

The best cafés to caffeinate and cram for finals

By Irene Castillo, Senior Staff Writer

The worst part about finals is to see your life dwindle away in the small space of your room, finishing up essay after essay. After a while, the monotony doesn't help you get work done. That is where the beauty of coffee shops comes in — a little treat and an adventure bundled up in one. As a coffee nerd, I've spent the past three years scouring the city for the best coffee shops that offer a good study space for me to bang on my keyboard and get a delicious drink in the process.

Here are my top coffee shops, from closest to campus to furthest away.

Redhawk Coffee | Meyran Avenue, Oakland

I usually write my articles for The Pitt News at Redhawk.

While the space is tiny, and I need to stare people down to get a table, both their coffee and ambiance are amazing for coworking, meetings and anything that involves writing. I love their iced latte with extra cinnamon for when it's warm, but if I can sit down and relax, their cortado is amazing — thick crema and milk foam, savory and aromatic, and the perfect ratio of espresso to milk. Their grind changes daily — you can see their bean of the day displayed on a small blackboard by the cashier! — but Cauca, from Colombia, is my current go-to. It's more floral and fruity, like tart cherry, so it works great iced and hot. Their tea selection is great, but their matcha is too light and milky for my taste. They also carry Pigeon Bagels, my favorite pastry shop in town. Their coffee cake is perfectly crumbly and not too sweet for a midday snack.

P.S. If you ever find yourself too tired to fight for a table but still want their great coffee, go to Scaife Hall at CMU! It's only a five minute walk from Frick Fine Arts, and they have plenty of chairs and tables for you!

The Café at Carnegie | Forbes Avenue, Oakland

The first coffee shop I ever tried as a first year was at the Carnegie Museum, and I still believe it's one of the best on campus. Lillian — the blonde barista you can find chirping away with the customers — pours an amazing cortado. Their bean is Commonplace Coffee, and while it's not my favorite grind, the bittersweet chocolate taste is a great find if you are short on time. While the Café doesn't have electrical outlets — an absolute pain — their booths are private and comfy enough for you to get some readings and worksheets done. It's also an amazing place for networking if you're in the humanities! I always meet new people from my department there.

Tazza D'Oro | Lytton Avenue, Oakland

Tazza D'Oro is found closer to Clapp, Cathy and the Computer Science Building. I prefer them when I'm craving a hot cup of tea, since they have a long menu of tea varieties. They also have a great deli fridge, where they carry salads and sweets, vegan options included. It's usually not packed, as its entrance is discreet, and the only people you will find are parents staying at the Oaklander or Wyndham. Their tables are small, for two people max, so it's a great spot for some alone study time. They also carry The Pitt News! (#selfpromo)

Redstart Roasters | Euclid Avenue, East Liberty

Only 15-ish minutes away from campus by bus, and sharing a line with Target, Whole Foods and Trader Joe's, Redstart Roasters is an amazing place for coffee nerds like me. Their menu features nine different types of single-origin coffee beans and a specific roast for their espresso and cold brew. I've never been a fan of pour-overs — I found them too watery — but this place convinced me to offer



Amaya Lobato | Senior Staff Photographer

People sit inside of Redhawk Coffee on Meyran Avenue.

them a second chance. Their location is low-profile enough that you won't catch your friends here, so you'll get work done. They also have a great big, shared table with outlets and lamps, so you can sit down for those five hours to finish your essay for English composition.

Mosaic Leaf Matcha Bar | Butler Street, Lawrenceville

I've always been a tea person, way before I started drinking coffee. Matcha is great for a quick, sweeter caffeine fix, especially if you're trying to avoid caffeine on days when you are stressed out. Mosaic Leaf Matcha Bar doesn't just offer their own tea brand but also has matcha ice cream, kombucha, seasonal drinks and specialized drinks — such as their spritz and “focus drinks.” They have an iced lavender matcha — matcha with lavender buds, not the syrup — that got me through my very hectic museums and society study session. Their venue is matcha green, filled with flowers and plants with a few tables. It's never too full, so you can always snag a table and enjoy your study treat and your sweet reward!

Butterwood Bake Consortium | Butler Street, Lawrenceville

The farthest from campus, Butterwood was recommended to me by a Pitt alumnus after hearing me cry about being unable to find a “not too sweet” cake for my birthday. Butterwood is 30 minutes away from campus by bus, but their store is simply too cute to not go. Their coffee — by KLVN Coffee — falls on the more chocolaty side, but it blends perfectly with their menu of floral and spiced cakes with buttercream. They offer a different cake menu every day, with flavors ranging from cardamom, strawberry and poppy seed cakes to ube and lavender tea cakes. Their buttercream is salty, and their cakes crumble perfectly, so pairing them with a simple unsweetened latte is a perfect idea. Their vintage-decorated, warmly lit store also offers plenty of seats with electrical outlets for you to get your work done.