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Postponed games, omicron scares plague winter season

THE saratoga falcon

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STATE of the SOUL

Graphic by LIHI SHOSHANI

Photo illustration by SELINA CHEN

Quotes from students:

- "Students have actually reached our breaking point, but we're also so numb and emotionless that we don't even realize we've reached it."
- "History has shown that we, as humans, are strong, resilient people. This is going to end; it'll just take some time."
- "I'm stuck in a never-ending cycle of pain, anxiety, and stress."
- "There's this frustration that you need to go back. You feel that, but you can't go back for your own safety and for everyone else's."
- "Every day I go to work, and I'm still in my little cave nerve."
- "We're normalizing COVID-19 just like we normalized other horrible things that are happening: police brutality, hunger & poverty."
- "Sometimes, I even cry two to three times a day. It's so bad but people who just look at me don't understand."
- "I'm much more reclusive. I don't talk to people as much as I used to in-person."
- "I don't really know anybody's face under their mask. It can be more difficult to express emotions and interact with people."
- "Frustrated and anxious — that's what I gauged from people's feelings."
- "I haven't been able to communicate with anyone except for my little bubble."
- "Usually, people find out about their trauma after the event, but our generation realizes the trauma in the midst of our traumatic event."

TWO YEARS OF PANDEMIC STRAINS MENTAL HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

BY SelinaChen
& LihiShoshani
& ShaanSridhar

Two years after the outbreak of COVID-19 in the U.S. and the widespread restrictions that followed, a study led by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has shown that the majority of Americans have suffered from increased mental health issues as the pandemic persists.

Here, the constant interruption of COVID-19 has kept some students and staff in constant fear of becoming infected.

Even with the return of most sports and extracurricular activities, there have been major disruptions that keep students on edge, such as the recent COVID-19 outbreak on the boys' basketball team and the cancelations of the Media Arts Program and Leadership program overnight field trips.

Students and staff members interviewed by The Falcon say that, despite being largely physically healthy, the inability to see family, anxiety from fear of infection and isolation from social relationships have continued to take a heavy toll.

I haven't seen a lot of my relatives for a long time

The last time senior Miwa Okumura saw her father in person was during the winter of her freshman year. Because he lives in Japan, Okumura was able to visit him roughly once a year or so. That ended in 2020.

Okumura's father, who is in his 60s, did not have WiFi prior to the pandemic, but traveling difficulties motivated him to install it.

"Now, I can speak to him online whenever I want, so that's the only positive thing

that came out of [the pandemic]," she said.

Despite their virtual connection, Okumura is planning to visit Japan this summer no matter the state of the pandemic.

"There's this frustration that you need to go back. You feel that, but you can't go back — for your own safety and for everyone else's," Okumura said.

For younger students like Linh Do, a seventh grader at Redwood Middle School,

>> SOUL on pg. 6

Students step forward for mental health

BY SerenaLi, LihShoshani,
& SarahThomas, CiciXu

"Raise your hand if you or someone you know has dealt with suicidal thoughts, addiction or other mental illnesses," said junior Allison Tan at one point in last Friday's Speak Up for Change week assembly in the quad.

Students here and there raised their hands and looked around solemnly.

Early in the event, the outreach commission — which includes seniors Catherine Kan and Alex Yang, sophomore Paul Hulme and freshman Ethan Yang — introduced this year's SUFC theme, "Stepping Forward," and the speakers for this year's rally: Tan, junior Ishir Lakhani, senior Raya Khanna and assistant principal Matt Torrens. Following the introduction, the speakers talked about personal mental health struggles as well as how they reached out for help.

"They were careful with what they said as if I was a bomb that could go off at the slightest touch."

JUNIOR Ishir Lakhani

Having hope in trying times

In his talk, Lakhani dissected how he coped with the loss of his mother in second grade.

As an elementary schooler, he said he felt defined by her death as his classmates referred to him as "that kid with the dead mom."

"When people met me, they were careful with what they said as if I was a bomb that could go off at the slightest touch," Lakhani said. "When I tried to make new friends, I was met with the same five words — 'I'm sorry for your loss' — drenched in pity."

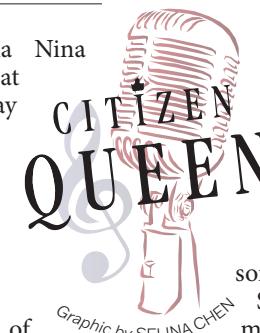
Despite the sense of hopelessness, he was warmed by the support, patience and comfort he received from loved ones,

>> ASSEMBLY on pg. 4

Alumna soars in singing career

BY AvaniKongetira
& NidhiMathihalli

Class of 2016 alumna Nina Ann Nelson gazed out at the packed arena in Amway Center, in Orlando, Fla., in June 2019 as she belted into a microphone, surrounded by the four fellow members of her a cappella girl group, Citizen Queen. As they finished the last harmony of their rendition of Ariana Grande's "No Tears Left To Cry," thousands of fans burst into applause.



Citizen Queen, which consists of Nelson, Kaedi Dalley, Cora Isabel, Hannah Mrozak and Kaylah Sharve, was formed in 2018. Since then, they have released covers, including "Best Part" by Daniel Caesar and H.E.R. and "Lost in Japan" by Shawn Mendes, as well as original music like their newest single "Y."

In her sophomore year at University of Southern California, Nelson received a life changing call from Scott Hoying of Pentatonix, a Grammy Award-winning acappella group.

>> NELSON on pg. 14

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newsbriefs

Virtual elective night hosted for incoming freshmen

The school hosted a virtual electives night on Jan. 31 for incoming ninth grade families, featuring parent boosters, extracurricular/co-curricular activities, athletic presentations and elective informational sessions. After a two-part welcome session, incoming families had a chance to participate in five 10-minute elective sessions, where students and teachers answered questions related to their respective programs.

In the main session, a Zoom-bombing incident occurred in which inappropriate chat messages were sent by multiple people, but administrators quickly resolved the situation; according to assistant principal Matt Torrens, there were five separate instances of Zoom bombing during the event.

Overall, turnout for this electives night was comparable to last year's virtual electives night, said Torrens, with a total of 120-140 families joining the general session.◆

— Carolyn Wang

As auditions end, spring musical rehearsals begin

After three days of auditions and callbacks, the cast for the school's spring musical, "Fiddler on the Roof," was announced on Jan. 27.

Starring in the show are senior Taylor Zhou as Tevye, senior Peilin Zhang as Hodel, junior Anastasia Ramirez as Tzeitel, freshman Ashly Henry as Golde and freshman Diya Iyer as Chava.

"Fiddler on the Roof" is a musical set in the Russian village of Anatevka in the early 1900s. It revolves around Tevye, who tries to marry off his daughters Hodel, Tzeitel and Chava, in order to preserve their Jewish heritage.

In the early stages of rehearsals, which are held on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays until tech week begins on April 21, the cast is working on initial choreography for dance numbers and blocking scenes in small groups.

Performances will take place on April 29 and 30 and May 6 and 7, with drama teacher Benjamin Brotzman directing; former music teacher Margie Alejandro in charge of vocal training; junior Dragon Neal as production manager and sophomore Arushi Maheshwar; and freshman Diya Kapoor as stage managers.◆

— Avani Kongetra

Students see success in competitions, scholarships

Students from multiple clubs have recently achieved competitive success, allowing for some to participate in higher-level competitions.

The Robotics team MSET Jellyfish, led by senior team captain Daniel Jiang, won the prestigious Inspire Award at the Sunnyvale Qualifying Tournament on Jan. 29. By earning the highest possible ranking, they snatched a spot at the Northern California regional competition, which will take place March 11-13.

The speech and debate team competed at the National Catholic Forensics League (NCFL) qualifiers on Jan. 29-30. Three students qualified to the NCFL nationals in Washington, D.C., on May 28 and 29: Freshman Timothy Leung placed first in Dramatic Performance, while freshmen Ashish Goswami and Leonardo Jin placed as first speaker and second speaker, respectively, in public forum debate.

In Model UN, all six students who competed at the Santa Clara Valley Model UN conference on Jan. 28 and 29 earned an award: Sophomores Sanjoli Gupta and Maithreyi Bharathi won outstanding delegates, freshman Anushka Tadikonda and Will Norwood won honorable mentions, while junior Shaan Sridhar and sophomore Tara Natarajan won verbal commendations.

Additionally, seniors Vignav Ramesh and Anouk Yeh became two of the 250 Coca-Cola Scholars regional finalists from a pool of 65,000 applicants, from which 150 national finalists will be chosen to receive a \$20,000 scholarship.◆

— Selina Chen, Allen Luo, Jonny Luo and Nikhil Mathihalli



FALCON // TARA NATARAJAN

Fabulous Flutist | Senior Elaine Liu, who has been playing the Dizi, or Chinese bamboo flute, for over a decade, plays the song "A Walk in Gusu" during the Lunar New Year celebration in the quad on Feb. 1.

District plans more advisories after putting them on hold in January

by SelinaChen
& LihShoshani

After a turbulent start to in-person advisories last semester — including a pause due to teacher objections and website failures — the district has delayed rolling them out in January. Now, it is planning for five more advisories in the second semester.

Dr. Jamal Splane, the director of School Climate and Culture/Curriculum and Instruction for the district, is in charge of planning advisories. Splane said he recognizes "this may not be the right time to launch new initiatives," as the school is focused on curbing the omicron variant.

"We're already asking students, teachers, parents and administrators to carry a huge load in this pandemic education world, so we don't want to add to the weight that they're carrying," Splane said.

In collaboration with the Advisory Lead Teacher Planning Work Group, Splane is devising the advisory topics while also trying to minimize conflicts with testing schedules and students' needs for tutorials. He is also hoping to avoid another site crashing, the way Kognito did during the fall semester when the hundreds of users from both schools overwhelmed the system.

"Our community values not only academic success but social emotional skills [as well]."

ADVISORY LEAD Jamal Splane

he said.

The work group plans for the frequency of advisories in second semester are similar to the fall: either once or twice a month or every other Wednesday.

Despite uncertainties with the schedule, the five topics have been finalized: healthy communication with uncomfortable topics, identity, bias, microaggressions and how to create a community of belonging.

In future years, Splane hopes to tailor lessons separately for Saratoga High and Los Gatos High in order to best address the issues prevalent in the two schools' "uniquely different" communities. He also hopes to make the lessons grade-specific and teacher-specific so that students are being engaged in topics relevant to their age, and teachers are being matched with topics they are passionate about.

One of the Advisory Leadership group's immediate goals is to address students' dislike about advisories, starting with inviting student voices to the work group, which initially consisted only of adults in its first meeting on Jan. 18. Splane is still figuring out how he will advertise the student position, and what the position would entail.

A student eager to pitch in her opinions is sophomore Simarya Ahuja, who shares many students' grievances that advisory periods take up much-needed tutorials and aren't very effective.

She proposed a solution similar to the advisory format during the 2020-2021 school year, saying: "I remember when we were in online learning, we had a 30-minute advisory period on Wednesdays. Maybe we could have something dedicated to advisories on Wednesdays early in the mornings, and then go straight into classes."

Ahuja also hopes that future advisories are modified to appeal to students, such as having short-



Graphic by SANJOLI GUPTA

**TITLE
IX**

New Intro to Stem class combines existing CS and engineering courses

by MitchellChen
& DanielWu

In order to combat the common dilemma of students having to choose between taking Intro to Computer Science or Intro to Engineering, a proposed new class called Intro to STEM will combine the two.

The new class will permanently replace Intro to Engineering and Intro to Computer Science, merging the classes into one year-long course with each subject occupying a semester and being taught by a different teacher.

"We've been meaning to do this for a very long time. Although COVID-19 pushed everything back, I'm absolutely thrilled that it's finally taking form," War-muth said.

The engineering semester will focus primarily on the design process, an approach where students will have hands-on experience going from the drawing board to a finished product.

With multiple prototypes developed along the way, students will gain fluency in 3D modeling software and utilize hand tools, such as the drill press.

For the computer science portion of the class, students will learn Python and Java using CodeHS, a comprehensive teaching platform for programming basics.

The course will allow students to learn basic skills, such as abstraction and algorithm design, and explore both courses to help them become well-rounded.

botics Club, said he believes that the school is taking the right step forward.

He emphasized the importance of getting exposure to both the software and mechanical sides of STEM.

"For students who have little to no experience in the STEM field, I think this class would be perfectly suited for them and really solve the conflict they may encounter when deciding which path to pursue going forward," Fernández da Ponte said.

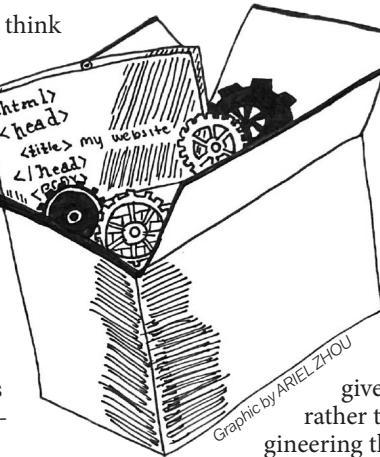
However, he said that, if given the option, he would much rather take a full year of Intro to Engineering than Intro to STEM.

Fernández da Ponte said that his preference for separate courses is influenced by his prior experience within the robotics community, where he preferred working with engineering and hardware.

That being said, Gonzalo said he believes that Intro to STEM will have a positive impact on anyone new to the field.

Redwood Middle School Robotics and STEM teacher Due Hoang said that the Intro to Stem class will benefit students more than the two separate courses.

"More often than not I notice students who hold passionate interest in both branches and don't want to give up one for another. Intro to STEM will likely tackle this issue," Hoang said.◆



Graphic by ARIEL ZHOU



FALCON // TARA NATARAJAN

Sophomore Maia Shama wears a KN95 mask for the SUFC assembly on Feb. 4.

School issues KN95 masks

by SanjoliGupta, NidhiMathihalli & LihShoshani

It's time to upgrade your mask — and especially get rid of cloth masks — if you haven't done so already, say school officials.

Following assistant principal Brian Thompson's email announcement of the district's plan to supply the masks, all sixth period teachers distributed two KN95 masks to each student because of the rapid spread of omicron on Jan. 21. Moving into the first week of February, the school will continue to provide all students with two KN95 masks biweekly in their English classes, and replacements will be available in the office when needed, according to principal Greg Louie's Jan. 28 Friday Newsletter.

The distribution came about because cloth masks have shown to be ineffective at curbing the spread of omicron: The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted that cloth masks provide the least protection, while N95s offer the "highest level of protection" by filtering out 95% of particles, making them the best fit for schools, since many students are in an enclosed space for hours at a time. As for surgical masks, the FDA says that they can block "large droplets, splashes and sprays" but are defenseless against tiny particles from coughs or sneezes.

To enforce the policy banning cloth masks, Thompson said that students seen wearing cloth masks will be asked to replace it with a KN95, which is always available at the attendance office and the health office.

Senior Aryan Gupta, who used to wear cloth masks because "it was more convenient," now wears KN95s in light of new information on masks' effectiveness against the omicron variant. Now with a constant supply of KN95 at school, Gupta said he won't wear a cloth mask "for the most part."

"Masks can be worn every other day for two weeks before new masks are needed," Thompson said. "The cost of the masks are expensive, and we want to make sure the masks are used according to the appropriate lifespan of the material."

Senior Christopher Okuno is one of several students continuing to wear a cloth mask.

"I'm not really sure if I can say there's any real deep reason for it," he said. "I believe it's been relatively effective, and I like the mask that I have. If, for any reason, I begin to think the risk of me spreading COVID-19 has risen, I will start doubling up."

The funding for these masks comes from the In-Person Learning Grant, a one-time state fund that was received late last school year, according to chief business officer Delores Perley. Providing both staff and students with KN95 masks cost about \$30,000. The administration hopes that the distribution and increased usage of KN95 masks will result in a lower percentage of students testing positive for COVID-19.

However, this is not a substitute for the weekly COVID-19 testing, which will be required in the foreseeable future.◆

drinking coffee, and I thought it didn't taste like coffee," he said.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of testing positive for COVID-19 was the amount of schoolwork he missed. For classes like chemistry and math, he was able to watch prerecorded lecture videos online to avoid falling far behind.

For history, however, Vaidya noticed a lack of online lectures and materials that made it difficult to catch up. Since his history class consisted of lectures and in-class activities, it was hard to replicate the coursework and lessons at home.

To mitigate this, he frequently communicated with his teachers, who sent him materials over email to work on.

Vaidya returned to school on Jan. 10 after testing negative, and resumed his participation in winter percussion.

For teachers, however, testing positive for COVID-19 severely impacts their teaching. COVID-19 had spread through Algebra 2 Honors and Pre-Calculus teacher Kelly Frangieh's extended family, and she tested positive on Jan. 2.

She was unable to return to class for the entire 10-day period, since she didn't test negative until her last day of quarantine.

"I was lucky because I was able to spend my break snowboarding and doing all the things I wanted to, but then I got sick and was unable to return at the start of the semester."

Frangieh said her symptoms were mild, namely a slight sore throat.

She found it hard to keep up with her classes when the spring semester began, as she was unable to come back on campus.

"I made videos of all of my lessons," Frangieh said. "My department is awesome, and a lot of them subbed when there wasn't a sub available."

Frangieh said that even with the help she got with running her classes, it still was difficult to stay top of everything.

"[COVID-19] affected my taste — I was



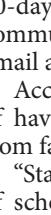
Ahmed



Vaidya



Frangieh



Vaidya



Frangieh



Frangieh

ASSEMBLY*continued from pg. 1*

including his elementary principal and his stepmother, who helped him to "launch [himself] out of his pit."

Lakhani urged students to savor every moment of their lives and asked adults to be supportive, kind and available for people who might need support around them.

Everyone has bad days

Khanna then took the stage and shared her story. At age 12, she began feeling depressed and tired, despite having what she viewed as a privileged life.

"I couldn't stop myself from thinking about how selfish I was for feeling the way I did," Khanna said. "I felt guilty that I had such a great life, I felt upset with myself for feeling this way and I felt like I wasn't measuring up to my potential."

Khanna then detailed her personal journey with healing. From confiding in her friends about to receiving professional help and therapy, she discussed the obstacles she faced and the bravery required to reach out for help.

As a result, her counselor set her up with a 504 plan, which is a list of "accommodations that a student needs," and a psychiatrist as well as helped her drop a few classes and communicate with her parents.

"It was a major step for me to get help from others," Khanna said.

Khanna ended her speech by emphasizing the importance of normalizing "bad days" through checking in with each other, stepping forward for help, and allowing time for healing.

I am so proud of you

Tan's speech opened with a list of phrases and their negative connotations: "suicide," "struggling with mental health" and "opening up about mental illness" were followed by descriptions like "selfish," "crazy," "shameful," "weird" and "attention-seeking" to highlight the stigma against mental illnesses.

One of her words was "semicolon," a piece of punctuation Tan said symbolized a choice to continue on instead of giving up. Project Semicolon, of which Tan is a part of, is an organization focused on building better lives for people with mental illness.

"The semicolon is emblematic of people struggling with mental health choosing to continue their story rather than ending it," Tan said.

Tan said that her poor mental health manifested itself in crying

fits, lashes of anger and a lack of motivation in school or extracurriculars. As time went on, it became harder for her to ignore her struggles as she suffered eating disorders, toxic friendships and self-harm issues.

"There was no definitive breaking point within my journey to reaching out for professional help, but rather an endless conversation or monologue in my head consisting of pros and cons lists contemplating reaching out for help," Tan said.

One of the most important steps in feeling worthy of recovery was realizing that her negative self-image was a result of her depression and that she deserved to be happy and recover completely.

Although deciding to tell her parents about her struggles was difficult, Tan said it felt like taking a weight off her chest.

The process of reaching out wasn't perfect or magic and took me well over a year to get situated with therapy, medication, healthy friendships and rebuild my relationships with my family, but it was real and I am proud of myself," Tan said.

Stepping forward TOGA-ther

Following Tan, Torrens stepped onto the podium and began with highlighting the immense historical and collective strength of the school.

He then discussed his personal experience with anxiety from the recent passing of social studies teacher Todd Dwyer and the need for students to confront mental health issues with positivity, citing rap lyrics from seniors Sahil Shaik ("Dr. Shakes") and Rishi Atreya ("Reesh").

"The process of reaching out wasn't perfect or magic and took me over a year."

JUNIOR Ally Tan

"[I hope students] find the courage to step forward — whatever that means for them — and get some ideas on how to step forward and that they think of a friend that they might encourage to step forward," Torrens said.

Embracing the message that "stepping forward does not need a triggering crisis," Torrens expressed gratitude and hope for the stories, memoirs and inspirational people that make this "prison-like" campus beautiful and "sexy."♦

Clubs host SUFC activities

Monday

Nanoseed club kicked off Speak Up for Change week's club events with "Sticker Therapy" session where members and participants drew on pieces of sticker paper and cut them out into shapes.

"Since the lack of mental health initiatives is clear in the Asian community, we wanted to talk about how to destigmatize mental health," Ispasoiu said.

The Neuroscience Club continued the theme of open mental health through their talk "Mental Health and the Brain," which analyzed the overlap between anatomy of the brain and mental health.

society, junior president Jasmine Ispasoiu said.

"Since the lack of mental health initiatives is clear in the Asian community, we wanted to talk about how to destigmatize mental health," Ispasoiu said.

"I think it was a really cool way to get across this information because it goes into more of the science part," junior officer Ojas Somanai said. "It appeals to more of the people who are looking for an academic perspective while also conveying this very real, very big problem in Saratoga."

Tuesday

With Lunar New Year on Tuesday, the Chinese Club hosted a celebration to highlight many students' heritage and to encourage students to "unwind, de-stress and relax" by watching performances, senior Chinese Club president Derek Hsu said.

The club also sold egg rolls and milk tea buns to fundraise.

Seniors Dizi (bamboo

flute) player Eliane Liu, vocalist Taylor Zhou and Guzheng (Chinese harp) player Selina Chen performed that day.

"I've always loved the Dizi, having played it for over a decade, and getting to perform for Lunar New Year has been great," Liu said. "It's sad this is my last year performing at SHS."

Gender & Sexuality Aliances (GSA) hosted "Let's Talk: Mental Health &

LGBTQ+," an open discussion about mental health in the LGBTQ+ community. There, students were able to voice their thoughts, opinions and learn about resources to be an ally.

"I hope the members feel empowered and comfortable," senior co-president Maanvi Chawla said. "That's the point of GSA: We try to create a safe space for people to feel comfortable sharing."

Wednesday

To host "Sandwich Packaging for the Homeless," Leo Club partnered with Loaves and Fishes, a San Jose-based family soup kitchen that caters to the homeless.

"We want to be able to give [sandwiches] to the homeless on days when they have no other alternative to fill their stomachs," senior co-presi-

dent Viraaj Reddi said.

The volunteers, packaged over 200 sandwiches, all of which Reddi dropped off at Loaves and Fishes for the soup kitchen to distribute to the homeless population.

Later, Singing for Smiles' five performers delivered a five performance of songs about motivation and happiness.

Sophomore secretary Si-

marya Ahuja said that although a typical event only includes two or three singers, this time the club got enough sign-ups to sing all the way through lunch.

"During a performance of 'Climbing to the Moon,' I saw some freshmen waltzing," she said. "It was very satisfying to see that people were really enjoying the performance."

Thursday

Free tea and pastries were available at Persian Club's "Chai and Chat," where students drank chai and talked

about life, shared their stories

and discussed their struggles, senior president Sadaf Bobhani said.

"It was very inspiring for

people to share their stories," she said. "Drinking tea pays homage to Persian culture and makes it more comforting as well."

Friday

The Crafting Club took a more hands-on approach with "Finger Knitting."

"Crafting is calming and almost therapeutic," senior president Cheryl Wu said.

Meanwhile, Girl Up's "Domestic Violence: Alyship and Stepping Forward" created a space for students to discuss the deterioration of mental

health due to abuse.

"Covering this topic helped students fully understand and grasp what abuse is and realize that it's a lot more common than people may think," junior treasurer Allison Tan said.

"Normally, we wire and work with circuits, but SUFC is a great time to take a step back and learn about mental health," she said.♦

— Nidhi Mathihalli and Nilay Mishra

improve mental health, while acknowledging the negative side effects, senior president Alison Lim said.

"Covering this topic helped students fully understand and grasp what abuse is and realize that it's a lot more common than people may think," junior treasurer Allison Tan said.

Lastly, the Internet of Things hosted "Intersecting Technology with Mental Health," where the club introduced apps that can help

early in the fall semester.

"It got to the point where I was making Instagram posts hyping up the reveal, when in reality I was just stalled for time while I decided on which play to do," he said. "I eventually decided on 'She Kills Monsters' because I was playing Dungeons and Dragons with my friends at the time, and had so much fun."

After selecting this play, Zhou went for "something wacky and creative" with his production because he felt that other productions of "She Kills Monsters" looked "pretty standard," so he wanted to "mix things up."

Zhou took inspiration from anime to design the costumes for the show. For example, the costume for Agnes Evans is designed with elements from Sir Bedivere from "Fate: Grand Order" and Bell Cranel from "Danmachi."

Another aspect of Zhou's creativity will be spotlighted in the fight scenes, which include multiple actors dancing and stabbing monsters. For the final fight, Zhou said that he showcased the dragon's five heads — each played by a different actor representing the elements water, fire, lightning, earth and wind — through dynamic choreography as well as sound and lighting effects.

"This will be my last show at Saratoga, so it serves as a send-off for me as I enter the next phase of my directing career in college," Zhou said.♦

Graphic by SERENAU

Student director brings gaming hobby to the stage

By Michael Fok

From Feb. 11-13, the student production "She Kills Monsters," directed by senior Taylor Zhou, will be performed in the McAfee Center.

The drama-comedy, written by Qui Nguyen and debuted in 2011, tells the story of a woman grieving her late teenage sister through exploring the latter's passion for Dungeons and Dragons, a roleplaying game.

Senior Samantha Weisner, who plays the protagonist Agnes Evans, said that the cast — consisting of 17 students — were busy in the weeks leading up to the play, sometimes rehearsing six hours a day until 9 p.m. Other lead roles include sophomore Arushi Maheshwar as Tilly and freshmen

Kat Aldrete, Jay Louie, Apollo Burgess and Cosmo Cooper working together to portray the Monster.

Weisner has extensive experience acting in plays, musicals and student productions, but she said none were quite like this.

"In the drama program, we usually do more well-known or older plays, but this one's radically different in that it's less popular," she said. "She Kills Monsters" is a niche play, one without a reputation for us to worry about maintaining."

For Zhou's part, he initially wasn't sure which play to use for the student production even though student productions are usually chosen over the summer or

in the fall semester.

"It got to the point where I was making Instagram posts hyping up the reveal, when in reality I was just stalled for time while I decided on which play to do," he said. "I eventually decided on 'She Kills Monsters' because I was playing Dungeons and Dragons with my friends at the time, and had so much fun."

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Graphic by SERENAU

English teachers foster classroom community

by TaraNatarajan
& KavyaPatel

As sophomore Emily Ta eagerly walked into English teacher Marcos Cortez's English 10 class, she was met with homemade gifts from students in her "pod group."

For the past five years of teaching in the district, Cortez, who now teaches English 10 and English 10 MAP, has hosted a gift exchange in his class in which students sign up for any class day in the first semester to give and receive gifts from three to five people — a cohort known as "pod group."

The project was successful even during online learning, Cortez said. Despite the lack of peer-to-peer interaction exacerbated by the pandemic, he was able to keep the gift exchange going, during which students came up with creative ideas such as personalized playlists, digital artwork and even a detailed road trip guide, in lieu of physical gifts.

This tradition is meant to bring students together and allow them to become comfortable communicating with each other, especially if the group consists of people who wouldn't normally interact with each other, Cortez said. It celebrates each student for being a part of the classroom community.

In order for a student's pod group to know what to give them, they turn to a slide filled out at the beginning of the year with bullet points of items each student would like to receive, Ta said.

In her case, Ta got some homemade

cookies, brownies and a poster for her pod day.

The gift exchange has a significant participation point value attached to it during the first semester, but is optional in second semester. Nevertheless, most of Cortez's students opted to continue the tradition in the spring semester.

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SOUL*continued from pg. 1*

gauged from people's feelings," she said. Ghai added she finds comfort in Wellness Center director Marina Barnes's words: "History has shown that we as humans are strong, resilient people. This is going to end; it'll just take some time."

On the other hand, senior Noora Fayad, who attends the district's online independent study alternative, described her experience in what feels like a never-ending pandemic as numb and exhausting.

The most common reason students have for visiting the Wellness Center is anxiety, constituting 39% of its visits.

"We're normalizing COVID-19 just like we normalized other horrible things that are happening, such as police brutality, hunger and poverty," Fayad said. "It's the normalization that really affected me."

She called her experience with COVID-19 "traumatic" as she hears her father, who is a healthcare professional, call patients with the virus regularly; listening to the coughing and crying over video chat is difficult because she said she knows "[the patients] are scared they're going to die."

In the mornings, she finds it difficult to get out of bed because of crippling headaches. She feels that she's stuck in a "never-ending cycle of pain, anxiety and stress."

Recently, Fayad got physically sick from her stressed and anxious mental state.

"The pressure we put on ourselves is just so overwhelming," she said. "Sometimes, I even cry two to three times a day. It's so bad, but people who just look at me don't understand."

"Nobody understands what it's like"

Math teacher Kristen Hamilton felt a rush of anxiety when she heard that an early January all-staff meeting was going to be held on Zoom. Other pandemic-induced protocols, such as the district asking all

"Frustrated and anxious — that's what I

togatalks

How has COVID-19 impacted your mental health?

"COVID-19 has made me feel unmotivated and that doing it is worthless to do anything."

senior Kai Doebling

"I felt very isolated and alone during the lockdowns; it was depressing."

freshman Tamar Garniek

"I was pretty unmotivated during online school, but seeing my friends in-person helped me a lot."

senior Cameron Byrne

City targets plants infesting Quarry Park

BY Carolyn Wang

On a crisp, Saturday morning on Jan. 8, junior Anjini Mani hiked the trails of Saratoga's Quarry Park in search of a green, flowering shrub known as French Bloom.

Peering through the undergrowth, she trekked alongside eight other volunteers participating in the city of Saratoga's "Let's Work" program.

clusters."

The plants are also highly fire hazardous, making them a threat to the park and its hikers.

The plants are also highly fire hazardous, making them a threat to the park and its hikers.

"Let's Work" volunteers meet the second Saturday of each month from November to April. They gather at the entrance to Quarry Park before entering to search for the invasive plants, clearing areas pre-identified by PRC commissioners.

When the volunteers come together, Huang debriefs the group, educating them about the history of the park, the

French Bloom problem and potential dangers like poison ivy and ticks.

They are then provided with tools and other accessories like Weed Wrenches, which help remove larger plants from their roots.

"We arrived and hiked up one of the trails, picking any weeds we saw along the way," Mani said. "If you walk around the park, there's piles and piles of all the weeds that we pulled out from this one area that was super overgrown. After pulling out the [French Blooms], we felt like we really accomplished something."

Mani learned about the program after looking for volunteer opportunities.

Students who sign up can use the program to fulfill their volunteer hour requirements.

Without the seven years of continued work the program has done,



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The staff of The Saratoga Falcon is committed to objectively and accurately representing the diverse talents, cultures and viewpoints of the Saratoga High School community.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Saratoga Falcon welcomes all signed letters of opinion, which are subject to editing for length, accuracy and grammar. Please send them to apurvachakravarthy@saratogafalcon.com or preston.fu@saratogafalcon.org. For ad information, phone (408) 867-3411, ext. 222.

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Stop taking advantage of Wellness Center

The Wellness Center, a mental health resource established in the heart of the campus in 2019, aims to provide a safe, calming and supportive space for students. Students have the ability to tell their teacher they are leaving to go to the Wellness Center and stay until they need to calm down before returning to class.

Theoretically, this seems like a great solution — one the school wanted and desperately needed given the meltdowns that occur inside the academic and social pressure cooker here. Most teachers are extremely understanding about their students leaving, and encourage them to take mental-health breaks as needed. Most of the time, the Wellness Center is used as intended: A student checks in, spends around 20 minutes collecting themselves and then goes back to class more ready to learn.

But there are instances where the privileges are being abused. Teachers and administrators are growing increasingly frustrated at the number of students who leave class to go to the Wellness Center, and instead hang out with friends in the Student Center or leave campus.

Even though the Wellness Center now requires visitors to sign in, it's still easy to sign in, enough to judge for themselves how much personal time they need to take.

stay for a short period of time and leave to do something else. Ultimately, the system is based on an honor code.

The more people who abuse the Wellness Center as an excuse to get out of class, the quicker the administration will be to remove the privilege altogether, eliminating this resource that so many students actually need. The fact that there is a high possibility of it happening now is infuriating.

Students constantly complain about the school's disregard for mental health. When it's time for Speak Up For Change week, they grumble that one week of assemblies, club meetings and activities in the quad won't fix the systemic issues that create stress for students. When the AP Physics C course was introduced this school year, some said that adding another unnecessary AP class would do nothing but pressure college-obsessed upperclassmen to add another stressful class to their workload.

In these situations, students were absolutely right to critique the system and push for even more mental health resources. But now, we've been offered a resource that has accomplished worthy goals. A place solely dedicated for students' wellness. A place where students are trusted



time for yourself or are tempted to just leave class for other reasons, don't ruin the opportunity for those who actually use the Wellness Center for its intended purpose — just stay in class and preserve this important resource for those who need it. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief Anjali Nuggehalli
Opinion Editors Apurva Chakravarthy
Reporter Preston Fu

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted in 31-0 favor of this article.

Linguistics: a perfect bridge between STEM and humanities

By Carolyn Wang

We take the English language for granted.

Very rarely do we stop and consider why we say "I am going to class" rather than "going to class I am," (Yoda!) or why we insist on pronouncing *been* as *bin* and *tough* as *tuff*. Attempts to explain the mechanics and idiosyncrasies of our own language through the NoRedInk online grammar lessons elicit groans from a good portion of the student population. Not to mention the complaints about having to learn how to conjugate dozens of tenses in world language classes.

Meanwhile, students who are more interested in social sciences and the humanities will enjoy exploring branches like psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and ethnolinguistics, which are all concerned with how languages relate with the individual and society. Pursuing such fields would provide a solid foundation for careers in government service (such as the FBI), language documentation and fields that require writing skills, including journalism.

In fact, these are the underlying questions for an existing, under-rated area of study: linguistics.

In addition, students who further their knowledge about language structure will generally have an easier time studying English grammar and foreign languages.

Rarely do schools help students learn to understand the study of language on a broader level.

Why does Spanish put the adjective after the noun? It all has to do with syntax, the linguistics subfield concerned with the formation of sentences. Why do Chinese immigrants frequently forget their articles, mix up "he" and "she," or fail to pronounce ending consonants in words such as "that?" Phonetics and phonology, subfields within linguistics that study speech sounds in their physical and cognitive aspects respectively,



CAROLYN WANG

can explain that. Most schools force students to take a second language, but rarely do students learn to understand and appreciate the study of language on a broader level.

Studying syntax, phonetics, phonology, morphology and the like would provide students with a more holistic perspective on these specific mechanics behind how language is formed; thus, they will be more attentive and responsive to topics that NoRedInk and VHLCentral try to instill through repetition, often at the expense of student engagement.

Other students agree. In a survey on the Saratoga High School 2021-2022 Facebook group, 81% of students who responded would be willing to take a linguistics elective sometime in their four years of high school if it were offered. The idea of incorporating linguistics in schools, although relatively obscure, is not unique; other schools have implemented an actual elective course with great degrees of success and positive feedback from students.

Because the field is so overlooked in secondary education, olympiad puzzles available on the web are tailored towards students who have no prior knowledge of linguistics. Their format — specifically in the form of approachable puzzles and competitions — introduces specific topics within the linguistics field that students can figure out using logical reasoning and a bit of creativity.

This makes them accessible challenge-activities that can make studying linguistics fun.

If I told you I've transcribed Old Persian tablets, translated

for example, students interest-

theranos in Silicon Valley: Anomaly or in step?

Graphic by PRESTON FU

Bad blood: exception to Silicon Valley's reality

By Carolyn Wang
& Zachary Zinman

board of experienced business executives to guide Apple from a variety of fields, with exception of one former government official.

The Theranos board had former government officials with no experience with health care: Jim Mattis, former head of U.S. Central Command who later became President Trump's defense secretary; Henry Kissinger, former secretary of state in the Nixon administration; and George Shultz, another former secretary of state, among others.

After three years out of public eye, Elizabeth Holmes, the founder and former CEO of the now-defunct blood analysis company Theranos, was convicted on Jan. 3 on four of 11 counts of wire fraud. The rise and fall of Theranos, arguably one of the most intriguing and disgraceful episodes of fraud within Silicon Valley's technology bubble, brought increased scrutiny of its famous startup culture.

Decades of misinformation fueled by poisonous investor behavior have bubbled over, revealing Silicon Valley's toxic culture of valuing growth over all else.

It begins with the investor networks, dissuading the entrepreneur from focusing on product quality, and persuading them to focus on pleasing investors. At surface level, the wealth of investors seems a harmless concept, promoting growth, innovation and entrepreneurship.

But as more firms developed, so did the Silicon Valley network of venture capitalists (VC), and the culture completely shifted into one of fraudulence.

Theranos completely exploited this cycle, starting with \$5.8 million in 2005 and rising to \$100 million raised in December of 2017 — it took over a decade for Holmes to be caught.

There is no focus upon the product, and the cycle of growth kills startups and naive entrepreneurs. Brilliant ideas and teams are crushed by this culture. Like Theranos, many other Valley companies are little more than a glorified — and legal Ponzi — scheme.

Heralds of the Silicon Valley point out that Holmes, a pathological liar, cannot be used to represent the culture, and yet use the success of Larry Page and Mark Zuckerberg to characterize what being a Silicon Valley startup truly looks like, completely discounting the hundreds of failures occurring each year.

This is no jab at the entrepreneurs and the innovators here, not even an attack at the companies. There is no doubt that most entrepreneurs begin with great ideas, motivation and dedication to create change. But the systematic fraudulent behavior encouraged across all levels of startup culture has made the Valley toxic for success and productive innovation — Theranos just happened to be the company that was caught.

In this cycle of inflated valuations and ridiculous multiples, billionaires and firms implicitly encourage startups to use statistics to lie in order to raise valuations, even multi-billion in rare cases.

There is no better example than Theranos. The idea was brilliant, potentially revolutionary. For that reason alone, its valuation soared exponentially. The company generated a few million in sales between 2010 and 2012 but reached a valuation of \$10 billion in 2013 and 2014 through the rosy images Holmes painted and the hundreds of millions in revenue that she promised.

Across the Valley, tech and SaaS startup valuations are pumped. On paper, these companies look huge, making their entrepreneurs worth millions of dollars, but in reality, the entrepreneurs often can't afford to pay themselves a salary, and are on the brink of financial ruin. Then the IRS and the state swoop in and tax them heavily because they appear to be well-established, sizable firms.

Investors pressure these startups to grow their revenue and customer base, allocating all capital to stock growth instead of research to improve the product itself — for consumer-facing products, such as Facebook ads and Amazon web services.

Twenty-five cents dollar investment for every sent back to these companies is to these.

But it's the next few cycles of the investments that are the most evident of Silicon Valley's fraudulent circles. A speaker event with "This Week in Startups," Canadian Venture Capitalist Chamath Palihapitiya, who at one point engaged in the following process, describes the fundraising cycles as follows:

"Entrepreneurs are encouraged to reach out to firms in order to provide the first set of investors opportunities to sell their stakes at massive profits. Investors will encourage these startups to burn all their tools to do so."

Silicon Valley is a place in which risk is celebrated, innovation is strived for, failures are learning opportunities and the impossible is a mere challenge which can be overcome with cutting-edge technology. Although Holmes's company can serve as a warning for others, the sad and distressing Theranos tale remains an outlier in Silicon Valley.

Graphic by ANUJ PAUL



The 'undeserved rest' we love: February break

by Benjamin Li
& Daniel Wu

Whether we're hitting the slopes to ski, sleeping in or utilizing the time to catch up on second semester studying, February's so-called ski week is every high school student's savior.

Some people say it shouldn't exist; we couldn't disagree more.

Placed just over a month into the second semester, many question exactly why we need this break; however, the ominous thought of AP tests and building academic pressure cause students to cherish the extra time and rest provided in order to carry through the tedious second semester.

Given that most students endure three to four full months in the first semester without a substantial break, many assume they would be able to do the same in the second semester.

However, the circumstances differ tremendously after winter break.

During the first semester, students were slowly reintroduced into in-person school, as teachers refreshed their minds with reviews of information forgotten over the summer.

Not to mention, student motivation was at an all time high after being confined in our bedrooms for over a year.

On the other hand, the second semester starts at full throttle with teachers launching straight into new material, expecting students to fully retain everything from the fall.

In reality, however, many of our two-week holiday breaks are spent grinding through SAT prep books or college applica-

cations — necessitating ski week as the real winter break.

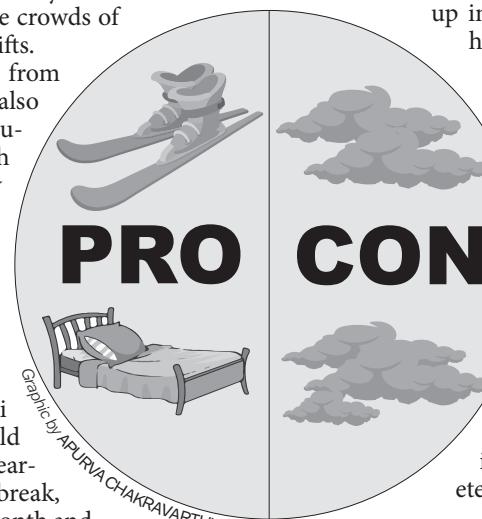
Let's not forget to mention the whole point of February break: As mentioned in the nickname itself, ski week provides a full week to journey over to Tahoe and experience the best snow of the season at the peak of winter.

Considering how most companies don't recognize ski week as a holiday and how school districts hold the break during different weeks in February, there aren't as many massive crowds of skiers clogging the lifts.

Coming back from ski week, students also have to endure a brutal March month with only one day off. Speaking from experience, March tends to be a period of burnout with the immense academic load and AP test preparation.

Without ski week, students would have to wait until early April for spring break, then face the next month and a half with no days off at all. This would be even more difficult for students — especially juniors who are generally taking their heaviest course load in their high school career.

Ski week resuscitates students and provides room for them to relax, allowing them to return to school with an even stronger academic rigor. ♦



by Jason Cheng

Oh, ski week.

It's cold, it's boring, it's pointless — need I say more? February break marks the worst time of year, and I kid you not, I'm going insane just thinking about it.

Blistering cold isn't what I associate with the word "holiday," especially when there isn't even a holiday to celebrate during the time off. I prefer going outside, but ski week forces me to stay huddled up in a blanket in my barren house, trying not to freeze in the icy depths of my heaterless room.

At best, February break is merely bland. At winter's prime, I'm trapped inside, developing the dreaded cabin fever, greeted by nothing but gloomy clouds. For non-skiers, it's a depressing week of laziness spent doing absolutely nothing for what seems like an eternity.

I understand — it's nicknamed ski week for a reason. We all love the thought of a trip to Tahoe to enjoy the beautiful, snowy climate. At least, that's what they say until the ski resort reality sinks in.

The final verdict? Ski week isn't needed. For my part, I'd much rather take more three-day weekends spread out in second semester instead of suffering through an endless week of feeling frostbitten and bored. ♦

ple who are irritated after spending hours in traffic with their families. Even after you arrive, there are just too many people. Lines for ski lifts are packed to the brim, and when you're on the descent, the hordes become obstacles in your path.

Now, let's say you've avoided all these mishaps, but you're now hungry. Lucky for you, ski resorts are offering a once-in-a-lifetime deal of burgers for only \$30 and just \$15 for a side of French fries.

I know about the law of supply and demand, but really? There's no other food options in a 10-mile radius, so you'll have to spend all your cash to feed your aching belly. It's obvious that students need a break every once in a while, but February is, by default, the worst time of year. Wasting a holiday in such a depressing environment is devastating.

Especially when the end of ski marks the beginning of a tireless, grueling March marathon, the entirety of the break is spent suffering through the thought of inevitable schoolwork and AP testing in May. With students just beginning to warm up to second semester, the placement of February break gives students nothing to look forward to and nothing to look back upon.

In all honesty, I'd much rather sprinkle these extra days throughout March to be more productive while maintaining a rigorous schedule.

With everyone scrambling to go skiing during the same week, it's safe to say that traffic is horrific. The endless line of cars is a grim sight, worsened by a sea of people.

Sleep deprivation is not a flex — stop glorifying it

CONSISTENT LACK OF PROPER SLEEP WILL ULTIMATELY RESULT IN HARMFUL MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES

by Nilay Mishra

In AP Statistics recently, I witnessed a junior who went to sleep at 3 a.m. the previous night give into the blissful, yet fleeting pull of sleep instead of completing their warm-up worksheet.

They woke up startled after the concerned teacher tapped them, asking appren-tively what time they went to bed the previous night.

Such moments are common, especially for juniors and seniors. Thanks to the school's hyper-competitive environment, ambitious upperclassmen often take on the hardest classes all at once while also juggling college applications, sports and extracurriculars into the mix.

With so many balls in the air, they find they can spare only four to six hours a night for sleep and sometimes even less.

If this problem wasn't bad enough on its own, it becomes even worse when upperclassmen start bragging about their lack of sleep.

"The time you wake up is generally when I sleep," I overheard one classmate saying. "Last night, I slept at 7 a.m."

When students were working on the infamous "Beloved" essay in English 11 Honors, few essays were submitted by midnight. In fact, many classmates I knew turned in their essays between 3 and 4 a.m.

The next day, instead of shamefully re-gretting the fact that they had about one-third of the recommended amount of sleep, many bragged around to their friends and even the teacher, eliciting sympathy and bravado.

In a Facebook poll that sampled 34 upperclassmen taking mostly honors and AP courses, 82% say they regularly go to bed past midnight, and a majority go to bed past 1 a.m.

This translates to, at most, five to seven hours of sleep on a regular basis — a far cry

below medical professionals' recommended eight to 10 hours for long-term health.

This problem isn't confined to our school — only about 27% of high schoolers nationally actually get the recommended amount of sleep.

What are the causes of the plague?

Leading the list are poor time management, bad organization and a lack of fore-thought.

Chronic sleep deprivation (defined as not one or two days but a longer period) should not be looked at as the pinnacle of achievement nor something to be admired and emulated.

Long-term sleep deprivation has been linked to anxiety, faulty brain function, memory loss and immune system deficiency.

Having immune system deficiency during a pandemic, a dip in mental health or faulty brain function is the last thing stressed high schoolers need.

Yet they bring it on themselves by trying to out-do one another by staying up unimaginably late at night in order to keep up with their peers or be the epitome of tireless work.

To solve this, students can do many things: Stop giving into peer pressure, stop procrastinating, use weekends more effectively and plan ahead as much as possible.

Peer pressure usually takes the form of sleep-deprivation glorification.

People should stop bragging to their friends when they go to sleep late, and instead brag when they get a full night's sleep.

This change in mindset would promote prioritizing sleep rather than the procrastination that results in 3 a.m. bedtimes.

Another major issue is group projects where the habits and sleep schedules of some members tend not to match those of others.

In these cases, getting everyone to agree to a schedule that they follow is the best

AVG. TIME IN BED

6 hr 16 min

Aug 15, 2021–Feb 12, 2022



A junior sleeps an average of 6 hours nightly, which is 2 hours less than recommended.

course of action rather than following the course of the worst procrastinators.

In practice, this involves finishing homework and studying for tests ahead of time.

But for all sleep-deprived juniors and seniors looking for a way out of the vicious cycle, I ask one thing: Don't brag about when you stay up well past midnight, stop procrastinating and plan ahead.

While students have many extracurricular activities and competitions that take place throughout the day, there are almost always more hours to catch up on school work as well. ♦

In practice, this involves finishing homework and studying for tests ahead of time.

But for all sleep-deprived juniors and seniors looking for a way out of the vicious cycle, I ask one thing: Don't brag about when you stay up well past midnight, stop procrastinating and plan ahead.

And above all, let's change our mindset from one that glorifies sleep deprivation to one that condemns it and fights it at every turn. ♦

Uneventful, unnecessary, uninteresting: ski week

by Jason Cheng

Oh, ski week.

It's cold, it's boring, it's pointless — need I say more? February break marks the worst time of year, and I kid you not, I'm going insane just thinking about it.

Blistering cold isn't what I associate with the word "holiday," especially when there isn't even a holiday to celebrate during the time off. I prefer going outside, but ski week forces me to stay huddled up in a blanket in my barren house, trying not to freeze in the icy depths of my heaterless room.

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love the thought of a trip to Tahoe to enjoy the beautiful, snowy climate. At least, that's what they say until the ski resort reality sinks in.

The final verdict? Ski week isn't needed. For my part, I'd much rather take more three-day weekends spread out in second semester instead of suffering through an endless week of feeling frostbitten and bored. ♦

be that bad," Asher said.

Asher's family was planning to leave Tahoe on the day when the storm was at its peak, but those plans were quickly derailed.

Due to the snowstorm, there was well over a foot of fresh powder in most areas throughout Tahoe. Asher's family attempted to make a U-turn back to their ski resort, but the icy, unplowed roads caused them to get stuck in a bank of fresh snow.

After installing chains and getting help from locals, her family was able to get out of the bank in a couple of hours. Asher said it was stressful and unexpected, but she was really grateful to get help from the people around them. They then decided to drive up to Reno, where they stayed in a hotel for two days.

In the meantime, their holiday plans of returning home and spending time with their family and friends were completely obliterated due to the snowstorm.

"The experience was challenging, but being able to get through it made Christmas more special for our family," Asher said. "I was disappointed about missing out on our usual Christmas celebrations and seeing family and friends, but the sense of community I felt after being helped out of the snowbank by complete strangers helped make this disaster a fond memory." ♦

lifestyles



Courtesy of DIYAIYER

The record-breaking snowstorm stranded many cars in the area due to the slippery roads.

ing an unfamiliar neighborhood.

"Chains were a huge deal, because we had to buy them multiple times," Iyer said. "Two of them broke, and we had to fix that on the road. It was quite the experience."

Because of the unusually high number of car accidents and snow plows on the usual route, the Iyers chose to drive south to Bakersfield, turning the usual three or four-hour drive home into a grueling 14-hour slog.

They faced many challenges trying to leave, such as installing chains and navigat-

still able to sled and spend time with her family on Christmas. And while the white out dashed many of their plans, it also gave them a unique Christmas experience that they will never forget.

Sophomore Ella Asher was another student who planned to go to Tahoe and ski for a week with her family before returning home for Christmas.

"We didn't see the storm warning until the middle of the week when we were already in Tahoe, but we didn't think it would

Fantastic masks and where to purchase them

by Nilay Mishra

the protection offered by the N95 mask.

The only major drawback of these masks is their discomfort. They restrict breathing and are attached tightly to the face, making it impossible to wear painlessly for prolonged periods of time.

Indeed, in an email, the administration announced that they "will supply each SHS student with two [KN95] masks," and they can be bought in bulk for only about \$1 to \$2 each. By comparison, cloth masks that offer a smaller degree of protection from the virus are often 10 times as expensive.

One downside is that the nose bridges are often difficult to tighten, which results in many students around campus wearing the masks loosely.

This allows particles to come in from above the mask, making it less effective than its N95 counterpart. Thus, students wearing KN95 masks should follow the proper protocol.

Cloth Masks: Falcon pick — the Proper Cloth for \$20

The KN95 is a more casual version of the N95. It is more comfortable, but less protective. However, it is still a medical-grade mask, and offers significantly more protection than most cloth masks. This balance be-

tween heavy protection and a modicum of comfort has made the mask one of the most commonly worn masks at the school during the omicron surge.

The perfect mask that blocks out all invading foreign particles, fits snugly like a glove, is affordable, fashionable and comfortable is not on the market. When one focuses on a specific characteristic they want in their mask, however, mask-shopping is no longer an intimidating.

Listed below are the best mask options on the market, with their corresponding benefits and drawbacks.

N95: Falcon pick — the 3M for \$1.20/mask

This is the mask that started it all. For the first six months of the pandemic, I exclusively wore it whenever I had to leave my house. While they were difficult to find, and cost as much as \$100 for one mask at the beginning of the pandemic, they are now quite affordable. N95s are the most protective commercial masks available, and offer medical-grade protection from almost any kind of infection. No other mask comes close to

These masks are the most comfortable by far; some are designed to be so uninhibiting that their presence can barely be felt. However, they prioritize comfort and fashion over protection. The KN95 mask is better

because it sacrifices a small amount of comfort for significantly greater protection.

With the omicron variant being extremely transmissible, it is important to recognize that the only masks approved by the CDC at the moment are KN95 and N95 masks. Students who wear cloth masks are compromising the safety of students and teachers around them.

Masks are tricky to choose as buying the correct mask requires considering various criteria: comfort, fit, quality, material, effectiveness, color and fashion.

Tips to have a fabulous first date

WHILE IT'S NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID THE AWKWARDNESS THAT COMES WITH A FIRST DATE, HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO MAKE THE EVENING A LITTLE MORE BEARABLE



ja-sun an-jelly
Jason Cheng and Anjali Nuggehalli

It doesn't matter if you have nerves of steel when performing for a crowd of thousands or don't even flinch skydiving out of an airplane: First dates are terrifying.

While the awkward icebreaker phase is inevitable, there are certain things you should never do on a first date to make the evening as smooth as the one-liner you delivered when your date got in your car.

Don't try to be funny.
While it seems tempting to blow your date away with all the jokes you brainstormed in your bed the night before, there's truly nothing more uncomfortable than a continuous stream of terribly timed jokes. Both parties are probably nervous during the first date, so making the other person feel at ease is far more important than becoming the next Pete Davidson.

Don't go to the movies.
There is nothing easier than sitting in silence in a pitch-black theater for two hours, which is why going to the movies is the perfect cop-out for a first date.

However, we want to dissuade you from



Don't be on a date with your phone.

We get it. Going on your phone is a great way to act like you're super important with super important things going on. It's also a go-to move to grab your phone when things get slightly awkward.

But from your date's perspective, there is nothing worse than feeling second to whatever's happening on your screen. They'll think you're bored, or uninterested in what ever they're saying.

Or even worse, they'll think you're hit-

A love letter to my bike

DATES ARE TEMPORARY — BUT MOUNTAIN BIKING WILL LAST FOREVER

sina is a speeda

Sina Salehi

While a lot of people are focused on finding a date for 2/14, I'm planning my day with my teal, industry blue Santa Cruz 5010cc XO1 RSV, with Maxxis DHR IIs on both wheels.

Here's how my Valentine's Day would play out:



I wake up and right next to me, is the cold carbon (CC grade, of course) of my Santa Cruz 5010 X01 with Carbon Reserve 32 wheels. The LED lights are red. The tires are muddy. Last evening's ride

was dirtier than I expected.

I shower my bike, using my biodegradable muc-off bike wash. I lather up my bike and rinse it off with my garden hose. Proper bonding requires that I spend absolutely every moment with my industry blue 2021 Santa Cruz 5010 CC XO1 RSV.

After washing up, I go on my first ride of the day, probably in Sanborn. I pump the tires. I lubricate the chain. I hop on the seat, and pedal for hours. Then, after a brief rest, I bike into the woods.

The misty forest air creates a romantic atmosphere, as the giant branches bruise my bike.

However, my side piece, a Fact2 Carbon Specialized Roubaix Sport equipped with a Shimano 105 groupset, is still up for ride.

A roadie may not be able to take on the rough muck ahead, but it'll keep me rolling until next Valentine's Day. ♦



FALCON // SINA SALEHI

Salehi poses with his beloved bike.

the bike back to my Local Bike Shop, only to find they are closed for Valentine's Day. My bike is sent into cardiac arrest, as I realize I'll never be able to pedal through the forest on my bike again.

The dropper goes in and out of the seatpost, and the ride takes a turn for the worse as oil oozes out of the Rockshox reverb stealth 31.6x200mm retractable seatpost, meaning I can no longer continue my ride. I sadly wheel



Foolproof 'icks' to help you get over that not-so-special someone

kava-needs ravioli

Avani Kongetira and Kavita Sundaram

When their pajamas are too short

We know it might be scary for them to go shopping for clothes without their mom, especially since they haven't changed their wardrobe since middle school, but I'm sure they can find someone to chaperone them on Target run to buy some basic flannel pants.

When you go to their game and they're benched

There's nothing worse than showing up to their game where their only impact was a butt sweat stain on the bench.

When they have a perm

This should be self-explanatory, but clearly people still need an explanation. We're going to gatekeep curly hair for the people born with it.

When they run with a backpack to get to class on time

Somehow they refuse to run during PE, but as soon as they're a second late to World Geography, they're ready to fulfill their Olympic sprinter pipe dreams.

When they snap you with filters

Especially the dog filter. It's not 2017.

When they have 5 Star binder paper

Imagine asking them for notebook paper and they whip out a piece of 5 Star laminated binder paper that's more expensive than your entire binder. If that's not an ick then what is?

When they play Fantasy Football

We know they like to think they're the main character and everyone else is living in their world, but the key word here is "fantasy." None of it is real. Go run around outside.



Valentine's Day through the eyes of the double-dumped

A CYNICAL OUTLOOK ON THE ABOMINATION THAT IS VALENTINE'S DAY

you'll never know

Anonymous

day to spend with someone who really matters to you in a special way. It looked pretty neat until I brought my eyes back to myself and remembered I don't matter to anyone in that special way, and with all the wisdom of an eighth-grade basement goblin, I went out to change that.

It took less than two months for me to be dumped again. You'd think that by the sixth time in the disposal I'd be pretty good at it; maybe I'd even have found the big metal bar to stop the compactor from squishing me this time.

I'd hope so too, but alas, squished between the walls of misfortune, I found myself heading into another February utterly alone.

To one wrung so dry as I, Valentine's Day isn't much of a holiday. It's an advertisement for pink-colored trash and cheap candy.

It's a reminder that the throne in the sky that is love isn't reserved for me, and that whatever I do, I won't escape the cosmic comedy and personal torment that has so proven to be my love life. ♦

As said edgelord, I make sure of it. While my eloquent declarations may convince people that I've spent a lifetime perfecting my cynicism, there have been years when I attempted to enjoy the holiday. That's not to say it went well, but I tried.

Looking at my older brother and his girlfriend, I got the idea that Valentine's Day was something special, something worth looking forward to, a fun holi-

Fast forward two and a half years and one misstep leading to another and I've been dumped for the fifth time by the same person. Well, I thought to myself, that sucked, I'm never doing that again!



NELSON

continued from pg. 1

Upon having seen posts of her singing on his explore page, Hoying wanted her to audition for a girl group he was creating. After multiple virtual and in-person auditions, Nelson became a member of Citizen Queen.

The girls stayed together for two weeks when the group was first formed; in that time, they produced four full a cappella covers and recorded "Evolution of Girl Groups," which has garnered over 22 million views on YouTube.

On May 1, 2019, Citizen Queen signed with RCA Records. Under the mentorship of Hoying, the group was able to hone their skills, and their covers have garnered positive responses from their fans.

Citizen Queen accompanied Pentatonix on tour in May 2019 and opened for them all across the country, from Madison Square Garden to Oracle Arena to the Forum.

"The minute I got on that stage, I was like 'I'm not leaving. You're going to have to forcibly remove me from the premises because this is home now,'" Nelson said.

At the moment, the group is focused on growing their presence on TikTok and other social media platforms. Currently, they have nearly 500,000 subscribers on YouTube and 1.2 million TikTok followers. Several of their videos, such as a cover of "Champagne Poetry" by Drake, have gone viral, enabling

them to build their audience.

Nelson said she has loved every minute of her time with Citizen Queen, relishing in the fact that singing — a career path she had given up on early in college — was making others happy.

As a high schooler, despite her winning Saratoga Idol as a freshman and being widely recognized for her talent, Nelson never anticipated a singing career.

At school, she honed her skills through the Theater Arts Program and the Media Arts Program (MAP).

Despite her robust musical background, she entered USC as a theater major after several rejected auditions for its heavily impacted music program.

"After the rejections, I was like, 'That's God telling me not to do music,'" Nelson said. "So I dropped it because I just lost faith in my voice."

Her family and friends urged her to keep going, however. Nelson said her parents have always given her the freedom to pursue her dreams, but under one condition: She needed to give it her all.

"[My mother] always says that talent is only 10 percent of what you need," Nelson said. "You need to fill the other 90 percent with hard work, consistency, doing things outside of your comfort zone and matching your passion with your work ethic."

Once they realized her passion for singing, Nelson's parents strongly encouraged her to follow her dreams and supported her in her singing journey.

"I'm super grateful for them,"

Nelson said. "I know not everyone gets that kind of support from the get go. The fact that my parents have been investing in my dream since the beginning is amazing."

With her family's support, she was able to regain her confidence and pursue music, realizing that finding herself as a musician was more important than trying to emulate someone else.

"I ended up saying, 'You know what, screw this,'" Nelson said. "I made an Instagram for music, and I started singing again in my freshman year of college. Then, one of my favorite artists commented on my vid eo."

While Nelson had some hesitations about singing, when Grammy-award winning singer and songwriter Yébba told Nelson to not stop singing in a comment on Nelson's singing post, Nelson's insecurities about singing vanished, she said. In the following years, she continued to make song covers and post them.

Nelson has also begun to explore songwriting, and even penned a couple of Citizen Queen's upcoming tracks, as well as music for other artists.

"It's crazy: I'm a musician but that's not at all the degree that I originally pursued," Nelson said. "My high school gave me the space to start exploring my passion for music. In the end, it's really just putting yourself out there. When you think something can happen, trust me, crazier things have happened!" ♦



Courtesy of MITHIL CHAKRABORTY

RISING STARS

ALUMNI

Graphic by SERENA LI

The Chakrabortys take center stage in entertainment

by AnjaliNuggehalli

Looking through his childhood videos, Class of 2021 alum Mithil Chakraborty watched his 4-year-old self tense his forehead in concentration, arch his shoulders back and raise his poised fingers to his chest. In the tape, he replicated every Bharatanatyam step his older sister Meghna executed on the wooden dance studio floor, fixated on her grace and rhythm. His passion for dance was born.

"Being six and a half years older than me, Meghna is the person who really got me into performing," Mithil said. "Ever since then, she's been one of my biggest supporters."

Now a first-year bioengineering major at UCLA, Mithil has performing experience in a range of genres from Bollywood to musical theater. He began singing lessons with Gayle Greenbook at the age of 7, and joined the Mona Khan Company at the same time. After entering high school, Mithil was promoted to a company dancer, and performed for paid gigs such as the Golden State Warriors halftime show and a reception for the prime minister of India in 2015 at the SAP Center.

Mithil was also selected through an intensive tryout process to be a performer for IndianRaga, an organization that makes professional music videos. Under the fellowship program as a high school freshman, he opened for some of India's biggest Bollywood stars at the Shoreline Amphitheatre, which he recalls to be one of the most surreal moments he's experienced.

"I got to skip school for a week and wear an earpiece, and it just felt like I was one of

those people on TV," Mithil said. "I saw so many Bollywood stars there, and it was by far the biggest audience I've ever performed in front of."

Because his parents and extended family were never involved in entertainment or performing, Mithil said that he has looked to Meghna for guidance on navigating the industry that can be "brutal at times."

Meghna, a Class of 2015 alumna, graduated from USC in 2019 with a business major and a digital arts minor. While attending school in Los Angeles, she joined the Joya Kazi Unlimited dance company, where she learned about the production work behind music videos and films.

After working in a marketing internship at Amazon Studios as an post-graduate, Meghna returned to USC for the two-year Peter Stark Producing Program. Her Amazon in-

ternship involved promoting existing content, but Meghna said she applied for the USC graduate program in hopes to one day create things she believes in.

"I'd been interested in storytelling since taking yearbook in high school, but it wasn't until college that I realized how much I loved being on set and working in entertainment," she said. "The purpose of this program is to figure out exactly what role I want to be in."

Through gaining experience in a range of job opportunities, especially in the South Asian community, Meghna realized that she wants to center her career around promoting cultural diversity. At Universal Pictures, Meghna worked on engaging African American audiences through the promotional campaign for "Queen and Slim," a groundbreaking film in the Black community; she was also featured in a dance number in the popular Netflix original series "Ne-

er Have I Ever."

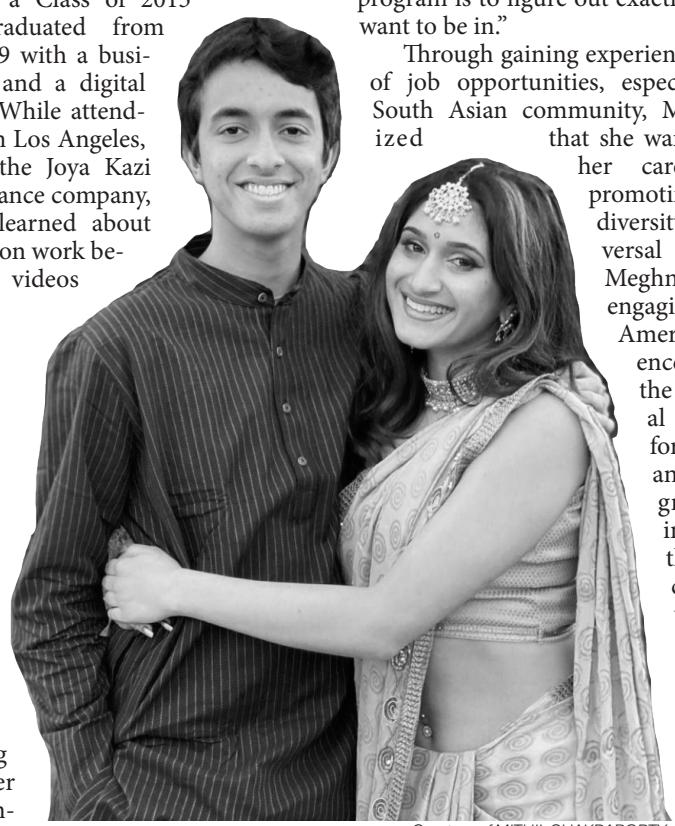
At first, Meghna said that it was difficult to find role models pursuing non-traditional careers. Her business friends were going into consulting and banking, and her parents had their own reservations about her career choice. However, meeting other South Asians in the entertainment industry gave Meghna assurance that the path she was taking was the right one.

"I used to spend so much time in my head, being anxious, and doubting myself that at one point I was like, 'OK, I've chosen a path. Now I have to stick to it,'" Meghna said. "I realized that the world is so diverse, and if you seek out the community you're looking for, it's there."

Gaining the confidence to carry her passion into her career is a lesson that Meghna conveyed to Mithil, as she has encouraged him to keep performing even while attending college. While she was home during the pandemic, the siblings would make videos and song covers to post on TikTok, continuously fueling their endless passion for performing.

Mithil also wants to closely incorporate his passion for music into his bioengineering career. As his first foray, he is currently researching the impact of music therapy on information retention and Alzheimer's prevention.

"I hate it when people say that once you turn 18 and go to college, all of your passions aren't important anymore because you have to focus on your studies," Meghna said. "Being able to connect a passion to a paycheck is so important to me — it's all connected." ♦



Courtesy of MITHIL CHAKRABORTY

'Harry Potter 20th Anniversary': Documentary into wizarding world of film rekindles childhood times

BY Derek Hsu
& Kavita Sundaram

tween Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint and Emma Watson.

The documentary is split into chapters, which extensively cover the director Chris Columbus' vision, practical effects and casting decisions in each successive installment of the franchise. Its main focus, however, is the synergy and growth of the iconic trio of main characters: Harry Potter, Hermoine Granger and Ronald Weasley.

Radcliffe, Watson and Grint spoke about their time on set and how they evolved throughout the series. From their audition tapes and set videos in 2001 to clips of behind-the-scenes interactions, gaining a glimpse of the actors' overflowing joy and eternal family-like bonds was especially comforting.

While the first film in the franchise was released three years before we were born ("Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" debuted in 2001), the series continues to be a source of childhood nostalgia. With that being said, we had high hopes for the reunion, and the final product certainly didn't disappoint.

The "Harry Potter 20-Year Reunion," released on HBO Max in January, covered the complexities of making of the film series.

The two-hour documentary opens at the iconic set of Hogwarts, in Oxford University, immediately immersing us into the magical realm of our childhood. It was the perfect setting for a warm blanket (or an invisibility cloak) and cozy fireplace with the family.

There were a few moments that showcased new information, such as Watson revealing she considered leaving the franchise after "The Order of the Phoenix" in 2007.

Viewers get an inside scoop of Watson's crush on Tom Felton, who played Draco Malfoy, and how they have remained friends to this day. Helena Bonham Carter, who



Courtesy of RITA SKEETER

Senior Derek Hsu, dressed up as a Ravenclaw, and senior Kavita Sundaram, as a Hufflepuff, use a wand to closely examine Harry Potter's Marauder's Map in search of secret pathways.

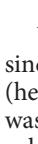
Rupert Grint confesses his love for Emma Watson — as a friend, of course.

While it's tragic to know that there will not be any new Harry Potter films in the future, watching specials like the "Harry Potter 20th Anniversary" help keep the beloved series alive and celebrated. ♦

My 2021 musical journey: refining tastes from chaos

Jay-song Champ
Jason Cheng

Jason Cheng



While SZA remains virtually stagnant since dropping her renowned album "Ctrl" (her most prominent appearance in 2021 was a feature in Doja Cat's "Kiss Me More," a hit song nearing 1 billion streams on Spotify), her single "I Hate U" is a reminder of what she can produce.

In a similar manner to both SZA and Walker, Dominic Fike rose to the top of my R&B-influenced indie list. His only release in 2021, a remix of Paul McCartney's "The Kiss of Venus," combines electric guitars and live drums in a mind-boggling performance, showcasing Fike's unique style.

His 2020 album "What Could Possibly Go Wrong" remains one of my favorites,

combining catchy pop hooks with hard rap verses in singles like "Vampire" and "Florida."

My thousands of listening hours on Spotify have been built up over countless late-night study sessions, which

require a soothing blend of R&B and indie hits. In particular, Summer Walker and SZA were standout artists for me.

Their listenability for any environment,

ranging from midnight sleep precursors to workout pumps, meant I streamed their songs 24/7.

Straying from his typical R&B hits, Jaden Smith has captivated audiences with his newfound indie style, after his successful collaboration with Justin

Bieber on "Falling for You" in 2020 translated into success in 2021.

His singles "Cabin Fever" and "BYE" emit fun road-trip energy through upbeat tempos and smooth

backing vocals.

Through these artists, I discovered more emerging artists, such as Kiana Ledé and Victoria Monét, while revisiting more established artists like Jhené Aiko and PARTYNEXTDOOR.

In a year of transition and adaptation, my music taste followed suit, migrating through melancholy beats and bitter lyrics.

Standout collaborations "No Love" with SZA and "Unloyal" with Ari Lennox epitomize Walker's evolution as an artist and her capability to enchant listeners.

Gaining the confidence to carry her passion into her career is a lesson that Meghna conveyed to Mithil, as she has encouraged him to keep performing even while attending college.

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turn 18 and go to college, all of your pas-

sions aren't important anymore because you

have to focus on your studies," Meghna said.

"Being able to connect a passion to a pay-

check is so important to me — it's all con-

nected." ♦

All graphics by CICI XU

Imperfection is beautiful

TRANSPARENCY IN CELEBRITIES' MODIFIED BODIES COULD LEAD TO MORE TEENS ACCEPTING THEMSELVES

BY Sara Bright
& Ariel Zhou

Lip fillers. Brazilian butt lifts (BBL). Facelifts. Nose jobs.

Additionally, BBLs, a risky surgery that enhances buttock volume and over-

all body symmetry, are encouraging girls around the world to travel to places like Florida, Turkey and Mexico.

BBLs have become the "fastest-growing cosmetic procedure," despite them having the highest mortality rate out of all plastic surgeries.

On social media, many influencers' posts are highly edited using photoshopping apps. The commonality of this behavior subconsciously sets the ideal look for women—a standard that is largely unrealistic. When teenage girls imperceptibly internalize these images, it can contribute to health issues such as eating disorders, along with the risks that come along with plastic surgeries.

While striving toward a fitter body is commendable, influential figures who set unrealistic beauty standards through surgeries they deny having are dangerous to impressionable audiences.

These unattainable beauty standards will harm teenagers less if celebrities and influencers come clean about their procedures, behind-the-scenes plannings and costs. Celebrities might also want to accept their own natural imperfections as beautiful—but that might be asking too much. ♦



Soundings literary magazine resumes after two years

BY MINSUITANG

During a recent tutorial, English 11 Honors and Creative Writing teacher Amy Keys' classroom was a hub of action. Throughout the 40-minute period, students on the editorial board of the school's art and literary magazine, Soundings, were discussing upcoming deadlines, editing student submissions and finalizing artistic choices.

Soundings has featured selected students' submissions since 1986, and provided opportunities for students to express their creativity beyond their English and art classes.

In the 2019-2020 school year, however, Soundings did not publish the magazine because students were unable to collaborate in person.

This year, the magazine will resume, led by Keys and an editorial board consisting of Creative Writing and Falcon students.

The preliminary deadline for submissions was Jan. 6, and the submitted works will receive feedback from the board before the final deadline on March 1, after which the student body will select the entries.

Currently, the editorial board is still finalizing the size, material of the magazine and providing feedback for submissions.

For senior Maanvi Chawla, who helps design and advertise the magazine, the most exciting part of working on Soundings has been "getting to see the art and writing that students from all grades submit."



Keys



FALCON // MINSUITANG

Students on the 'Soundings' editorial board gather to discuss the agenda, review upcoming deadlines and edit and assess submissions during tutorial in Ms. Keys' classroom on Feb. 2.

Senior Madhu Ayyer, who is involved in the journal's logo, layout designing and the general artistic aspects of the magazine, said that she hopes to expand her social interactions through this project.

In terms of editing and planning for the publishing of the magazine, the roles of the majority of the students require roughly two to three hours each week. Students also meet once a week during tutorial to discuss deadlines, and stay in close communication with the team.

Keys said that working on Soundings has provided a sense of community and normalcy this year for her and her students. Keys said that letting students take the

lead instead of giving specific directions and deadlines on this long-term project has allowed her to acknowledge and appreciate the talents within the student organization and their ability to work together.

"The editorial staff is extremely impressive," Keys said. "The skills they've learned more than equip them for this task, and their initiative, organization, appetite for creative and critical work and passion for language and literature make them a total delight to work with." ♦

Math department creates mentoring program for students

BY SANJOLI GUPTA
& NIDHI MATHIHALLI

In response to the learning-gap created from online learning, the math department decided to start a math branch of the Falcon Family Peer Tutoring Program earlier this year.

Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 Honors teacher Lisa Ginestet-Araki said that the program is a "win-win" situation for both mentors and mentees as the former get volunteer hours, and the latter get practice on math topics they may have been struggling on.

Mentors develop many collaborative skills into teaching math to their peers, according to Ginestet-Araki. She added that students learn how to collaborate with one another, including speaking to others in a constructive way while explaining concepts.

Sophomore Medha Ravi decided to vol-

unteer for Yim's mentoring program because she immensely enjoys both learning about math and helping people.

"I think a lot of times in math, it's just nice to hear it from a different voice rather than just your teacher."

MATH TEACHER Lisa Ginestet-Araki

Ravi has noticed several skills she has strengthened while being a mentor. For example, she has learned how to discuss a problem and help the student arrive at an answer themselves. ♦

One technique Ravi uses is asking the student to explain the problem back to her step-by-step, so she can see where the misunderstandings lie.

"Through this experience, I've learned that you can learn from being a mentor as well," Ravi said. "I hope that I will be able to make a positive impact."

Ginestet-Araki has seen that peer mentoring can often be more helpful than going only to a teacher for help.

As of right now, however, only a few students are taking advantage of the peer mentor program.

"I think a lot of times in math, it's just nice to hear it from a different voice rather than just your teacher," Ginestet-Araki said. "A student might have a different way of explaining or understanding a concept that makes more sense." ♦

Foreign language teachers adapt to rise in COVID-19 cases

DUE TO A SURGE IN OMICRON, LANGUAGE CLASSES ARE SHIFTING TO ACCOMMODATE STUDENTS STUCK AT HOME

BY NIDHI MATHIHALLI

Looking out at the empty seats in her classroom on Jan. 17, AP Spanish and Spanish 3 teacher Sarah Voorhees took attendance, noting that only two-thirds of the class was present; the rest were out with COVID-19, or had come in close contact with someone who was sick. As she uploaded the class's worksheets to Canvas, she wondered how much her online students would actually learn in their time away.

Although the number of students coming to class has improved in the weeks since, some are still staying at home in order to stay safe or after having had close contact with COVID-19 positive individuals.

Voorhees, who has taught Spanish for 22 years, said she believes that these past two years have been extremely difficult for

foreign language instructors. Although many classes had difficulty switching to online classes during the 2020-2021 school year, foreign language classes were hit especially hard. Since the majority of the lessons were oral, students could not absorb the material as effectively online. Now, with the rise of the omicron variant, many foreign language teachers have faced these issues again.

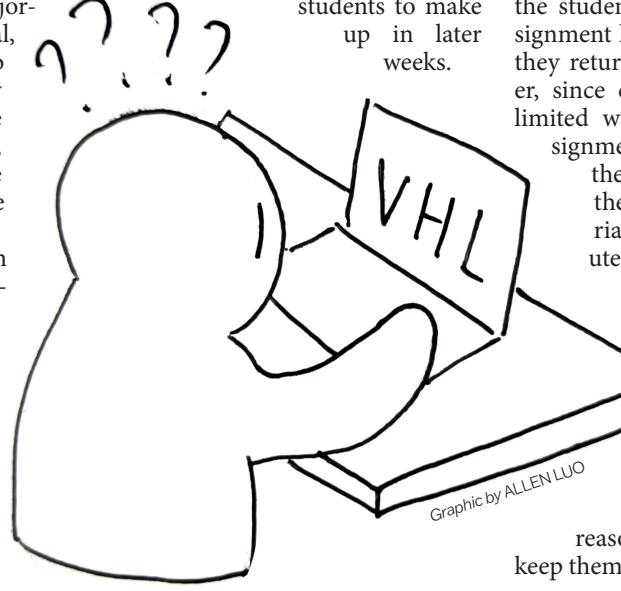
"I put everything on Canvas and VHL central, which has some oral speaking portions," Voorhees said. "However, a couple people that were absent were somewhat lost on their audios. Just like last year, if you're not in class, you're missing all of the oral

practice."

Additionally, according to Voorhees, the in-class material is often time-consuming, which can be hard for some students to make up in later weeks.

For example, her AP Spanish class recently wrote an hour-long essay based on a video they had watched. Since this assignment was considered as an assessment, the students who missed the assignment had to make it up when they returned in person. However, since class time is extremely limited with the number of assignments completed in class, these students had to write the essay during the tutorial, which is only 55 minutes long.

Spanish 3 and 4 Honors teacher Stephany Marks has faced a similar problem, with many of her students missing class for COVID-19-related reasons. In an attempt to keep them up to date, she has been



emailing them with her daily presentations and posting the homework on Canvas. She has also seen some interesting student solutions, such as students doing group work over Facetime or taking pictures of important class material for other students. Marks even had an online student Facetime her friend to stream into the class.

Having seen students' different ways of learning and connecting from home, Marks is hopeful that the remote learning situation will improve in a way where students will still be able to absorb the material.

"Luckily, it's the beginning of the semester, so they're not going to get too far behind," Marks said. "But it's nerve-racking, for both students and teachers. So many people are in and out all the time. But, I understand we all just do the best we can do, and hope that everyone stays healthy." ♦

Teacher Q & A?

What is your go-to method or activity to better connect with students?

Introvert physics teacher's favorite: Google Forms

BY GEORGE HUANG

er, as the year has progressed the students began realizing they could take advantage of the reflection form to ask personal questions.

Welander started this tradition five or six years ago when he went to a series of workshops designed to help teachers form personal relationships with their students.

In the responses, Welander receives a wide variety of personal questions ranging from his workout routines to advice for stressed seniors.

"I think the funniest ones are when people pick up on my interesting traits," Welander said. "And when they do, I get a lot of questions about those."

For him, the reflection exercise is a fun, easy and non-threatening way to break the ice and ultimately get to know his students better.

As an introvert himself, Welander said that the form forces him to be a lot more outgoing in ways that he wouldn't be ordinarily.

Junior Kevin Zhao said, "I always love opportunities to get to know more about my teachers. I can listen to his answers to not only my questions, but also the questions my classmates ask as well, and sometimes they are things I have never really thought about."

The segment of the class when they are talking about the questions on the google form is so popular, said Welander, that students are always looking forward to the next one.

"I'll have people asking, 'When are we going to do the next one?'" said Welander. "Overall, I think different teachers have different ways to get to know their students. I'd recommend whatever method they're comfortable with." ♦

togatalks

What is one of the most entertaining things you've seen a teacher do at school?

"There was this one time where Mr. Betz was showing this song about a swamp fox and he was dancing around in his wheelchair."

junior Varun Adunuthula

"My teacher from another school got mad and left the class, so I started teaching. When she came back, it was hilarious."

freshman Sofiya Malko

"It's the most enjoyable thing to spectate Mrs. Cahatal yelling at students, but you know that she's not actually mad."

junior Jenny Chan

All graphics by CAROLYN WANG

Senior reflects on elementary school in China

Senior Caroline Keogh's kindergarten classroom didn't look like the ones that most people recall from their childhood.

Instead of books, computers and paper, it contained shelf after shelf of sparse, colorful, carefully organized materials: a tower of smooth pink cubes in descending sizes that fit perfectly into a box; maps made out of wooden puzzle pieces; long bead chains and trays of letters cut out of sandpaper.

Rather than tight rows of desks and tables, children and teachers alike sat cross-legged on cloth mats over the outline of a single, large oval painted on the floor.

This type of classroom, known as a prepared environment, is an integral part of Montessori education — one of dozens of educational systems and theories that have gained prominence in the past century.

Keogh's family relocated to Beijing due to her father's work.

Her parents enrolled her in the International Montessori School of Beijing, a bilingual primary school that serves both expatriate and local students from preschool to 8th grade. Keogh, whose family was a part of the growing expatriate community in Beijing, attended the international school until 5th grade.

Keogh, who has lived in Saratoga since middle school, received a radically different early childhood education than most of her current peers. Yet, she said she has assimilated well into the U.S. public education system over the years, and her experiences with different types of schooling reflect the resounding myriad of education in the world today.

Keogh's school followed the Montessori curriculum — a pedagogy developed by Dr. Maria Montessori that focuses on individual, holistic learning during crucial periods of a child's life based on Montessori's years of observation.

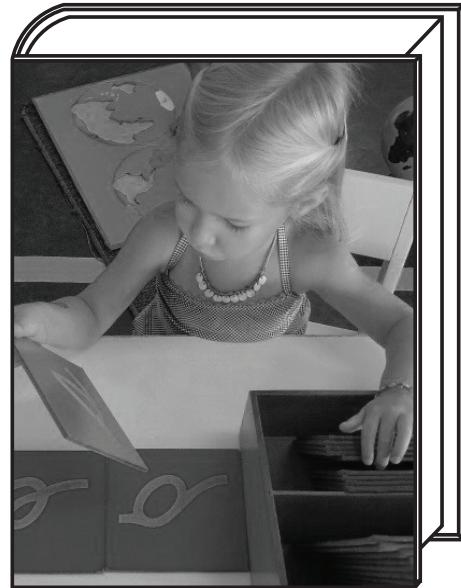
"I was caught off-guard at first, with the idea that all of the kids were expected to move through the curriculum at the same speed," she said. "I think it's a completely unrealistic expectation, and kids internalize

Keogh noted that her school was diverse

those ideas. And when they get older, we see things like cheating scandals because people have grown up only caring about the grades, not what they're learning."

"I was caught off-guard at first with the idea that all kids were expected to move through the curriculum at the same speed."

SENIOR CAROLINE KEOGH



Courtesy of CAROLINE KEOGH

She believes that it would be beneficial for U.S. public schools to incorporate more elements of Montessori teaching into their own curricula. For instance, Montessori's emphasis on u-

n-der-

and move on to the next subject."

According to the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, more than 3,000 Montessori schools operate in the U.S.

Of them, 560 are public. The total number of Montessori schools across the world exceeds 20,000. They are growing increasingly popular in European and Asian countries as a more holistic alternative to traditional methods, but are not as common in the U.S.

Getting a Montessori elementary school education, according to Keogh, has continued to shape her, even when she moved back to the U.S. At first, it was difficult for her to acclimate to competitive and academically rigorous Saratoga schools, which were vastly different from the relaxed and self-paced environment she knew in Beijing.

"It was caught off-guard at first, with the idea that all of the kids were expected to move through the curriculum at the same speed," she said. "I think it's a completely unrealistic expectation, and kids internalize

Keogh's Montessori experience wasn't just focused on academic growth — the emphasis on developing social-emotional awareness, learning practical skills, forming close relationships with peers and teachers and diversifying both the school and the city all played a part in the unique Montessori education Keogh and her classmates received.

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Keogh noted that her school was diverse

Senior's change in schools proves less rigorous

The first thing senior Amoli Vanavadiya did after immigrating to Saratoga from Bangalore, India, in the summer of 2018 was to join the school's cross-country team. She had been interested in running since elementary school, and she found out about cross-country while researching possible extracurriculars here.

Cross-country caught her attention because it was not available in Bangalore due to the limited access to natural terrain there.

Practices began before the fall semester, and Vanavadiya recalled how joining the cross-country team was a formative experience.

"I went to [cross-country] practice before freshman year even started — it was my first impression of pretty much everything here," Vanavadiya said. "I was trying to research everything I could about American high schools before the move, and I found out about cross-country. I was so excited to make the team."

Before moving, Vanavadiya attended The International School Bangalore (TISB), an elite private school in Bangalore, as a day student; TISB serves as both an international boarding school and day school. Its student body consists of a mix of expatriate and local students. TISB has different curriculums based on grade levels. Students from sixth grade to eighth grade follow the school's independent curriculum based on international standards. In ninth and 10th grade, students transition to the Interna-

ICSE and IGCSE are of utmost importance to high school students in India.

Unlike the U.S., where there is no national or international board of education, most institutions in India are required to follow these centralized curriculums.

This is an issue addressed by private schools — while they previously catered exclusively to affluent families, an increasing number of low-cost private schools means that an English-focused education is becoming more accessible to the masses of low-income and lower-middle-class students.

The past two decades have seen an increase in the popularity of private schools in India, especially in urban areas. Between 2011 and 2014, private school enrollments increased by 16 million while public school enrollments dropped by 11.1 million.

India's severely underfunded public school system also has a major flaw: Most schools are not taught in English. This means that the students do not learn English as a primary language, causing major long-term set-



Courtesy of AMOLI VANAVADIYA

School spirit encourages junior to explore

Last August, junior Willie Kuiper found herself in a difficult situation: Her family had just moved to Saratoga from the hometown of Eindhoven in the Netherlands, and Kuiper was about to undertake the grueling

task of assimilating into an American public high school as a junior.

During her first month here, Kuiper noticed glaring differences with her previous schools. At first, she was shocked at what

seemed like a massive student body compared to her old high school, Van Maerlant-Lyceum in Eindhoven. However, Van

Maerlant-Lyceum and Saratoga High have approximately the same number of students — between 1,100 and 1,300 — but

Kuiper attributes

Saratoga's large, outdoor campus to her overblown perception of the school's campus size.

"It was so terrify-

ing," Kuiper said.

"[SHS] was way bigger than I imagined. I thought I was going to

get lost here. Campuses in [the Netherlands] are almost never this big — my school definitely wasn't."

Another major difference

Kuiper observed was freedom in course selection,

with the exception of

the required core cur-

riculum. For her sci-

ence credit, she decided

to take Marine Biology, a

course that was not available

in her old school.

Kuiper's previous school

was a public secondary school

for pre-university education

that served students who had finished

eight years of Basisonderwijs, or el-

ementary education.

When she began her first year at

Van Maerlant-Lyceum, Kuiper was

able to choose between four curricu-

lar "packages" that would decide the course

pathways for her secondary education.

These four choices consisted of two sci-

ence packages and two economics packages

— each with a series of fixed classes related

to the package they chose, as well as limit-

ed supplemental courses. Kuiper chose the economics package with an advanced math course. She added a supplemental Business Economics class to her course load.

"The quality of the education was good," Kuiper said. "But there was less choice in your schedule. I like the different types of courses I'm able to take now."

Schools in the Netherlands typically follow a model that is completely different from U.S. public schools.

After completing the required eight years of elementary school education, students then choose from three different pathways that would place them in different levels of higher education. The most basic pathway is Pre-Vocational Secondary Education, a four-year program that prepares students for four more years of senior vocational education, and eventually either a two-year associate's degree or a bachelor's degree in applied sciences.

The second pathway is Havodiploma, or Senior General Secondary Education — a five-year secondary program that directly prepares students for a bachelor's degree at a university for applied sciences.

The final pathway, which Kuiper chose, is a program called Vwo-Diploma, or Pre-University Education. This is the most academically rigorous and time-consuming track — a comprehensive six-year secondary school education that

prepares students

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education systems.

However, Kuiper expressed a strong desire to attend university in the U.S. despite it being more expensive — tuition in the Netherlands is regulated by the government and costs between \$2,300 and \$4,600 per year, comparatively less than the U.S. average of \$10,338 per year for in-state public universities.

She attributed her desire to attend U.S. universities to her admiration for the strong sense of community, school spirit and academic freedom she observed in the culture surrounding them.

Kuiper noted that the young adult "college experience" seemed uniquely American to her, which influenced her plans to attend university in the U.S. Kuiper's love for school spirit and community also influenced her positive perception of American high schools.

"Since sports [in the Netherlands] were not connected to schools in any way, there

was no concept of school spirit or rivalries or school color. We attended [solely] for our classes, and went home once they were done," Kuiper said. "I love it here — things like tailgates, quad days, spirit weeks and being a part of the field hockey team really made me feel welcome in this community."

Kuiper recalled most students at her previous school acting closed-off to newcomers because of their individualistic nature and the cultural detachment of school from all non-academic aspects of students' lives. Contrary to her expectations, Kuiper found the culture in Saratoga to be welcoming — despite her nervousness, she almost immediately found people to befriend and sit with at lunch.

"I was scared because I felt I didn't know the language, I didn't know the culture," she shared. "But people were so nice from the beginning — my whole [field hockey] team was so open and friendly, and now they're my best friends. Because of how welcoming people are, I really love it here, and I'm starting to feel at home already."

Foreign School Experiences

ALL STORIES BY TARA NATARAJAN



study is difficult compared to international universities that offer elective choices, double majors and minors. As a result, many affluent graduates are leaving the country to study abroad. The mission of international schools is increasingly to prepare them for it.

Because Vanavadiya attended TISB from the sixth to eighth grade, she did not study the IB curriculum.

Nevertheless, her school was fiercely academically competitive — even more so than Saratoga High, she said.

"Although [TISB] did have sports and music, they didn't place as much emphasis on extracurriculars," Vanavadiya said. "I took orchestra both here and there, and it's taken seriously [at SHS]. There are major orchestra trips and concerts, and the music teachers over here are much more committed to it as a subject."

Despite her academic success during freshman and sophomore year, Vanavadiya's journey to assimilation was a difficult one at first. She had a hard time fitting in with her peers who had gone to the same elementary and middle school and already formed their own groups. Additionally, her Indian accent was sometimes a source of embarrassment and frustration.

Vanavadiya also felt that Saratoga students were more socio-emotionally mature than many of her peers in TISB due to a heightened sense of independence and self-sufficiency and that she had to change her own mannerisms and style to fit in. Still, one thing has remained constant throughout her high school journey: her love for cross-country.

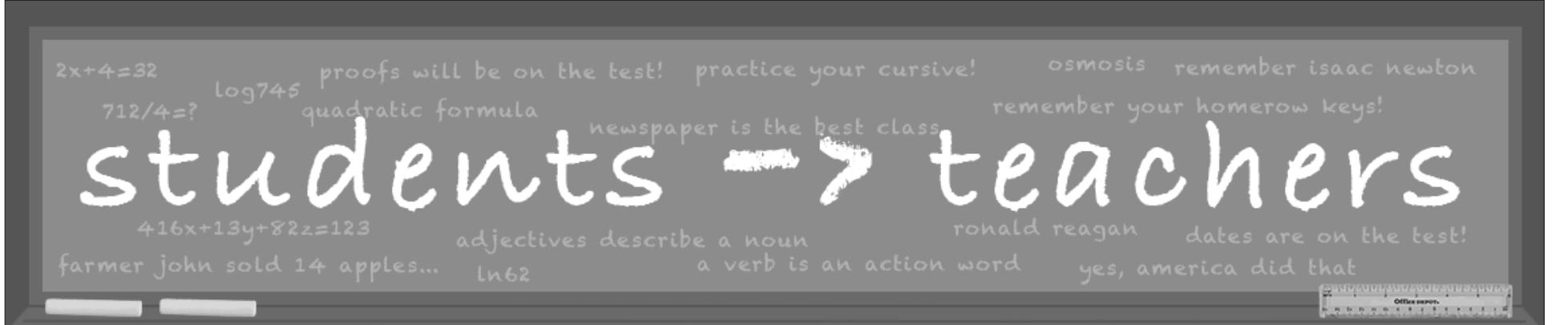
While she didn't feel the academic rigor was an entirely bad thing, she prefers the well-rounded experience SHS offers.

Vanavadiya particularly noted the lack of school spirit in her previous school com-

to make friends, participate in extra-curricular activities and foster a sense of belonging. She eventually found friends and now feels at home in the community.

Vanavadiya did not lose her Indian accent — instead, she explained, she was able to become more confident about herself and her background.

The diverse community she found in her new home made a big difference in her years here.



THE CALLING TO BE A TEACHER REMAINS STRONG FOR STUDENTS MAJORING IN EDUCATION IN COLLEGE

by SanjoliGupta

Last summer, senior Casey Gilligan worked as a teacher's assistant for Saratoga Elementary kindergarten teacher Julie Kwok.

One day, as she waited for the children to finish writing, she saw a boy struggling to write simple sentences on his paper.

Gilligan was able to recognize his frustration. Rather than hating him, she wanted him to have fun while learning to write quickly and effectively. So, she pulled him aside and asked him about his favorite sports and animals, calming him as they practiced writing sentences.

Gilligan has a lot of experience teaching besides being a TA for multiple elementary school teachers, such as coaching for the All Stars United Soccer Club. In all her mentorship positions, she has focused on helping kids who are falling behind their peers, and forming one-on-one connections. She is



Gilligan

The experiences that she gained through these classes, specifically adapting to different children's needs, coupled with her passion for helping others, led her to consider pursuing a degree in education.

She said that her teachers such as Kwok were her main inspirations, since they emphasized kindness and giving back to the community.

"[I want to do] anything that can help future generations move to the right path," Gilligan said. "I want to help these little kids out, and get them to where they want to be when they're older."

While some teens like Gilligan are excited to become a teacher one day, the profession is fading in popularity. In fact, according to MarketWatch, only 4.6% of college freshmen in the U.S. plan to major in education today, a drastic decrease from the 22% of college students in the U.S. who majored in teaching in 1975.

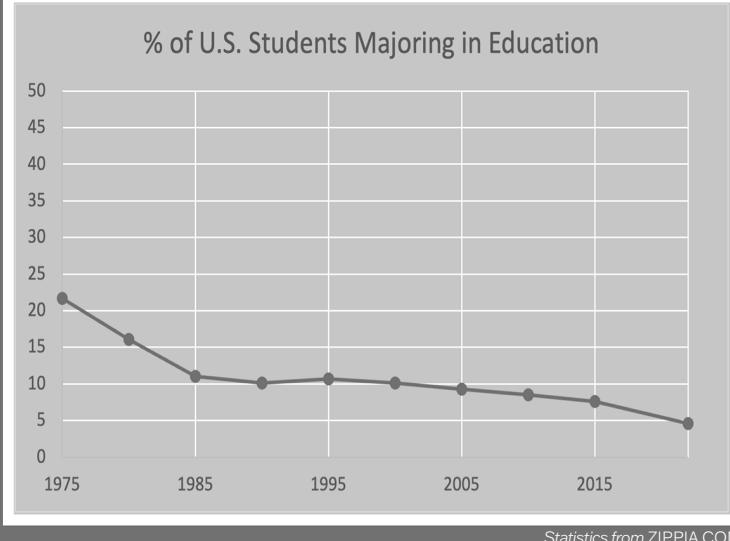
The New York Times reported that the number of U.S. graduates earning education degrees dropped by 22% between 2006 and 2019, despite an overall increase of U.S. students earning graduate degrees.

In addition, a survey of over a thousand adults in Education Week found that 61% of people have "trust and confidence in public school teachers," but a little over 50% said they don't want their children to be teachers — 29% cited "inadequate pay and benefits" as the main reason for their hesitation. Despite these concerns, however, Gilligan's parents are proud of her decision to take up teaching.

She added that when it comes to connecting with students, she believes it's easier for younger teachers to understand the atmosphere of the classroom.

"I feel like people fresh out of college remember how it was when they were a student,

I think teaching allows you to be a life-long learner in a way that a lot of other professions don't," she said. "I learn a ton from my students every year. Especially when it comes to teaching English, the world is such a complicated place and being a human is difficult. Having an opportunity to read books about it, to talk to each other about it feels like a very valuable thing to do."



All graphics by SHAAN SRIDHAR

>> falconfigures

61	% of people have trust and confidence in public school teachers
50	% of parents don't want their kids to become teachers
29	% of people cited low pay and benefits as a con of being a teacher
22	% drop in graduates with teaching degrees from 2006 to 2019



ENGLISH TEACHER Natasha Ritchie

and the culture hasn't really changed too much since," Ravi said. "They've just come out of that environment, so they know exactly how students interact with one another today."

Despite Ravi's desire to become a teacher, her parents would rather she become a doctor or lawyer due to the higher pay of those professions.

However, Ravi said that she still wishes to pursue teaching after going into a higher paying profession and building up enough savings for her to be able to support herself on a teacher's salary.

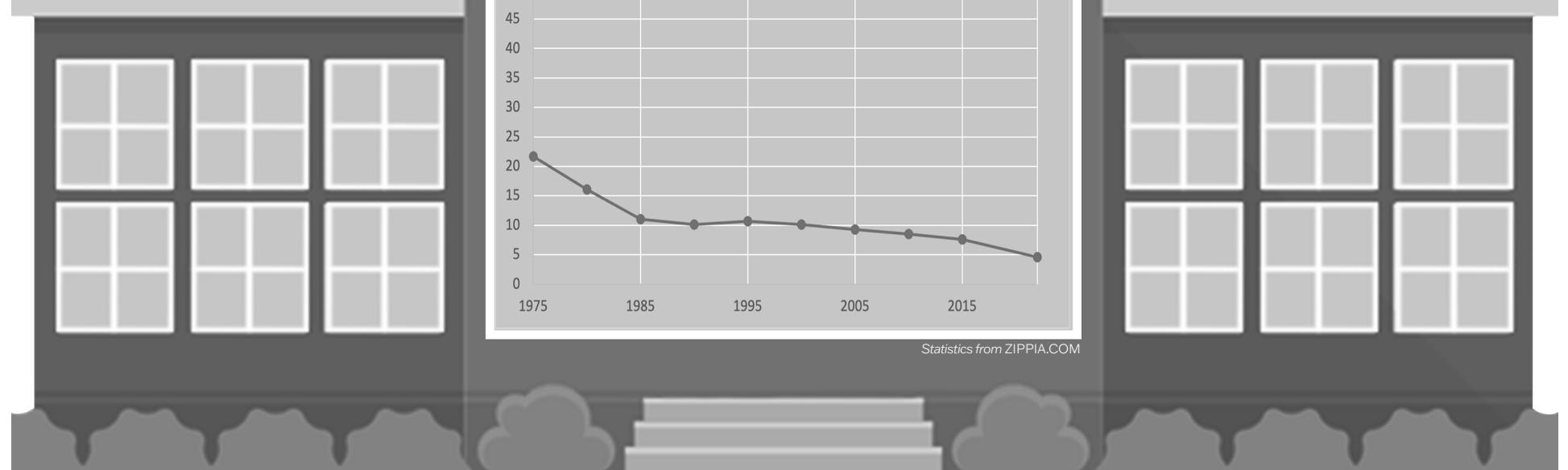
"Especially in the Bay Area, people put importance on [money] because it's a very competitive community and people want to be the best without having any certain end goal in mind," she said. "I think overall, people are really concerned about their social image and overall success and they forget what is truly important to themselves."

English teacher Natasha Ritchie faced a similar conundrum. Ritchie initially applied as a law major, before she realized that the career was not for her, and instead became a teacher. She said that, even after 19 years of teaching, she loves her job and finds it invigorating.

"I think teaching allows you to be a life-long learner in a way that a lot of other professions don't," she said. "I learn a ton from my students every year. Especially when it comes to teaching English, the world is such a complicated place and being a human is difficult. Having an opportunity to read books about it, to talk to each other about it feels like a very valuable thing to do."

"Teachers really go out of their way to connect with every student, and learn their way of learning because every student learns differently," she said. "That's a major thing that I'm gonna incorporate as a teacher later on."

Helping young kids strikes a personal chord with Gilligan. She fondly remembers her own education experience growing up. When her elder brother was in Kwok's class, Gilligan found herself welcomed into the classroom. She was allowed to sit through the beginning part of class, and always felt welcome even though she was still in preschool. Rather than solely focusing on traditional lessons, her kindergarten teacher taught her about morals and life lessons.



Getting fit in the best exercise fits

BY JasonCheng

When I enter the gym, I'm locked in.

I'm constantly pushing myself to become stronger both mentally and physically, and I'm completely focused on getting my reps in — well, sort of.

That is, you need to look good in the process, too.

Sure, benching 225 pounds is impressive, but being fitted up in the gym is the best way to effortlessly trip your physical appeal.

Become an egotistical bodybuilder

Not everyone can pull this look off, but if you're really confident in your body, a tank top and shorts will get you plenty of stares at the gym.

Make sure to stop and pose in the mirror to let everyone know that you're really into yourself.

Your gym diet is exclusively protein powder and creatine, so scream through every set until your already revealing outfit tears right off.

Looks can be deceiving

We all know a hoodie-and-sweatpants guy. Even if the gym feels like an oven, they'll casually be lifting hundreds of pounds without breaking a sweat.

Still, for most people, this iconic combination only works for chilly weather.

Especially if you get the color match right, you'll look fit in this classic attire.

If you're running low on time or nervous about people judging your outfit, you can't go wrong with this. If you start heating up, don't worry: That's what layers are for. Hoodies are perfect for warming up, and wearing something lighter underneath during more rigorous portions of exercise is ideal for a great workout.

A few accessories won't hurt

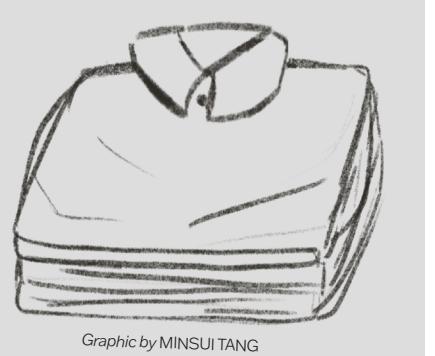
Accessories are awesome: Compression shorts polish up your morning runs, headbands hold back any irritating strands of hair, and fitness watches track your progress throughout a workout.

Yet, less is more sometimes, and stacking up accessories will only make you look tacky in front of already judgmental people at the gym.

Plus, you don't want random accessories hindering your performance; remember, working out is the main priority.

No matter what you choose to wear during your workouts, make sure you feel comfortable.

You're doing this for yourself, so as long as you put the work in and feel confident, nothing can stop you from achieving your goals — not even that bodybuilder in the corner.



Graphic by MINSUITANG

Teams cope with COVID-19 cases

BY BenjaminLi
& JonathanLi

The winter season has seen several game cancellations and postponements, as well as a number of COVID-19 cases.

The boys' basketball team has been particularly hard hit by the outbreaks.

With four sideliners with COVID infections, they rescheduled their game against Fremont on Jan. 28, and halted practice for four days before holding three practices in preparation for their match against Lynbrook on Feb. 1, whom they view as the biggest threat in their league.

The team managed to pull through with a 65-58 win in a tense overtime match.

"It's pretty hard on our team," senior co-captain power forward Ayaaz Shah said.

"Last time we played a couple games without some key players, meaning everyone else had to step their game up."

Before the omicron outbreak, the team had to deal with two COVID cases, leaving them two players short against Monta Vista on Jan. 8, but they managed to pull off a 49-46 win.

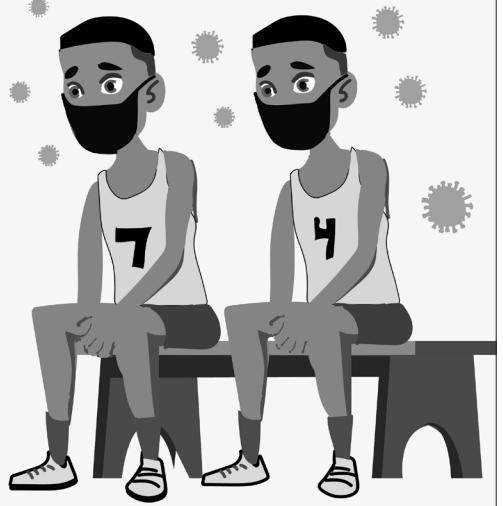
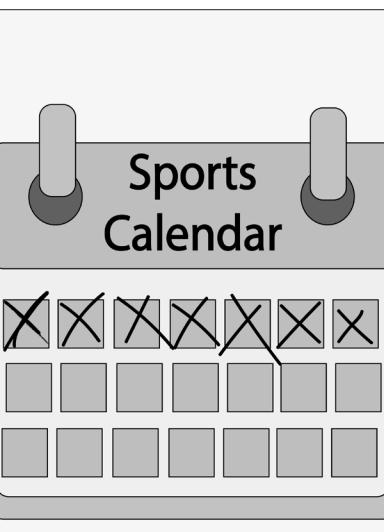
The team continued to find success in the next two games against Los Gatos on Jan. 14 and Wilcox on Jan. 18.

The cases also affected other players, who had to get rapid tested and were pulled out of class to check results.

Although players tested positive on the team, none of the games had to be rescheduled and the team was still able to play both home and away games.

Shah said he believes that the team will continue to win and stay dominant in their league, despite the recent surge of COVID-19 cases. Their main goal remains winning the El Camino League title and CCS.

"We've been checking up on each other



Graphic by ANJALI PAI

throughout the week in our group chat," Shah said.

"

Even though it's rough on our guys that do have [COVID-19], our concern for each other has allowed us to grow closer and tighter as a team."

"It's been pretty taxing," senior co-captain Emma Foley said. "In the last two weeks of January, we had three games each week, which was really tiring."

In addition to the physical exhaustion that came with the increased number of games per week, the team also had to deal with the changes in lineups.

"

Because of the back-to-back games, the team had to delve deeper into their bench, and use new strategies to fit the personnel.

However, the team has still seen success and remains at the top of their league.

"Though it's challenging, other teams are going through the same thing we are," Foley said. "We need to stick together and get through this."◆

Fantasy Football cements friendships

BY DerekHsu

Senior Weilin Sun eagerly selected Carolina Panthers star running back Christian McCaffrey with the first pick of his Fantasy Football league's virtual draft in early September; he instantly knew it was the right choice when he heard the enthused reactions in his Discord voice call.

Sun had sky-high expectations.

He created a short list of coveted players days beforehand, hoping to leap ahead of his competitors: an annual Fantasy Football league of 10 seniors who sought to maximize the excitement of the 2021-22 NFL regular season.

According to an ESPN statistic, more than 40 million Americans participate in Fantasy Football each year.

It can be difficult to differentiate the competitive atmosphere of other leagues to that of Sun's, but the Fantasy Football rivalries among these 10 seniors felt each year has served to bring them closer together as friends.

He drafted a mix of his favorite players and those with the highest projected point totals per week.

He accurately predicted that Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Cooper Kupp would break out with new quarterback Matthew Stafford.

Kuppam also held the second pick in the draft, choosing Alvin Kamara from the New Orleans Saints, a dependable and durable rusher and his favorite player.

Kuppam regularly facilitated trades in the league, polling members if they believed the transaction was fair. Kuppam and his friends often engaged in debates hours before games on Sunday to approve trades.

"These people are my friends as well as my competitors, so I didn't want to sabotage their team," Kuppam said. "If I could estimate the number of trades, it'd be more than twenty over the season."

To counteract his lack of wide-receiver depth, Sun picked up Amon-Ra St. Brown, a Detroit Lions player with favorable match-ups.

Both Sun and Kuppam said they were able to increase their love for the game through strategy, planning and execution.

Second Place Mum Get the Kamara

Champion Bishop Sycamore

Third Place Team BUNS

Graphic by DEREKHSU

points than average for a couple weeks, Kuppam was more inclined to start him for the upcoming matchup. Many of his efforts contributed towards improving his overall record.

"At the end of the day, there is some luck associated with it," Kuppam said. "Still, you have to consider the strength of the opposition and previous trends."

Kuppam and Sun placed second and fifth in the league, respectively, which ended in early January— their mutual friend, senior Younis Zaman, won the league.

They stated that there was initially a jackpot of money for the winner, but not enough participants contributed to it to make it enticing to Zaman.

Both Sun and Kuppam said they were able to increase their love for the game through strategy, planning and execution.

Nearly all of the ten seniors intensified their viewership of regular season games to watch their players.

Many use sports as an outlet of their interests and passions, and Fantasy Football has successfully extended that for these ten seniors.

"I learned more about the game and enjoyed a fun competition with my close friends," Kuppam said. "We may be in college next year, but I can't wait to do it all over again."◆

BOYS' SOCCER

CCS hopes uncertain after string of setbacks

By Sina Salehi

As the final whistle sounded, the dejected boys' soccer team walked off the pitch with the scoreboard reading 2-1 in favor of Milpitas on Feb. 1.

“It was the initial excitement that the Falcons began the league season with,” said senior captain mid-fielder Shaheen Masoumi.

“That game basically threw away all of our chances for CCS,” senior captain mid-fielder Shaheen Masoumi said. “It’s very sad.”

With a 4-5 record in the league this season in the SCVAL-El Camino league, the overall total record now stands at 7-6-1, lowering the team's chances for making CCS. While the league season began with three consecutive victories, injuries and a string of sidelined players resulted in losses to Lynbrook, Wilcox, Fremont, Milpitas and Monta Vista.

Despite the losses, hopes still remain for finishing the season as a unit, with playing wanting to renew the initial team chemistry that allowed them to start the season strong.

“We’re just not getting the results we want,” said senior goalie Mason Manzagol. “There’s only so much I can do in goal, but if we don’t play together and as a team, we’re not going to get the results that we want.”

With the season coming to a close soon, three matchups remain against Milpitas, Lynbrook and Wilcox. While the team's morale has been hurt by the recent losses, players haven't given up.

"If we don't play together and as a team, we're not going to get the results that we want."

SENIOR Mason Manzagol



Courtesy of MASON MANZAGOL

The team huddles up during a home game against Monta Vista on Feb. 3, which they lost 1-0.

GIRLS' SOCCER

Falcons boast 8-0-1 record despite challenges

By Nidhi Mathihalli
& Anjali Nuggehalli

The varsity girls' soccer team continues to lead their league, currently boasting a 8-0-1 record. They found recent success with 3-0 and 2-0 wins against Cupertino on Jan. 21 and Jan. 27, respectively; 1-0 win against Fremont on Jan. 25; 9-0 win against Milpitas on Feb. 1; and 6-0 against Monta Vista on Feb. 3.

The team's success has been in spite of this season's lack of players and personnel changes.



Gilligan

has been actively trying to be approachable to underclassmen.

However, she still expects everyone to perform to the best of their abilities, including herself.

As a co-captain, she sees her presence on the field being more prominent than in previous years. She has been making an effort to be more talkative and communicative to the members throughout practices and games.

“There is a lot of great talent on the team, and I’m really proud of everyone,” Gilligan said. “I think everyone’s on the same team for a reason, and making sure everyone is included is really important.”

Freshman earns playing time on the varsity squad

When freshman Anika Kapasi walked into tryouts in early November, the last thing she expected was to make the varsity squad, let alone start for it. However, as the season progressed, head coach Ben Maxwell recognized her growth, and she secured the defensive midfielder position on the varsity team.

“We almost grew through the program together, so getting to work as captains together has been really special now that we’re seniors,” Gilligan said.

Gilligan's main strategy when working with the team is welcoming all types of players. She recalled how younger players can be intimidated by the stereotype of older players looking down on younger players, and

“During my first game on varsity, there were a bunch of butterflies in my stomach,” Kapasi said. “I kind of forgot to breathe because I was so nervous. I just didn’t want to let my new teammates down.”

Senior adjusts to goalkeeper position

During the 2020-21 girls' soccer season,

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Team bounces back after early losses in season

By Minsui Tang

Due to two players out sick with COVID-19, schedule conflicts and unfamiliarity with new head coach Joshua Rivera, who led the JV team in the 2019-20 season, the girls' basketball team was overwhelmed earlier in the league season, starting with four consecutive losses against Lynbrook, Los Gatos, Los Altos and Homestead.

On Jan. 19, they won their away game 46-33 against Wilcox. On Jan. 21, they lost at home 59-34 to Palo Alto. Then they avenged their earlier home loss with a 50-45 victory at Los Altos on Jan. 28. They lost 60-53 to Lynbrook on Feb. 2 and 56-28 to Los Gatos on Feb. 4. As of Feb. 4, their total record is 7-10 and they are 2-7 in the De Anza league.

The Falcons have begun to regain momentum as players return from quarantine

and injuries, and there have been no absences for the three most recent games.

Junior Jenny Campbell and junior co-captain Tanya Ghai lead the team in points, assists and steals; junior co-captain Mika Tippets boasts the most rebounds and sloppy turnovers.

“The issue for games [before] was that it was really stagnant and we were still getting used to each other,” said Ghai. “When we’re in the game, it’s more real and a lot more fun and energetic.”

The whole team has tried to maintain morale by participating in bonding activities, such as team dinners, which have “definitely helped us get to know each other better,” said senior co-captain and power forward Amarangana Tyagi.

The improved team chemistry since the start of the season has contributed to better performance on the court in recent games, said sophomore guard Zinneerah Ahmed.

Before, many team members were still “getting a sense of how everyone played,” leading to a weaker offense compared to

their defense, she added.

The team's initial lack of players at various points earlier in the season meant the 10-person team had to play games with even fewer subs. This led to late-game collapses and sloppy turnovers.

“The issue for games [before] was that it was really stagnant and we were still getting used to each other,” said Ghai. “When we’re in the game, it’s more real and a lot more fun and energetic.”

The away win against Los Altos boosted the team's motivation, since the Saratoga players are generally younger and smaller than their opponents.

“[Los Altos was] definitely a strong team,” said senior power forward and co-captain Naomi Mallik. “But because we've been able to work a lot better and have better practices, we were able to win against them.”



Courtesy of WILLIE KUIPER

Junior Christina Chang attempts to block a pass in a game against Los Gatos on Feb. 4.

JAPAN: WIDESPREAD SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLS THROUGH CLUBS

Senior Taiki Fujigami moved to Tokyo in the summer before seventh grade after growing up in Saratoga and attending both Foothill Elementary School and Redwood Middle School. He currently attends Mita International School.

Since moving to Japan, Fujigami has noticed a visibly higher degree of sports participation both among the student body and in general compared to those in the US. At his school, roughly 60-70% of boys and 50% of girls are involved in some sports club by the time they graduate, compared to about 36% in Saratoga.

“Students just cut everything off as much as possible to secure time for both sports and studying,” Fujigami said.

“There’s not much entertainment or anything else that students can really immerse themselves in, so there’s more time and effort devoted to those sport clubs.”

Before moving to Japan, Fujigami was involved in karate, swimming and soccer. Since moving to Japan, he has been a member of Mita's middle and high school basketball club for five years. Their club

competes with other schools in the Setagaya province, a subdivision of the Tokyo tournament that determines qualification for the Nationals. Boys' and girls' basketball are one of the few sports that Mita emphasizes, alongside boys' soccer, girls' pop dance and boys' and girls' tennis.

“My school has other non-sports clubs such as debate, tea and general science, but they definitely receive less attention than sports clubs do,” Fujigami said.

Despite the focus on in-school activities and the high number of students involved in sports, Fujigami thinks the Japanese sports culture is fairly weak.

“The school isn’t super competitive athletically, so none of our sports teams are that strong,” Fujigami said. “The turnout at basketball games is pretty low except when it’s important. It’s mostly just the players’ parents and sometimes friends.”

Fujigami attributed his school's lack of sports culture primarily to the lack of

space in urban schools — Mita does not have enough land area to support all of its sports teams. Its only open area dedicated to sports is the “ground,” a patch of dry soil where the soccer and rugby clubs play. Several other clubs, such as swimming and tennis, do not have any on-campus facilities and must practice and compete in local offsite pools and courts.

“

“The gym is definitely not as big as the ones in the U.S.,” Fujigami said. “Since there’s not enough space for a lot of things, clubs have to avoid overlapping practice schedules with other clubs. Some days, the basketball team can actually use the full gymnasium, but other days there’s volleyball and badminton clubs using the other hall.”

“

“In the future getting access to sporting events will be much easier,” Fujigami said. “Especially in rural areas, more people will become involved with sports — whether playing, watching or following — which would economically benefit Japan and bring joy to the lives of the Japanese people. ♦



Fujigami

A GLOBAL TAPESTRY

Students share experiences with international sports cultures

Preston Fu and Allen Luo

INDIA: HEAVY ACADEMIC FOCUS, BUT SUPPORTS HUGE CRICKET CULTURE

Senior Kavya Narayan spent her first seven years of her life at a private school in Bangalore, India, where she said that opportunities to play sports were extremely limited — both in and out of school.

“We didn’t have any P.E. classes,” Narayan said. “It was just that, once a month, we would have a marching class, where everyone got in a circle and marched around.”

Narayan said that this overall lack of athleticism in schools resulted from an overemphasis on academics. Sports were exclusively viewed as extracurricular activities that most people would not pursue seriously. In fact, a focus on academics is ingrained in Indian culture; one Hindi saying roughly translates to, “You will be a King if you read and write, and be spoilt if you play games.”

“We have the Saratoga culture here, where all the focus is on STEM and academics,” Narayan said. “India is that but stronger.”

According to Narayan, college recruitment for sports was extremely limited. Even the opportunities offered to athletes only offer a minimum standard of living, CNBC reported, but the system is rampant with political interference.

Given the lack of available resources, competing professionally requires extreme individual commitment.

At the same time, their poor performance at the Olympics comes from a focus on sports like cricket that haven't been played in the Olympics. According to Narayan, sports followings for cricket are much larger and stronger in India compared to followings for sports like basketball or football in the U.S.

“Cricket was like a religion for so many families — when India lost a cricket match, they would literally mourn it like it’s a funeral,” Narayan said. ♦



Narayan

CHINA: ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE, BUT LACKS BALANCE

In China, Zhao was an exceptionally talented athlete. In golf, he placed seventh in the Buick Open on the PGA Tour China; years earlier his team placed fourth in the nation in tee ball. But after moving to the U.S. in 2016, Zhao discovered his skills are far more common here.

Zhao, who attended an international school in Zhengzhou, Henan, province, said that he saw people in China tending to focus on either sports or academics rather than trying to balance different interests and activities.

“If I told someone in China, ‘I’m the team captain for basketball,’ they’re going to think, ‘He’s probably not academically inclined.’ It’s a common perspective,” Zhao said.

Some Chinese athletic associations, especially at the college level, have started to emulate the U.S.’s approach to training athletes. According to Asia Society, many Chinese coaches and administrators from Chinese universities have visited American schools to learn about how they integrate athletics and academics into their school culture.

Despite China's gradual reform of sports training and organization, Zhao expressed a preference for American sports culture due to its generally more relaxed nature and increased opportunities for the general public.

“I’m in the fitness club and am interested in working out and exercising,” Zhao said. “I’m pretty hooked on this workout culture, and it’s definitely good for your mental health and better overall.” ♦



Zhao



This story has been modified for print. Read about students' experiences in Germany and the UK by scanning the QR code:

snapshots



FALCON // TARA NATARAJAN



FALCON // ANDREW LIN



FALCON // MINA YEAP

Senior Alex Yang, junior Ally Tan and sophomore Paul Hulme speak at the assembly on Feb. 4 during Speak up for Change week, which highlighted mental health awareness.

Senior Selina Chen performs traditional Chinese music on the Guzheng atop the quad on Feb. 1 for Lunar New Year.

Inspire Diagnostics staff await students to be tested on Feb. 1. Weekly PCR testing aimed to lower COVID-19 cases at school.

The grievances of a lowly, misused Falcon newspaper

Vol. 62
No. 5



Selina Chen

To Whom It May Concern,

I am a copy of The Saratoga Falcon's Vol. 62 No. 5. I was conceived on a grueling deadline night and printed for the school a week later on Dec. 10, 2021.

I've since come to know the despair of being born into a world where my brethrens are routinely abused in cruelly inventive ways.

After being distributed to a Spanish classroom, I sat abandoned in the back of the room, stacked amongst my fellow copies, slowly tanning into an antique yellow.

One day, I was yanked out from my stack.

Hopeful that I'd finally serve my purpose — spreading important news — I squinted at my bright surroundings, only to realize that I was being lowered onto the floor and ... ouch! The metal ring of a desk's leg lowered onto me with a thud.

The cruel student shook the desk a few times and, satisfied that it was no longer wobbly, settled down for class, leaving me to suffocate under the unbearable weight.

However, true misfortune fell when I was picked up and carried to the science building along with a plethora of other Falcon issues.

In horror, I watched a teacher tear out my double page and spread it out flat on the cold, black counters. Wet beakers and graduated cylinders were placed upon me, the slow drip-drip of water blurring my carefully inked words into indecipherable dark botches.

When a clumsy student spilled their distilled water, frantic hands grabbed me and

shove me into the puddle, scrubbing me around as if I was some common mop instead of the fruit of my creators' hard work. I was appalled, thinking there was no worse way for me to be used.

I was wrong.

When heavy rain drowned half of the school, the majority of campus was pitying their stained shoes or the state of their Teslas in the quickly flooding back parking lot. I watched water splash into the door of my current classroom, dreading what was to come.

As I'd feared, calloused hands flicked me open and dropped me onto the flooding zone.

My wood pulp pages screamed in silent agony as the reluctant material was forced to soak up the rain.

Ow! A muddied shoe landed on my front page, knocking me unconscious.

When I regained my mental faculties, I found myself disassembled, pages lost in



FALCON // SELINA CHEN

Papers were used as doormats in the rain.

unknown crevices of campus, including the dark belly of recycling bins or other dubious locations — possibly down the bowl of a toilet.

I beseech you, dear readers, please hear my plight and put a stop to my torture because as the harbinger of news for our school, I deserve love and respect.♦

Valentine's gifts that won't offend

Gift Exchange

Jason Cheng

It's that time of year again, where you're judged for being single and resented if you're taken — it's a lose-lose for everyone, really.

For those of you with a special someone this Valentine's Day, this means hauling your lazy butt off the couch and surprising your shawty with their fifth gift of the year.

Don't worry: If your gift doesn't blow them away, it'll only be a week of ghosting and side-eyes before things return to normal.

Let's start simple with the worst possible gift ideas: A box of chocolates. A teddy bear. A last-minute Valentine's Day letter. Unless your bank account has a negative balance, these are usually no-go's.

Come on, it looks like you didn't even put in an ounce of effort for your significant other.

It's offensive, really, if you're celebrating the love of your life with a pink and purple box of half-melted chocolates from Target, paired with a \$10 worn-out teddy

bear you found at the back of your closet.

Put yourself in their shoes: Would that really cut it?

Instead, try something creative that shows you truly understand them on a deeper level. Maybe it involves a memory box full of inside jokes, or recreating your first date — whatever the cliché, make it something that only you two will understand.

Even if it doesn't turn out perfectly, they'll appreciate the effort you put in for them. If they don't, it's time to move on.

Monetary value really shouldn't matter since it's the relationship that holds meaning, not the gift.

Gifts don't have to be materialistic, either; a shared experience can be just as rewarding, if not better. Take them out on a romantic date, and treat them to luxurious fine-dining. Your wallet will be crying for help, but it's a noble sacrifice to show how much they mean to you.

Ironically, Valentine's Day can be a trying time for couples. Your gift could be a make-or-break for your 2-month relationship, but cheer up: There's always more fish in the sea.



WAYS TO COPE WITH BEING SINGLE

- 10** Play video games. One of the best ways to cope with being single.
- 9** Watch a romcom while crying into a tub of ice cream. Bonus points if the protagonist is doing the same.
- 8** Think about your dream college. Love is temporary, college is forever.
- 7** Look for romantic couples in the park. There's bound to be a few of them. Maybe check the benches.
- 6** Ask your friend out. We'll just go out as friends. Nobody will think we're dating.
- 5** Cancel Valentine's Day on change.org. At least a third of the population would sign it.
- 4** Use your imagination. If you try hard enough, your dreams will come true.
- 3** Tell your friends about your long distance relationship. That's why you've never met. They definitely exist.
- 2** Stalk your crush on social media. Don't worry, most people do this anyways.
- 1** Read the Falcon's Life Section. It's Valentine's Day themed.

topten

>> George Huang