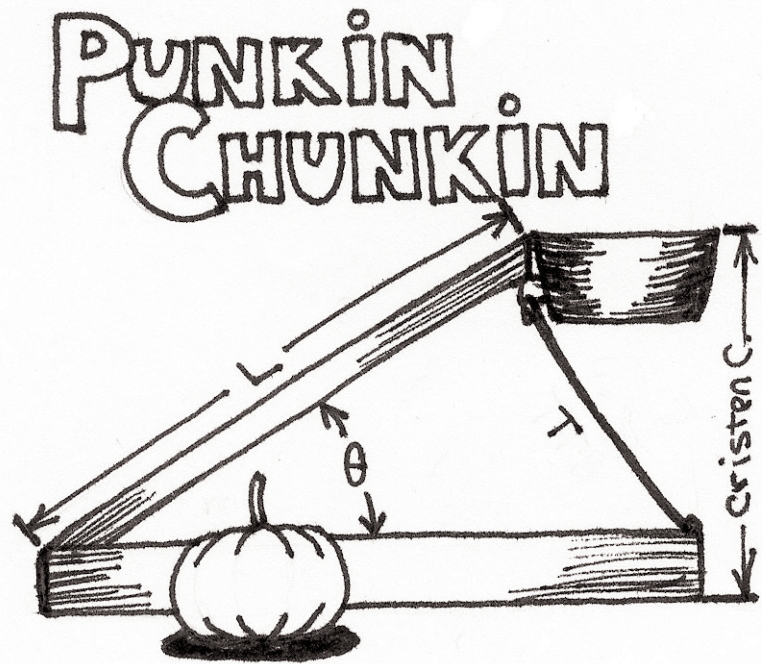
Despite these guidelines, there are no official requirements for choosing the graduation speaker. Without a set standard, Teitel would have had no basis for overturning this year’s senior class candidate. The process needs solidification,

and the guidelines need to be more appropriate than affiliations with academia. Teitel and student representatives must sit down and create an official procedure for graduation speaker selection that takes into account the purpose of the position: to speak meaningfully to the graduating class.

Choosing the graduation speaker necessitates a collaboration of opinions. A vote is a particularly effective way for seniors to consolidate majority opinion into a single candidate. The administration should give serious weight to the senior class’ choice, both when picking a graduation speaker and when working out set requirements for the decision process.

In the making of these requirements, seniors’ input is essential. Graduation speakers direct their words to the graduating class, and not to the administration. Seniors have the right to a speaker that they respect, and choose to hear. It is they who benefit from the commencement address. The senior class, more than anyone else, should be able to shape the celebration of the culmination of its high school years.

The Ancient Art of Hurling Pumpkins



By BORIS GRINSHPUN

A couple of weeks ago, weapons of destruction were brought to our school by groups of students. Security guards and teachers watched calmly as these students set up their machines on the third floor. Other students cheered as they dodged to avoid being hit by the flying ammunition—plastic pumpkins. These weren’t really weapons, and their purpose wasn’t actually destruction. The contraptions resembled medieval war machines, but were actually pumpkin launchers, built by Research Physics classes participating in the Punkin Chunkin event. In this event, modeled after an annual competition in Delaware, the three Research Physics classes split into groups and built pumpkin launchers, the most common designs being the trebuchet, a device using a lever to throw objects long distances, and the catapult, an arm that is held down to cause tension and then released to launch

projectiles. The goal of each group was to launch its pumpkin the greatest distance. This project was not merely about launching pumpkins. It was about demonstrating physics lessons in action, and it made for a great practical application of what we are learning in class. The complex designs of the machines utilized physics concepts like projectile motion, energy, and rotational motion. Building these machines also presented a historical lesson. We acquired respect for those who built and operated them in archaic times. They had to use precise calculations to launch large boulders accurately and over large distances, while avoiding the accidents encountered during our Punkin Chunkin, such as shooting plastic projectiles straight up or backwards. The historical role of physics is a side of the science that teachers often neglect to cover. Punkin Chunkin has an especially dear meaning for the groups who were not merely onlookers, but actually partici-

pated in the competition. Aside from the educational benefits, they were allowed to team up with friends and work together to build machines that they could be proud of. Then they skipped a double period of physics to go to the third floor and launch pumpkins as they demonstrated the creation that they had made using what they had learned in class. Junior Cindy Guan, who launched her own pumpkin in the Punkin Chunkin event, was very enthusiastic in describing the event. “You get to see what you learned in class directly, instead of just seeing teacher demos. How great is it to miss class, compete with your friends, and actively learn at the same time?” To add to the success of this competition, a spirit of kinship was strong during the event. Though groups competed against each other, there was little rivalry among the participants. Everyone eagerly chatted with one another and cheered when a pumpkin was launched, whether it hit the window or only traveled 15 feet. Guan said, “It was laid-back. People supported each other and gave each other ideas.” Junior Long Cheng believes that the groups were less competitive among each other partly because the project involved great personal effort. He said, “There was a lot of competition personally, to see how far you can go. But also, we didn’t know how far we should go, so we were trying to do the best we could. That’s the competition.” The Punkin Chunkin was an event that brought students together to learn real-life applications of physics without promoting overcompetition. It brought out the creativity, knowledge, and good will of the Research classes. Building weapons of war may very well become a great Stuyvesant tradition.

The Spectator

The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper



The pulse of the student body

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* Managing Board Members

Re: Boys’ Track Sweeps City Championships And Hitmen Fence Their Way To City Title

To the Editor:

Last week I picked up *The Spectator* and noticed something disturbing. Despite the fact that the fencing team won city championships, and the Boys Cross-Country swept four divisions of city championships, making New York City history, *The Spectator* barely featured them in the Sports section. What more must our student athletes accomplish in order to be deemed worthy of coverage from *The Spectator*?

Two articles denoted the wins of the two teams. The fencing team was buried in the Sports section, and the Cross-Country Team’s name was misnamed as the Track team. ‘Track’ is a completely different sport.

Despite making New York City high school athletic history, neither team had a single picture in the entire paper. *The Spectator* did not even send a photographer to attend the Championships. On the other hand, the Girls Volleyball team had an article that spanned three pages, and 7 pictures. Though Girls Volleyball came in second place and was extremely deserving of praise, Fencing and Cross-Country had won city championships. How could the only two fall teams to win city championships receive so little

recognition from the school paper?

Making this error even more ironic is a quote from the article “Hitmen Fence Their Way To City Title” itself. “Now that they have won the city championship the team would like the Stuyvesant community to take notice....”With a championship team like this in our school it might be time to appreciate them a bit more.”

I am not accusing any writers, editors, or other staff of *The Spectator*, or members of any athletic team of doing wrong. I do not know where responsibility for this fault lies, but no matter what the reason it is time for this to change.

The Spectator should strive to support all teams at Stuy, especially successful ones. Other teams, other writers, other letters, and articles in *The Spectator* itself have all pointed out this problem. An apology is in order to all teams *The Spectator* has neglected to properly represent, especially the Boys Cross-Country Team and Fencing team for their win at City Championships.

Sincerely, Nick Greenough writing for Sixty New York City Champion Athletes (The Boys Cross-Country and the Fencing Teams)

CORRECTIONS

- Katherine Mets was given the title of head librarian in the article “Library Restrictions Leave Students in the Hallway” in Issue 6. There is no head librarian.
- In the article “Westinghouse Semifinalists Vie for \$100,000 Prize” in Issue 5, Davi Geirgher’s name was misspelled.
- In the article “Track Sweeps City Championships” in Issue 6, Dave Silberberg’s name was misspelled.
- In Issue 6, the picture with the “Jahstix” article was not of Jahstix.
- Naomi Gordon-Loebl took the picture of Susan Rubin in Issue 6.

Opinions

How College Invaded My Thanksgiving

the diary of a mad senior

As is true of most things, it started over the turkey. My third cousin approached me while I watched my grandma carve the Thanksgiving turkey.

"So, Naomi, you're a senior this year, hm?"

By this my cousin meant, "So, have you decided where you're applying to college yet?" by which she meant, "Tell me exactly what your plans are for the next four years," which inevitably means, "LET'S TALK ABOUT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE."

I contemplated possible excuses for escape. An insatiable craving for hummus? A sudden bladder overload? A faked epileptic seizure? But noting that I was trapped between the refrigerator and a menacing pile of turkey scraps I decided to take it in stride.

"Yeah," I said.

"You must be applying to college now," she said. "You know, I went to Harvard."

And so it began. By the end of the evening I had discovered that not one, not two, but seven of my 25 fellow Thanksgiving-goers (I go to Stuyvesant—that's more than 25%!) were Harvard alumni. Some relative who shall remain unnamed thought she'd be really funny and put four of them at my table (two more joined us for dessert).

It was fun. We talked about SATs, huge Intro to Economics classes, and Nabokov (the medical student to my right, prompted by a sighting of my Post-It-note-peppered copy of *Pale Fire*, chuckled loudly and said, "Oh



gosh, remember when our entire suite read that in one weekend?"). What a party. In fact, it was such a party that I just kept finding it necessary to leave the table to refill my plate (a dangerous getaway tactic that resulted in hideous bloating later in the

day).

Maybe I'm a purist. Call me old-fashioned, or even a reactionary. Apologies abound from this stuffing-stuffed senior, believe me. But honestly, Thanksgiving should not be about college! I mean, haven't

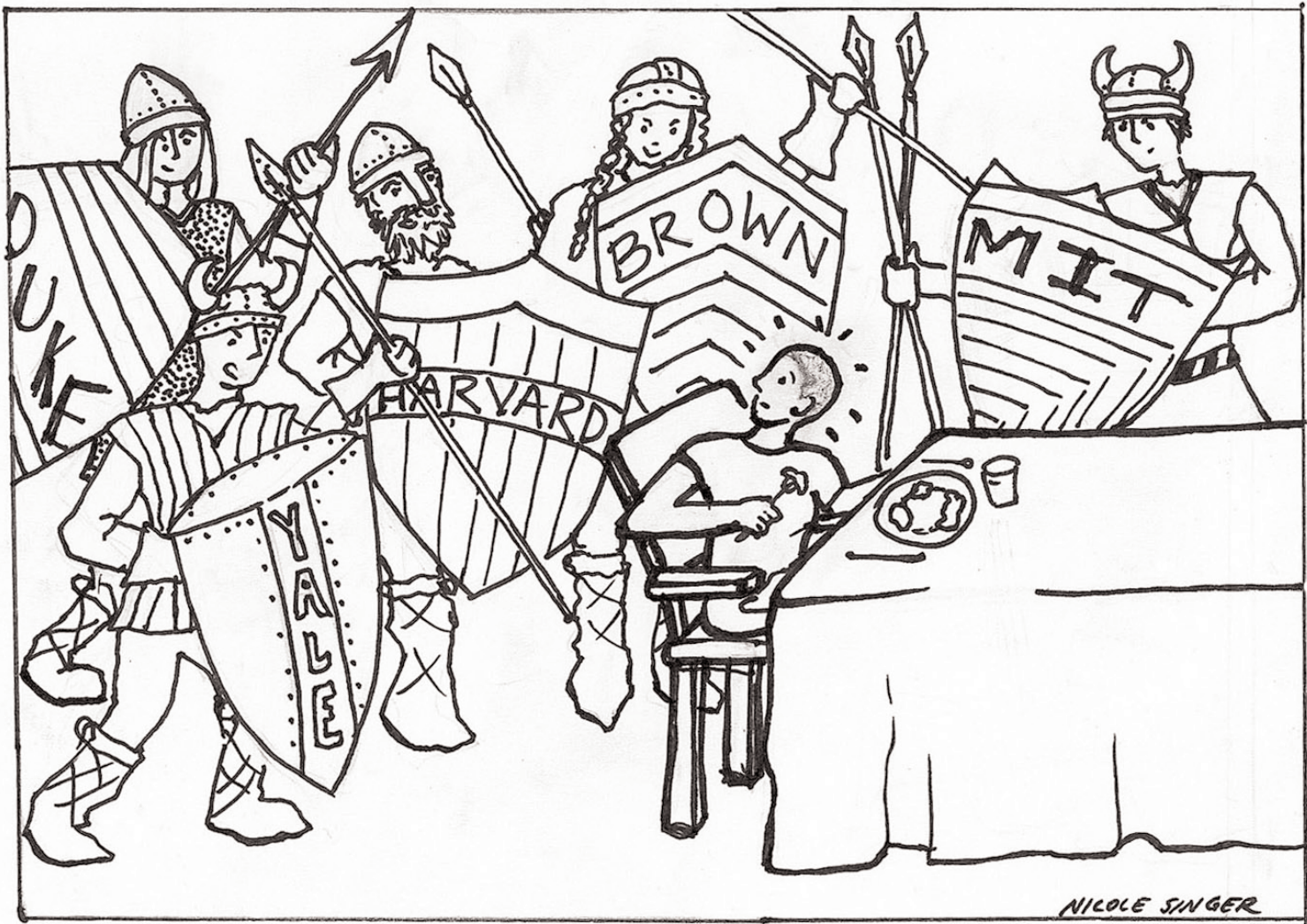
we had enough already?

Every day I get an e-mail from some school that wants me to come to its open house or visit its campus. Every day I get a letter from some admissions officer who wants to tell me, Naomi, that based on the information he's received about me from CollegeBoard.com, he thinks that Blah-Blah University is a perfect match for me! I shudder to think of the paper (whole forests probably!) that has been wasted in soliciting applications from United States high school seniors. In fact, the entire culture of college spam is eerily parallel to the culture of Internet porn spam. Maybe they have the same marketing agents or something.

The point is this: I like eating candied yams without talking about student-faculty ratios between bites. And I like eating loads of food and hearing that collective sigh in the room when everyone has overeaten and is regretting that last serving of corn. I don't love Thanksgiving—not even close—but it feels unfair. Thanksgiving has already been commercialized, so why does it have to be college-ized, too?

After dessert, I had a choice: Stay for more nerd banter or head downstairs for *Shrek 2*. As is true in most showdowns, the green ogres came out on top.

— Naomi Gordon-Loebl
Photo by Corbin Laedlein



Transcripts Should Not Gain Weight

By JACKIE HSIEH

On November 4, 2004, students who logged onto the Stuyvesant homepage (www.stuy.edu) were greeted by shocking news. As posted by Assistant Principal of Technology Services Edward Wong, the Web site read: "...as of September 2004, all A[dvanced] P[lacement] courses will be weighted 1.1 and will be averaged as such in their transcript."

Initial responses were marked by confusion, and often based on an incorrect grasp of what the policy entails. "I'm kind of confused," said junior Jacob Arluck. "If you get 10 points added on, obviously that's a good thing."

Unfortunately, this may not be the case. In reality, an AP class might be weighted as a tenth more than one regular credit course on transcripts. In addition, because some AP courses are indeed extremely difficult, this new policy will not work for the students' benefit. Because of the increased difficulty of the courses, it is possible that the grades received in AP classes may be lower than those

received in other courses. The increased weight of the class punishes students for taking AP courses, as their net average can be dragged down. Arluck commented about this added weight. "It's only good if your AP average is higher than your average for other classes," he said.

Added emphasis on AP courses also creates a notion that other difficult courses in our school are not equally worthy of the added weight. Honors mathematics classes, for example, also offer rather demanding coursework. Moreover, many classes are not even labeled "honors" or "AP" but are just as challenging. Such a class is fourth year French, which is so rigorous that many students who choose to take it are prepared for the AP test. Though the new policy only directly affects grades, it takes away from the importance of other challenging classes.

Senior Vanessa Kwan agrees that the policy is unjust in evaluating the amount of effort a student puts into his or her work. "It varies so much depending on classes and students that it can't be a valid determining factor in

[our] grades, especially in our school where grades are so important," she said.

On the bright side, students will have to be more careful in evaluating their decision to take a difficult AP course. Yet the new policy also encourages an emphasis on grades, which is exactly what many of us are striving to avoid. AP English teacher and grade advisor Jonathan Weil understands the negative effects of added stress. Weil said, "[The new policy] encourages grade consciousness which I don't think is good for education."

With or without the policy, students still have the obligation to think before taking an AP class. However, those who take on the responsibilities of these courses should not be, in any way, punished for their efforts. After all, when students successfully complete a semester of rigorous work, whether for an AP class or not, the rewards reaped should be more than just the number grade. And hopefully, another policy will come along to trim the excess weight on our AP grades and remove the burden that has been added to our backs.

Opinionated Teachers Cross the Line

By JON EDELMAN

Stuyvesant is a liberal school. It's located in the middle of a liberal city, in one of the few states that went blue this past election. The two mock presidential elections held at Stuy this fall went to Kerry and Nader. Anything else would be unexpected. So, it's normal to hear some Bush-bashing from the Stuyvesant community, even now that the election is well over.

What is unexpected is for someone to taunt the Pledge of Allegiance in class in front of students. Junior Shelley Njoo witnessed this twisting of words in class, as the speaker pledged allegiance to Kerry, and taking a wish to "dump Bush" at the

end. As with much Bush-bashing, it was obnoxious. It was disrespectful to students who care about the Pledge. Furthermore, it doesn't come from another kid. It came from a teacher.

Stuy's faculty has the political diversity of the student body. Caught up in the hotly contested presidential election, some of the liberal faculty decided that the pretense of impartiality could be brushed aside during class. They came out strongly against President George Bush.

School provides the tools and knowledge with which students can make their own decisions later in life. School is not intended to direct these deci-

The occasional Republican students constantly get shot down for voicing their opinions.

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Opinions

Opinionated Teachers
Cross the Line

continued from page 7

sions for us. With the knowledge that they were preaching to the choir, some teachers have stepped way over the line with almost constant criticism of Bush.

Senior Alex Malikan, co-president of the Republican Club, reported that around election time one teacher told him that there would soon be a military draft that included women. Another announced that the reason that Colin Powell resigned was that he experienced racism in the Bush cabinet, stemming from Bush’s conservative base. A substitute teacher warned the girls in Malikan’s class against getting pregnant, claiming that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned shortly.

I listened as a history teacher compared the situation of early America, along with the mishap of the Articles of Confederation, to the country’s present political situation. He ultimately concluded we were worse off now. While these comments engendered hearty laughs and renewed interest from most of the class, they left the few conservative students uncomfortable and embarrassed.

While teachers often later apologize for bringing personal politics to class, or for making

anyone uncomfortable, they do the same thing days later. In our predominantly liberal school, there are few people to call them on this; the occasional Republican students constantly get shot down for voicing their opinions.

Of course teachers can have political beliefs, and are perfectly free to express them. Without beliefs, the teachers would essentially be robots, and school would be very boring. Further, we, as high school students, are mature enough not to take everything each teacher says as the gospel truth.

But no matter how passionately one holds them, political beliefs are only personal opinions. They should be expressed as such—not as facts, and not as part of a lesson. Using an acknowledged personal political opinion to stimulate class discussion is effective teaching. But inciting a one-sided, anti-Bush diatribe perverts school’s purpose. No longer is it an agent of information. It is a propaganda machine.

This past presidential election was very heated, very important, and very close. We have a faculty well-informed, full of strong opinions. But when teaching devolves into Bush-bashing, our education is the thing that suffers. The democratic donkey is reduced to a jackass.

Some teachers have stepped way over the line with almost constant criticism of Bush.

Junior Ramblings

Seeking Beyond the First Impression

As a freshman, I attended a few of the Seekers’ Christian Fellowship Thursday meetings, out of a hope that I would meet some people with whom I could identify. As a Christian at Stuyvesant, I was looking for a welcoming community where I could celebrate my faith.

There was something memorable about those Seekers’ meetings that put me off. I remember the first meeting I attended, and the not-so-subtle ethnic trend that emerged as people came in after 10th period.

Everyone there was Asian.

And I don’t just mean a significant majority—*everyone* was of Asian descent. From the 80 or so students who turned up for the meeting, a sole African-American student stood out among us—and he was damn proud of it.

This gave me the uncomfortable feeling that many were members of the club not because they wanted to be part of a Christian fellowship, but because it was a place where Asians hung out. I sensed that the students there were not involved in Seekers for the right reasons. It made me sad: The Christian community I had hoped for didn’t seem to be present.

So I stopped going.

Where were all of the Hispanic Christians, all of the African-American Christians, and all of the Caucasian Christians? Where were they? A

Christian fellowship is about religion, which supposedly overcomes the boundaries of race. Seekers wasn’t supposed to be like other clubs. But I



Photo courtesy of Han Gwon-Lun

I saw myself as the unprejudiced one...but... I was the one being prejudiced.

didn’t see it as being a Christian fellowship; it was more of a toned down “Azn Bar” that met every Thursday. The lack of attendees from other ethnic groups turned me off. I felt that Seekers was a farce.

Two years later, I look back at the ease with which I left Seekers, and I regret it. I have been to Jesus Day and

seen how empowered the Seekers are by their faith. I have seen them work to try and change the “Asian-only” label attached to their organization. They are people who care, and they are trying their best to improve Seekers. Its members are not being hampered by stereotypes, and they are coming together based on belief and community. The changes are small but significant.

I had deluded myself into thinking that I understood the situation, judging the book by its cover, and letting this define my feelings. I was self-righteous. I saw myself as the unprejudiced one, not going to Seekers because it was dominated by Asian students. But by basing my decision on such a shallow impression, I was the one being prejudiced.

I think that all of us, at one time or another, are given to bad judgment, especially with regard to racial similarities or differences. First impressions, when not revisited, are lasting impressions.

When it comes to race in Stuy, many students may have missed out on great opportunities for petty reasons, similar to my assumption about and emphasis on race. I know I have missed out on a possibly life-changing experience because of foolish prejudice.

I should go back to Seekers.

– Han Gwon-Lun

STC CALENDAR

December 10 & 11: “Once Upon a Mattress” performs in Murray Kahn Theater
(December 10th – 6:30 P.M. & December 11th – 7:00 P.M.)

December 13 & 14: “Raisin in the Sun” auditions

December 16 & 17: “The Last of the Red Hot Lovers” performs in the teacher’s cafeteria on fifth floor
(December 16th – 5:00 P.M. & December 17th – 5:30 P.M.)

December 17: Interviews for Assistant Director and Producers of “Into the Woods”

December 20 & 21: Auditions for “Into the Woods”

Tickets for “The Last of the Red Hot Lovers” and “Once Upon a Mattress” are on sale at www.stuytix.com

Arts & Entertainment

Stuy Musicians Being All They Can Be

By MELISSA COLORADO

Stuyvesant senior Saachi Sachdev won a type of award that is quite unique to Stuyvesant—the opportunity to play a solo with the United States Army Band, the celebrated Pershing's Own, as the finalist in the 2004 Young Artist Competition.

The competition hinged entirely on recordings of the students playing the five-minute solo "Airs de Ballet d'Ascanio" (Camille Saint-Saëns), which was performed on the flute by Sachdev in the "A Salute to the American Soldier" concert on Saturday, November 20, 2004 at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall.

"It was an amazing experience, an honor, to be playing with them," said Sachdev.

As one of four semi-finalists, junior and trombonist Daniel Jaffe accompanied the Band during the latter portion of the concert, and said, "The United States Army Band is probably the best concert band that exists. They sound incredible."

**"The United States Army Band is probably the best concert band that exists. They sound incredible."
—Daniel Jaffe, junior**

Sachdev and Jaffe were surprised by and grateful for the Army Band's hospitality. "We were treated like celebrities," said Sachdev, and she and Jaffe even got the chance to meet one: CBS Sunday morning news anchor Charles Osgood. In addition, they were treated to a luncheon with Colonel Gary F. Lamb, Leader and Commander of the Army Band, whose retirement became effective after the concert.

The concert was only one of Sachdev's several musical

achievements. She and Jaffe are members of Stuyvesant's symphonic band and will be participating in the fall musical, "Once Upon a Mattress," and performed in the All-State Symphonic Band in Rochester, New York in early December. Sachdev has had years of experience with the flute that began before her time at Stuyvesant. At the age of nine, she began to play the instrument, selecting it for "its delicacy and gracefulness." She is the first chair flutist for the Staten Island Senior Concert Band, and has performed brilliantly in the New York State School Musical Association (NYSSMA) festivals. Interestingly enough, Sachdev wants to become a pediatric neurologist, and only wants to pursue music as a hobby of sorts.

Jaffe, the Vice President of the Stuyvesant Classical Ensembles Club, has similar feelings toward music: "Music is not much more than a hobby, though I do enjoy it, and it is a source of income. I imagine that in the future I will continue play-

ing in community bands, and playing other gigs on the side." He currently participates in many small brass quintets and quartets, in addition to the All-City Orchestra and Concert and Jazz Bands as co-principal trombone. Jaffe has formed a Klezmer (Jewish folk) band that regularly entertains at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, as well. Though Jaffe had to abandon the trombone in fourth grade because his "arms were too short," he returned to it in seventh grade, and is also an adroit euphonium-, tuba-, and French horn-player.

Hard Work Promises a Fairy Tale: Inside the Crews of "Once Upon a Mattress"



Rachael Scharf / The Spectator

Of her experience directing "Once Upon a Mattress," English teacher and Faculty Director Christy Close said, "And together they rode to the castle Voondebar, and they lived happily ever."

By NIKKI BOGOPOLSKAYA

December. A month of upcoming holidays, quickly approaching finals, and the breaking out of winter gear. For many Stuyvesant students, it also represents a culmination of months of hard work with this year's performance of the fall musical.

This year's musical is "Once Upon a Mattress," written by Jay Thompson, Marshall Barer, and Dean Fuller. One of the Stuyvesant Theater Community's four annual productions, the show has been arousing much excitement onstage, backstage, and among

potential audience members. All participants in "Once Upon a Mattress" are convinced that, upon the show's performances on Friday, December 10 and Saturday, December 11, all the hard work they have put in for the past two months will finally pay off.

Junior and Assistant Student Director Liz Livingstone said, "Everything about it, excluding a bit of stress, is just great. The show itself is gonna be awesome. We have a great cast and great people working on every aspect of it. When the show all comes together it will be so good."

According to Livingstone,

this show will be particularly successful because the cast has meshed so well. Junior Molly Ruben-Long, who will be playing Lady Rowena in the production, agrees. Although she has had much previous experience in Stuy theater, she remains unjaded about it, saying that "['Once Upon a Mattress'] is gonna be fabulous. It's crazy how well we have all gotten along. I think when you put such awesome work together and we all put so much into it, how can it not?"

In typical Stuy fashion, much crucial work has been

continued on page 11

Stars Among Us: Marisa Smith

By COURTNEY CHIN
with additional reporting by
PIYALI KUNDU

From acting to directing, junior Marisa Smith has become the quintessential Stuyvesant thespian, embodying the well-rounded and dedicated nature of a true theatrical talent.

Theater has always been a passion for Smith: "I've been involved in theater since I was seven. I started out taking musical theater classes at a place called Tada!. While I was doing that, I began taking voice lessons and piano lessons." She has participated in "14 shows over a period of five or six years." By that point, she was "pretty serious" about theater.

In her early theater days, Smith was involved with a number of prestigious people and programs. "As a kid, I worked some with people like Ricki Lake and a number of other TV talents who were alumni of the theater program I was in. I did backer productions [shows put

together for prospective financiers, or "backers"] . . . for people like Stephen Schwartz, who is relatively famous in the theater world for writing musicals like 'Pippin' and 'Children

**"She's not just neurotic. She's a hypochondriac."
—Marisa Smith, junior**

of Eden.' Some of the kids I was working with were in shows on Broadway," she said.

Smith was inspired to continue participating in theater when she began attending Stuyvesant. During her freshman year, for example, she was

involved in the Spring Comedy, "You Can't Take It With You."

"I think I had always planned to continue doing theater at Stuy, as a way to do something [I] liked, but also as a way to meet other kids," said Smith.

Smith's sophomore year seems to have been the most active and experimental. She portrayed Bianca in the Fall Musical, "Kiss Me, Kate," and was also involved in "The Actor's Nightmare" as part of the One Act Festival.

Smith got her feet wet in a new area, as co-director of Soph-Frosh SING! with then-sophomore Joey DiColandrea, who said that she is "certainly dedicated, absolutely a perfectionist."

Smith seemed to view SING! as a necessary growing period in her theater career: "That was a challenging experience. It was a huge task as my directorial debut. It was a major learning experience, probably the biggest lesson being in how

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Ashik Siddique / The Spectator

Arts & Entertainment

Dreams Come to Stuy in the Shape of a “Raisin”

By MAREK MERY

“I’ve always liked the theme of dreams, because dreams are what keep us going.” This is why English teacher Philip Mott has taken on the task of directing this year’s Winter Drama, Lorraine Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun,” which received its name from Langston Hughes’ poem “Dream Deferred.”

Making its debut in 1959, “A Raisin in the Sun” was the first play written by an African-American woman to be produced on Broadway. The play wowed audiences during its incredible 530-performance run, and it even won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play. It was recently renewed on Broadway, with a 15-week run during the spring and summer of this year. The production boasted an all-star cast, including Broadway and television veteran Phylicia Rashad as Lena Younger, and actor, rapper, and clothing

mogul Sean “P. Diddy” Combs as Walter Lee Younger.

Walter, a hopeful entrepreneur, is always searching for a “quick fix” to his family’s problems. He lives with his wife and son, Ruth and Travis, and his mother, Lena, in Chicago’s South Side. The play traces the African-American family’s struggle for survival and their quest for the American dream in the racially tense 1950s.

Mott said, “You can’t go wrong with this play. It’s just so well-written, and the issues speak to so much of where we are today.” It takes place at the threshold of the Civil Rights Movement, and,

according to Mott, it portrays the Younger family as it is “restricted by race in education and cultural opportunities.”

“A Raisin in the Sun” should be a fresh breath in the Stuyvesant theater world, straying from the typical Shakespearean Winter Drama. One aspect of the play that has caused significant controversy has been casting, considering that there is only one white character. However, senior and Managing Director of the Stuyvesant Theater Community (STC) Becky Dinerstein said, “Our goal is to encourage a population of Stuy students who do not nor-

“A Raisin in the Sun” should be a fresh breath in the Stuyvesant theater world, straying from the typical Shakespearean Winter Drama.

Top 5 Songs for a Day in the Life of a Stuy Kid

By COLETTE BIERVLIET-SCHRANZ and STACEY LEE

Time of Day: Early Morning
Pearl Jam – “All Those Yesterdays”

After so little sleep and so much work, who doesn’t feel exhausted? It can be difficult to get up, go on, and keep on smiling, especially in an overachieving atmosphere where you feel like nothing you’ve done is quite enough. Sometimes it’s hard not to give up—to forget everything and escape. Nevertheless, day after day, we shove our personal needs to one side, telling ourselves, “There’s time enough to rest tonight.” So put away your worries and your anxiety, and wash away “All Those Yesterdays.”

Time of Day: Late Afternoon
Simple Plan – “Welcome to My Life”

It’s the end of the day. You go home, your caffeine-induced high is over, and all of your forced energy is drained after a very long day. Your significant other doesn’t know you exist, you have a cold, and your test results are back—but they’re not as hot as you thought they would be. So your mother screams at you until you run inside your room, and slam your door “with the radio turned up so loud / that no one hears you screaming.” Then of course there’s hours of homework and another sleepless night to look

forward to. “Has life got you down? Do you feel like you’re beaten but the kicks keep coming?” Listen to these clichéd but ever-so-accurate lyrics, get your anger out, and then go back and hit the books.

Time of Day: Evening
Annie – “Tomorrow”
The minutes tick by—a little Instant Messaging over here, a little TV over there, and before

Time of Day: Late Night
Barenaked Ladies – “Who Needs Sleep”
Contrary to popular belief,

So put away your worries and your anxiety, and wash away “All Those Yesterdays.”

you know it, its 10:00 P.M. and you haven’t started your homework. Well, there’s always tomorrow to study for that chem test, and tomorrow to finish (and start) that English paper. And even if you don’t finish it tomorrow, there’s the tomorrow after that and all subsequent tomorrows to do all the work that’s due... one of those “tomorrows.” Maybe it’s this procrastination that leads to the signature tired gazes of the majority of Stuy’s population, or maybe it’s the overwhelming

the favorite topic of conversation for Stuy students is not “I got ANOTHER 100 on my math test” or even “My English teacher likes ME best.” Rather, it is the infamous “I bet I got less sleep than you last night.” After a hard day of classes and demanding work, one would think that he could look forward to going home and falling into a nice, deep slumber. Instead, Stuy students are plagued with the excessive homework from each teacher who believes that his or her class is the most important.

mally feel welcome or encouraged within the theater community to get up and get involved in this magnificent play. We will, as always, cast on merit. The best actor for the role, regardless of race, will be cast.”

The play is in good hands—Mott is directing a Stuy production for the third time and will be joined by junior student director Deke Hill, as well as juniors Erica Anderson and Jessie Wang as the producers. Mott is optimistic about the production, particularly about the ability of Stuy students to portray the characters, who are “multifaceted, powerful, and full of energy.” He is confident that the play will appeal to the Stuyvesant community as well, saying, “All of us have had dreams that we have postponed, dreams for ourselves, our family, community, and the world. ‘A Raisin in the Sun’ will be appreciated by everyone who values the human spirit.”

Not to mention the disgusting amount of extracurriculars that everyone is “required” to do. Or the extreme amount of studying which is crucial. We have all had the “Chapter read and lesson learned” only to lie in bed and realize that sleep is a luxury which we no longer have time for, and must therefore be pushed aside to make time for studying. And what’s the point of not sleeping if you can’t brag about it? “Who needs sleep? / Well, you’re never gonna get it. / Who needs sleep? / Tell me, what’s that for?”

Time: Always
John Mayer – “No Such Thing”
In a world where you are reduced to Delaney cards and four-digit ID numbers, it can be hard to stand out from everyone else. Everyone is telling you to do everything in a very certain way (think drafting). This song describes perfectly the way in which Stuy students can break the mold to which we’re expected to conform. No, we are not all 50-pound bag-carrying, pocket-protector-wearing math geniuses—we are individuals. This song describes the ways in which “They love to tell you / Stay inside the lines,” but “Something’s better on the other side.” So when you feel particularly robotic, remember—”There’s no such thing as the real world / Just a lie you got to rise above.”

What It Means to Be More Chill

By RAISA OSTAPENKO

The most rewarding accomplishments arise at the most unanticipated moments. Ned Vizzini, the author of *Teen Angst? Naaah...* and *Be More Chill* and a Stuy graduate from the class of 1999, recounted his humble beginnings as a writer and his current brush with Hollywood in an interview with *The Spectator*.

Ned Vizzini did not begin his career in journalism on *The Spectator* as numerous Stuyvesant students do. Instead, his career was launched when he was 15 years old. It was initially a consequence of his fascination with the *New York Press*, which he would pick up each day from green boxes on the street as he left Stuyvesant for home. “I really was blown away by the quality of these first-person confessional essays that were published in the *New York Press*,” Vizzini said. Although most of the articles published in the *New York Press* were oriented around adult themes such as sex and drugs, Vizzini nevertheless decided to submit his own article. He assumed that if he compensated for the absence of sex and drugs in his life by writing about snot and vomit, the article would be printed. Several weeks later, the editor of the *New York Press* responded to Vizzini. As Vizzini recalls, “He asked me to write shorter pieces. I did, and they were published.”

Vizzini continued writing for the *New York Press* for several years, and has also written for the *New York Times Magazine* and *Newsday*, although he has now transferred his concentration from journalism to writing novels.

Stuyvesant certainly did prove to be an inspirational environment for Vizzini in numerous ways. Fondly reminiscing about the individuals at Stuyvesant who encouraged him to continue pursuing his career as a writer, Vizzini spoke about a particular English teacher. “Ms. [Kimberly] Khoury let me sit in front of the class one time and read one of my stories to the group. That was a really wonderful time for me because I really got a chance to see what it was like to read in front of people.”

Although the incidents in his novel may present the “nerd trying to break out” image of Vizzini on a golden platter, Vizzini recognizes his school days as being pretty conservative. He did not dismiss his responsibilities as a student and received good grades. He also made certain to expose himself to many different social circles, mingling with “people who worked very hard at school and people who did not care at all for it.”

Eventually, Vizzini’s pieces for the *New York Press* evolved into a collection of anecdotes that were later published into his first book, *Teen Angst? Naaah....* All of the incidents in his first book were accurate;

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Arts & Entertainment

Hard Work Promises a Fairy Tale: Inside the Crews of “Once Upon a Mattress”



From left, Assistant Student Director Liz Livingstone, Faculty Director Christy Close and Student Director Leona Rosenblum. “Ms. Close has directed the musical before so she’s taught me a lot of stuff about theater in general and Liz has worked backstage before,” Rosenblum said. “They’re both coming from a different place than I am so we complement each other.”

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pushed to the last minute. Said senior and Tech Director Theo Polan, “There have been a lot of organizational problems both on the faculty/administration end of things, and the student end of things, but we’ve worked through it all and are making good progress. For a while it looked like we might finish everything ahead of schedule, but now it’s looking more and more like the final touches will be added sometime during the first intermission, which is normal.”

Polan’s expectations for the show seem easily reachable. “Hopefully each time a new piece of the set is revealed, people will be impressed and that’s it. Basically, if anybody notices tech more than simply liking the set, we screwed something up. If I get no feedback after the show, I’ll be happy.”

According to junior and Co-Costume Director Brooke Marlin, the Tech Crew is not alone in falling behind schedule. “So far,” she said, “The work on costumes has been somewhat

slow. I think it’s safe to say we’re a little behind. Not behind-behind, but not exactly comfortable with time.” She, like Polan, does not worry about this affecting the success of the premiere. “The time thing isn’t a big issue because we’re never on time. I know that the stuff will get done, so given that, I think the show will turn out very well. Of course you say that for every show, that this one is going to be better than all the others, but we’re like cheese. We get better with time,” said Marlin.

“Once Upon A Mattress,” which is based on Hans Christian Anderson’s story “The Princess and the Pea,” has provided the crews with a lot to work with. According to Alexa Yim, senior and Co-Costume Director, “‘Mattress’ is a costumer’s dream because it’s a fairy tale. There aren’t many time period restrictions so I can go crazy in terms of designs.”

Marlin emphasizes that she wants the costumes to dazzle. “That’s exactly what I want them to do, dazzle, because we put a lot of work and even emotion into each one. They’re like

works of art to us. We get really attached.”

The same goes for Polan, who said, “The most complicated thing we’re doing for this show is building two 15-foot semi-circular towers, which hopefully won’t fall over on anyone.”

With less than a week, at press time, left until the show, hopes are high. Senior and Chorus Director Tina Thomas is anxious. “When the vocal music and the instrumentation come together, everyone can feel the music and magic in the air, no matter how corny it may sound. There have been times when I don’t get home until eight [P.M.]. But when I hear the music put together, I’ll know all my work is worth it.”

Stuy students have been anticipating this show as well. Junior Lauren Chan said, “I’ve seen Stuy shows before and they’ve been great, but this one just has everyone involved so excited that I’m sure there’s gonna be something special about it. The only question now is whether to see it Friday or Saturday.”

Stars Among Us: Marisa Smith

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not to direct. After that I was somewhat reluctant to jump back into directing, but I’m so glad that I did.”

This past summer, Smith attended a summer program at Circle in the Square Theater Conservatory, which also hosts professional training programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre. Smith describes it as a “boot camp for actors.” She said, “I had classes Monday through Friday, nine to six, and then I had rehearsals with my scene partners, et cetera, for hours after classes and on weekends.”

According to Smith, of all the dance, singing interpretation, and acting technique classes, one of her favorite classes was a physical acting class taught by Ken Schatz. He served as both a teacher and mentor for Smith throughout the program. She described him as “absolutely sensational. He was one of the most involved and dedicated teachers I’ve ever had. But I think that even though I learned volumes from him in class, what made him so amazing was what I learned from him outside of class. He was an incredible mentor for me. I’m kind of struggling with what I want to do with my life and he understood that, and was really helpful to me in sorting it all out. He also was just brilliant.”

Smith applied what she learned from Schatz and others at the summer program and her Soph-Frosh SING! experience to direct a 2004 One Act called “Wandering,” by Lanford Wilson. “It was a fantastic small cast and it was a script that I fell in love with picking it out. That was an amazing experience. I really took a lot away from that. It’s made me think that directing is something I want to pursue in the future, if not on the stage, possibly in film,” said Smith.

Deke Hill, Stuyvesant junior and “Wandering” actor, commented favorably on Smith’s directing style. He said, “She tries to take parts of her own life to have an emo-

tional connection to the character[s]. [Smith] wanted the actors to be involved in the directing process and the show. It was a group working [together] more than her directing.”

Smith is currently rehearsing for her role as the Queen in the Stuyvesant Theater Community’s Fall Musical, “Once Upon a Mattress.” Smith has tried to make the character her own and to go beyond what is written in the script: “Instead of just playing the queen general, I’ve tried to focus on the specifics of her character. She’s not just neurotic. She’s a hypochondriac. I’ve created a world for her that isn’t necessarily the world the audience will see or know, but will make the queen more vivid and more alive.”

Participation in musical theatre and acting and directing at Stuy has caused Smith to describe herself as “rather eclectic in [her] interests.” For her, theater is a constantly evolving medium. “Recently, I’ve discovered a passion for more modern, experimental theater. I absolutely love ‘Theater of the Absurd.’ Playwrights like Ionesco, Shepard, Beckett, and Weiss really intrigue me. I also am intellectually stimulated by classical theater and I think that at some point I’d like to go back and really study Shakespeare and the Greek tragedies because I have far less familiarity with the classics,” said Smith.

When asked about college and career goals, Smith said, “I love theater without a doubt, but I think my real passion lies in film. Right now I’m thinking about becoming a documentary filmmaker. I love film as a medium for expression, especially for issues surrounding politics and human rights.”

Smith’s basic reason for participating in theater emerged when she said, “I have this kind of secret ambition to save the world somehow,” said Smith. “I think that art is the way to do it. For as long as theater or film is helping me toward that goal, I think that’s where my heart will be.”

What It Means to *Be More Chill*

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however, names were changed.

Asked about the difference between seeing one’s name in a novel and in a newspaper article, he said, “Really for me, my biggest thrill was when I got my stuff published in the newspaper...because it was really the first time and it just felt really special.”

Be More Chill, Vizzini’s first novel, based largely on his experiences at Stuy, has become an enormous success, receiving attention from many forms of media all over the globe. Vizzini is extremely grateful for the public’s response to Jeremy Heere, *Be More Chill*’s protagonist. “There’s a lot of empathy for the character,” said Vizzini.

Public recognition of Heere will only increase with the film version of *Be More Chill* in the

making. *Be More Chill* has recently interested Paul and Chris Weitz, whose production company (Weitz Brothers) produced the *American Pie* films. They launched a project to make a motion picture of the novel and have asked Steve Pink (*High Fidelity*) to adapt the book into a screenplay. Vizzini is extremely enthusiastic about this project, as are Weitz Brothers and Pink. “They really, genuinely like *Be More Chill* and they want this movie to come out and be a great success. It’s great working with them because they’re very smart and they understand where the book is coming from,” said Vizzini of his new associates.

The screenplay, which is scheduled for completion by the end of the year, will not incorporate all elements of the novel and will have numerous addi-

tions. Vizzini recognizes many of Pink’s ideas as excellent contributions to the story. “Expect some differences,” said Vizzini. “Read the book for the O[riginal] G[angsta] so you can know what it’s all about and you could see the differences between the book and the movie.”

When asked about which actors are being considered for which roles, Vizzini said, “We are not at that stage yet. We’re still putting together the behind-the-camera talent.”

The Weitz brothers anticipate a successful production, but are fully aware that the production of a film of this sort is a difficult process, as they have discovered during the making of the *American Pie* films. “*American Pie* is a tough movie because it was an R rated movie for teenagers,” said Vizzini. “We’re walking a very fine line

and the success that *American Pie* had would be great.” Right now the team is concentrating on developing a good film that will not be plunged into the darkness after its opening weekend. They are planning to begin filming this coming summer; however, the release date is uncertain as of now.

Vizzini hopes to encourage as many people as possible to pursue their fields of interest. For students aspiring to become writers he recommends that they visit his Web site, www.ned-vizzini.com/faq, for more information. “You have to be persistent. You have to just take the plunge. Woody Allen said, ‘Ninety percent of the success is showing up,’ and I believe that. Some people use Stuyvesant as a platform to focus on their own things...on their own projects. I don’t just write. Stuy taught me

how to be diverse,” said Vizzini.

Vizzini is currently working on his second novel, which he described as being “a little more adult and serious than *Be More Chill*.” Vizzini trusts, however, that his audience will progress with him in his literary evolution.

Vizzini believes that there are always some cultural influences on the adolescent population and vice versa. Vizzini demonstrates this in his books. Despite Vizzini’s elevating success, he is able to remain as down-to-earth as humanly possible. “I’m young and I got lucky young and I wanna keep it going. Family is really, really, important for me...they’re really supportive, because writing is not a very easy thing to do...if you do not have the support of family and friends you’re never gonna make it.” Amen to that!

S P O R T S



Sasha von Oldershausen / The Spectator



Sasha von Oldershausen / The Spectator



Peter Velez / The Spectator

Sports Photos of the Week

Left: Two photos from a recent Felines practice. The Felines have been practicing for their first meet, which will be at Stuyvesant on January 5.

Above: The Phoenix defeated Beacon High School on Wednesday, December 1 in overtime.

Difficult Road Ahead for Freestylers

By ED LU

Round up your rings and saddle up your pommel horses. The Freestylers, Stuyvesant's boys' gymnastics team, are ready to kick off another season filled with potential. This year however, the Freestylers are faced with new challenges that threaten to topple their status as one of the city's best gymnastics programs.

After ending last season with a second place finish in the PSAL Championships, losing only to Long Island City High School, the Freestylers have been severely crippled by the graduation of their most valuable athletes: Feliks Zarotsky, David D'Urso, and Keith Lin. Despite the loss, the team remains upbeat about the upcoming season. "We're going to train really hard this season," said junior co-captain Richard Lo. "If we work hard enough, we definitely could make second place."

As in past years, the Freestylers' greatest strength lies in their all-around gymnasts. With the departure of Lin, D'Urso, and Zarotsky, most of the team's core is now composed of Lo, junior Duane Le, and senior co-captain Kenny Cheng.

"Our team is relying on three main people," said Lo.

Cheng agreed. He said, "We're a lot weaker from last year. We lost two really good all-around guys," referring to Lin and Zarotsky. To compensate for this loss, the team has



Ashik Siddique / The Spectator

"We're aiming for second place, first place is a long shot. We would need a miracle to come in first."
—Richard Lo, junior and co-captain

trained extensively in the more difficult aspects of the various events. "Mostly right now, we're working on new tricks," said Cheng. "Pommel horse, parallel bar, that sort of thing." Being

able to adjust to the void left by last year's seniors is something the team will have to learn to do over the course of the season.

To complicate matters for the future, head coach Naim Kozi has not been able to find any new prospects that are capable of making an immediate impact. He noted that of the five new members of the team, there is one freshman, and the others are unlikely to be major contributors in the near future. Kozi, who is in his second year as coach, commended junior Max Chu, describing him as having "the most potential" out of the newcomers but also admitting that "he needs a year."

Even with Chu, Kozi was reluctant to praise his recruits in general. He said, "We got a couple of new guys, but they're not making a dent." It is up to the rookies to exceed their own expectations and create a formidable force very quickly.

Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School, Bronx High School of Science, and Long Island City are the Freestylers' main rivals, and, as Kozi said, "will give us a lot of competition."

Although mildly subdued, expectations for the season remain high. "We're aiming for second place," said Lo. "First place is a long shot. We would need a miracle to come in first."

Girls' Track is Back

By MONICA DESAI

As fall comes to an end, the Stuyvesant girls' indoor track team is ready and raring to go. And with more than half of the team returning from the cross country season, they know what to expect. Co-captain and senior Grace Duggan said, "We hope to fare better than we did this past cross country season." Last year they placed third, but this year dropped to ninth. Duggan also said, "This season we're hoping to send more of our team to the City Championships, particularly in the long distance events, which are our strong suit."

Last year, due to their performance in the City Championship, they qualified for the State Championship, sent two girls to City Championships, and finished their season strong. Almost the entire team is coming back, having lost only one senior from last year. Sophomore Sabrina Baum said, "Last year everyone was amazing, and I'm looking forward to another great year."

The team is returning with

10 seniors this year. Among them are co-captains Laura Coogan, Hannah Pinski, and Duggan. Coogan was one of the only two girls to make the State Individual Championships last year, along with then-sophomore phenomenon Christina Argueta. Argueta finished first in the Manhattan Sophomore Championships and second in the PSAL Sophomore Championships. Duggan said, "These two girls are our strongest runners, and we rely heavily on them."

The only negative impact on the team seems to come from a couple of injuries. Sophomores Ada Okun and Tiffany Chi are currently out due to a stress fracture and a sprained ankle, respectively. The team is hopefully awaiting their recovery as they are both huge assets to the line-up.

The team is just beginning to practice, but the girls are extremely excited about their upcoming meets. Their biggest meet is the Manhattan Borough Championships, which is on February 11 at the Armory.

