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# THE saratogafalcon

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Senior Nidhi Mathihalli discusses body dysmorphia and eating disorders at this year's Speak Up for Change assembly on Jan. 27.

FALCON // ATREY DESAI

## SUFC addresses mental health struggles

BY SaachiJain  
& KathyWang

*Trigger Warning: This story contains mentions of anti-trans sentiment, sexual assault, body dysmorphia and suicide.*

"I wish my parents knew I love them, I like them, I hate them," said English teacher Natasha Ritchie in an introductory video at the Speak Up for Change rally on Jan. 27. The video was a compilation of teachers reading students' anonymous responses to the following question: "I wish my parents/teachers knew..." In front of most of the school, students described tense relationships with parents, feelings of burnout they felt teachers didn't register, and above all, the desire to be heard.

Organized by the outreach commission — which includes sophomores Caitlin Lee, Justin Choi and Kinnara Potluri as well as senior Jasmine Ispasou — this

year's rally theme, Moving Past, had a goal of leaving behind a culture of academic stress and negative stigma surrounding mental health.

Following a week of mental-health related activities during tutorial and lunch, the assembly served as a closing event and allowed volunteer students and staff to share their own experiences with mental health struggles.

This year's speakers included seniors Nidhi Mathihalli and Allison Tan, sophomore Timothy Leung, and College and Career Center Specialist Brad Ward.

### Brad Ward: Speaking up for trans rights

Proudly showing off her skirt and sweater combo behind the podium, Ward highlighted her support for the transgender community.

As a minority in the field of education, Ward spoke about her difficulties transitioning in a society that saw her as an

anomaly and liability. Her efforts toward self-expression were met with backlash, such as her former supervisors' concern with her appearance in a skirt.

They had silenced her into becoming more apologetic of how her appearance in a skirt may impact her ability "to effectively provide outstanding college counseling services."

Never seeing a trans person in her profession, Ward has been trying to "blaze that trail." She has visited over 300 colleges, and returned to them multiple times to stay up to date with the admissions reps and promote transgender visibility.

In addition, she has also served on the executive board of the Association for College Counselors and Admissions Reps and given presentations in nearly every national regional conference on how to counsel trans students in the workplace.

**>> ASSEMBLY** on pg. 4

**>> ENGINEERING** on pg. 5

## Engineering lab building renovated

BY SaachiJain

The school's Engineering Lab — which was previously used as an autoshop and a woodshop for earlier generations — was until recently the only original building not to have been remodeled since the school's founding in 1959.

Renovations, which cost a total of around \$2.5 million and came from Measure E funds, began last June and were completed in early January.

The engineering program consists of four sequenced courses — STEM Lab, Principles of Engineering, Digital Electronics, and Engineering Design and Development. It follows a student through all four years of high school, and each course specializes in a certain concept.

STEM Lab is the introductory course, consisting of introductory block programming and 3D modeling. Principles of Engineering focuses on engineering concepts such as hardware design, electrical engineering, and robotics.

Digital Electronics is mainly about electrical circuits and devices, and students program Arduino kits. Engineering Design and Development is a project-based course where students apply their learning from previous years in a capstone project to solve a pre-identified issue, eventually presenting it to a panel of engineers.

**While the building was being renovated, engineering classes were temporarily moved to Room 902.**

While the building was being renovated, engineering classes were temporarily moved to Room 902 next to the Robotics Lab. Because it was originally built as a science classroom, 902 did not have space for many of the larger machines such as the laser cutter.

**>> LACROSSE** on pg. 5

## Lacrosse season to be canceled

BY SunnyCao  
& SaachiJain

Lacrosse players received an unexpected email from athletic director Rick Ellis on Jan. 18 saying that lacrosse's spring season sports season had been canceled. Ellis's email had cited low registration as the main reason for cancellation.

Last year, the girls' team also saw low registration, lacking substitutes with only 15 total players. Despite low numbers, the season went on, with the Falcons ranking 7th in the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL).



Ellis

Many of the new players were hoping to continue their momentum into the 2023 season, but instead were met with numerous obstacles.

"The whole thing is a mess right now," sophomore defender Riley Adler said. "Some girls registered and some didn't, and then the email went out saying that lacrosse was canceled for both boys and girls. It's frustrating because [the season] could have happened; we just needed prior notice so we could get more girls to register."

**>> LACROSSE** on pg. 5

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## Winter storms cause baseball field renovation delays

Starting last June, workers began digging up the baseball field to begin the process of installing a new turf surface, adding landscaping and making other improvements such as bigger dugouts and bullpen areas. According to assistant principal Brian Thompson, the renovations were initially estimated to be completed by Dec. 30; however, the delayed delivery of materials, coupled with recent rainy weather, flooding and drainage concerns, has led contractors to push the completion date back to Feb. 20.

After the contractors finish the field and turn it back over to the school, the athletic booster plans to implement additional changes, including installing a new scoreboard in late April, painting school logos on the dugouts and creating an entrance to the baseball stadium within the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) accessibility guidelines, Thompson said. In total, all the renovations will cost over \$4 million. It was funded by the 2014 Measure E Bond, a general obligation bond of \$99 million to fund new school infrastructure and resources at both schools in the district.

In the meantime, the Falcon baseball teams will run early February pre-season practices at Los Gatos. ♦

— Beverly Xu

## School averts post winter break COVID-19 outbreak

During finals week in December, the silence in many classrooms was sometimes interrupted by coughing and sniffing. Against the school's recommendation, many students had arrived at school sick. While many of these symptoms were caused by the flu or the common cold, COVID-19 cases also saw an increase from three to 12 cases that week.

That increase — and winter break travel — led district nurse Lisa Tripp and others to fear an explosion of COVID-19 cases following winter break, but it didn't materialize: While six students and teachers self-reported a positive test result in the first week of the second semester, which was a lower number than expected, only one case was reported in the second week back.

"I'm actually pleasantly surprised," Tripp said. "Those couple of weeks before the break, we were starting to see a pretty significant rise, and I thought after the break, it's either gonna keep going up, or maybe just everybody not being together might bring things down."

Still, Tripp strongly encourages students to stay home if they are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms and get tested. ♦

— Andrew Lin

## Mock Trial receives split decision in first competition

The team's first few official competitions occurred on Jan. 24 against Prospect High for the Defense and on Jan. 26 against Los Altos for the Prosecution.

The judge ruled against the Defense for all charges on Jan. 24, but the team was commended by the judges and scoring attorneys for a strong performance.

The Defense team is hoping to focus on making objections and restructuring its argument ahead of its next competition. Scores for the competition were not released before the time of writing.

The judges ruled in favor of the prosecution for all charges on Jan. 26. The judge and scoring attorneys particularly noted the team's knowledge of the case, good direct and cross examination questions and succinct summaries, and suggested focusing directly on the point during cross examination as an area of improvement. The Prosecution team beat its opponent, Los Altos High, 631 to 580.

"We thought it went really well and we were really proud of our team and the way we were able to put together a fairly solid team out of just a lot fewer resources than our team normally has," Sridhar said. ♦

— Christina Chang and Sanjoli Gupta



Calm Crafts | In teacher Theresa Muñoz's art classroom on Jan. 25, sophomores Alisha Wadhwa and Lucie Le Toquin take part in a ceramic craft making activity to express creativity and relieve stress.

FALCON // EMMA FUNG

## Clubs host activities during Speak Up for Change week

## BOARD GAMES, PUZZLES AND GROUP MEDITATION WERE OFFERED

by EmmaFung

To complement this year's Speak Up for Change theme of Moving Past, several clubs on campus hosted activities during the week of Jan. 23.

## Monday, Jan. 23

Dear Asian Youth held a discussion about racism and presented coping strategies on how to deal with discrimination.

During the discussion, club officers Jasmine Ipsasouli, Allison Tan and Vivian Wang elaborated on how it was important to stand together in solidarity during these times when racism is rampant in society.

Members also examined the shooting in Monterey Park that occurred the previous day on Lunar New Year. Although it wasn't a racially motivated crime, the officers found it relevant to discuss due to its effects on the Asian community.

The Chinese Club showed an anti-anxiety diet video. They discussed foods that contain magnesium, zinc and other elements that help fuel the human body to relax. Healthy foods such as avocados, apples, and nuts were also brought to the meeting for the members to enjoy.

Drama Club held a "Ripping Up Negativity" activity where students wrote their sources of stress on little slips of paper before ripping the papers up. Drama Club president Arushi Maheshwar said the activity was a way to cleanse negative energy.

"A lot of times, when you are angry, you just have an urge to tear something apart like paper," Maheshwar said. "This activity is a safe and helpful way to execute that."

In addition, Ward invited students to write positive affirmations on sticky notes and plaster them in the school bathrooms.

Because Davis is a fan of board games himself, he believed it would be a good way for students to socialize and have fun.

"I hope they were relaxed while playing the games and able to leave any worries or stress they had at the door," Davis said. "Hopefully, they found a relaxing game that they can play in the future for stress relief."

TEACHER Kirk Davis

Along with the club, physics teacher Kirk Davis allowed students to come in during tutorial to play fun board games like Monopoly and Twister as a way to relieve stress.

Because Davis is a fan of board games himself, he believed it would be a good way for students to socialize and have fun.

"I hope they were relaxed while playing the games and able to leave any worries or stress they had at the door," Davis said. "Hopefully, they found a relaxing game that they can play in the future for stress relief."

## Tuesday, Jan. 24

Four activities took place on

Tuesday: three club events and an activity hosted by college and career specialist Brad Ward.

During lunch, Singing for Smiles members performed uplifting songs such as "Titanium" and "Fight Song." Some of the student singers included freshman Sahana Kumar, who performed "Change"; junior Simarya Ahuja, who performed "Titanium"; and sophomore Anna-belle Miin, who performed "Fight Song."

"Fight Song" is about being strong, so I thought it would be fitting for this week," Miin said.

"During this week's 'Talkative Thursday,' we talked about techniques to alleviate stress," Conley said. "I would love for everybody to come to one of our sessions, but if you just come to one session and learn one technique to help you get through the day, that would be great already."

Thursday, Jan. 26

The Ultimate Frisbee Club invited all the students to play frisbee on the upper field as a way of distressing through team bonding. The Crafting Club opened its doors and invited students to make yarn leis.

"I find crafting, knitting and other tasks that are repetitive to be very relaxing," senior president Miranda Yee said. "It is what I do when I am stressed, and I hope it can help other people relieve stress as well."

The wellness center held a meditation session, once again hosted by Conley.

"Speak Up for Change is about mental health, and that is what we are all about in the wellness center," Conley said. "Hopefully, meditation can help reduce the students' tension and get them through the rest of the day."

## Friday, Jan. 27

The week concluded with a school-wide assembly on Friday, finishing off a week of Moving Past and spreading mental health awareness in the school community through a series of activities and events. ♦

## Wednesday, Jan. 25

Chemistry teacher Kathy Nakamatsu allowed students to come into her room and play jigsaw puzzles, while art teacher There-



FALCON // EMMA FUNG

Percussionists surround dancing lions and play out a rhythmic accompaniment on Jan. 22.

# Saratoga Library celebrates Lunar New Year by hosting lively cultural activities

by EmmaFung  
& KathyWang

The entrance of the Saratoga Library boomed with the beating of tanggu, a traditional Chinese drum, as children and parents crowded around twirling lion dancers.

Lion dancing was one of the various activities hosted by the Saratoga Library on Jan. 14 during its annual Lunar New Year event. Lunar New Year fell on Jan. 22, ringing in the Year of Rabbit.

Other activities at the library included a Tai Chi workshop, a Chinese youth orchestra and crafting for adults. The two most popular events were the lion dancing shows and Chinese youth orchestra performances.

The lion dancing took place in the entrance of the library and was performed by a nonprofit organization, the Rising Phoenix and Lion Dance Association. The lion dancers were dressed in traditional lion costumes decorated with multicolored patterns.

Throughout the dance, the performers traveled through the entrance of the library, the children's section, the adult's section and back. A group of percussionists accompanied the lion dancers by beating a pair of cymbals, a tanggu and a gong.

Directing the percussionists and dancers was Kevin Nguyen, the lead coordinator of

the Rising Phoenix lion dance.

"I'm kind of like the [performers'] eyes outside of the line and directing which area to walk around," Nguyen said. "I also signal them when to start the routine, and gather up anything that clashes with them."

Along with the lion dance, there were many other events the library offered for this traditional holiday. One of these events was a performance by the Aimusic music school, which is managed by Emily Bahn. The organization is part of the Firebird Youth Chinese Orchestra, which started in 2000.

Aimusic is a youth group that performs music with traditional Chinese instruments. They typically schedule their performances around Lunar New Year and have performed at various locations, including the Saratoga library. Bahn said that being a part of the orchestra allows the performers to learn more about their Chinese heritage.

"These instruments are all very old and traditional," Bahn said. "We live in a western country, so by learning how to play them, they are able to connect with their roots."

At the Lunar Festival, the orchestra performed many traditional pieces, including solos. Among the soloists was Madelyn Cheung, a sixth grader who started playing the yangqin, a traditional Chinese string instrument, and the guzheng, a Chinese zither instrument, since she was in second grade.

Cheung is one of the younger members in the orchestra, as most other members are in high school. Nevertheless, she secured a solo piece called the "Green Bamboo Forest" and was in the front center for the ensemble performance.

Although surrounded by older kids, Cheung is thoroughly enjoying her experience in this group.

"I love being in this orchestra because it helps me connect with people and my culture," Cheung said. ♦

## Advanced Science Research class to be canceled

by NatalieChua  
& SanjoliGupta

Since last year, Los Gatos High has offered Saratoga High upperclassmen a chance to take Advanced Science Research (ASR), a six-period course in which students design and test their independent experiments. However, with over 40 people in the class this year, this will be the last year of ASR.

"Part of the reason ASR is discontinuing is that the teachers feel overwhelmed by the large enrollment this year, especially [ASR]

teacher Cathy] Messenger, who has been running the class for over a decade," senior Howard Shu said.

Currently, there are five Saratoga students participating in ASR along with the 35 from Los Gatos: junior Lynn Dai, seniors Lisa Fung, Tanya Ghai, Jeremy Lu and Shu. The room is nearly at maximum capacity during class, and co-teacher Jennifer Lee and Messenger have to mentor about double the number of students they have compared to previous years.

Because it is the final year of ASR, students are making the most out of the opportunity to do advanced research in a lab setting.

Ghai is focusing on fat accumulation of C. elegans (microorganisms); Lu is working on mind reading artificial intelligence; Fung is focusing on human mobility models to combat disaster response, and Shu is testing polymer doping on tin-based perovskite solar cells to increase efficiency. Finally, Dai is exploring the efficacy of Chinese medicine.

"Since this is the first and last year I'm taking ASR, I try to take advantage of the opportunities provided: total freedom to explore anything I want and hands-on guidance and support from my peers," Dai said.

Because the majority of students are relatively new to ASR, some students seek help from more experienced classmates like Lu, who is in his second year of the class. With the closing of ASR, juniors and underclassmen lose the opportunity to be part of an interactive community. Nevertheless, those who took it say they are grateful for the time they had in the class.

"I think it's a really good opportunity for people to get their research skills and also meet a lot of people," Lu said. "It's a fun environment, and everybody's really collaborative." ♦

## Winter issue of Soundings magazine released online with exhibition to be held in early March

by AmyLuo  
& KathyWang

Chatter filled Soundings Art and Literary Magazine adviser Amy Keys's classroom as the staff voted on submissions for publication on Jan. 12. A Peardock slideshow containing artworks and their respective titles was projected on the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. Approximately 30 staff members voted "yes," "no" or "abstain" for each submission.

"We set up a slideshow and had conversations about each piece," said senior Anastasia Panidis, an editor-in-chief of the magazine. "It's really hard to let go of pieces that everyone is so talented."

The writing pieces consist of poetry, short stories and memoirs. However, writers are encouraged to submit whatever creative writing pieces they want. Artworks ranged from photography to digital and traditional art.

"A lot [of the art pieces] either express emotions students are going through or their technical skills in photography or a mountainside, for example," Panidis said.

While there are plenty of submissions, the budget to fund Soundings is tight this year. Before the pandemic, Soundings was funded by profits coming from yearbook sales, which have been decreasing in the past three years, Keys said.

"Our role as a school magazine is to serve as a forum for student expression and encourage students to produce art and literature," senior editor-in-chief Christina Chang said. "Aside from showcasing exemplary works, we really wanted to make submissions to Soundings a learning opportunity.



### Burnout

Christina Chang  
2022, colored pencils and pen, 9x12

I drew inspiration from my own experience as a student at a highly competitive high school. My work uncovers the unseen downside of the academic pressure cooker culture — burnout — that's buried beneath the superficial facade of gleaming resumes, perfect grades, and impressive extracurriculars.

Graphic by CHRISTINA CHANG

Many submissions revolved around the theme of mental health. Among them was senior Christina Chang's artwork "Burnout," a mixed media self portrait on academic stress.

Even though PTSO normally looks away from offering grants to consumable organizations, they have once again granted Soundings \$500 for the upcoming spring issue.

All submissions were given feedback in early December. Writers and artists had two weeks to make suggested edits.

While there are plenty of submissions, the budget to fund Soundings is tight this year. Before the pandemic, Soundings was funded by profits coming from yearbook sales, which have been decreasing in the past three years, Keys said.

Soundings plans to set up an exhibition in the library on March 3. Different art and

writing pieces will be showcased, accompanied by a poetry reading and a jazz performance. In addition, they will ask for donations at the door and award the top donors with the title of bronze, silver, gold and platinum on a dedicated page in the Soundings spring magazine.

"People can pay to walk in, look around, listen to poetry, readings and jazz," Panidis said. "Hopefully that's going to raise a little bit of money for us to print." ♦

# Intense storms lead to power outages, school cancellations and fallen trees on power lines

by Saachi Jain  
& Isabelle Wang

The first week of second semester saw violent rain and wind from intense storms leave countless community members without power, teachers stranded at home and unable to commute to school, and both schools in the district closing due to a prolonged power outage. Over 66,000 PG&E customers in California were sporadically without power in the few days after Jan. 5, including Saratoga High, which canceled school on Jan. 10 as a result of a 21-hour power outage.

In Los Gatos, power was out for three school days, and students from Los Gatos High began to come over to Saratoga to use the gymnasium for sports practice, charge their laptops, and do schoolwork in a lit environment.

Despite school only being canceled in Saratoga for one day, many teachers found themselves scrambling to communicate a plan with their students, having missed half of a Red-Blue day rotation.

To make up for the lost day, teachers took many approaches to make up missed time.

"I sent out a message to all my Blue Day kids, giving them all of the material that the Red Day students learned on Monday," Chemistry Honors teacher Kathy Nakamatsu said. "We're now playing catch up, and probably will be for a couple of weeks."

Some English teachers, for example, created extra lessons for Red Day students to occupy the additional day, and caught up with Blue Day students on the Thursday they returned. Other departments, such as Math, had a catch-up and homework day for Red Day students, and continued to teach Blue Day students normally on Thursday.



A tall tree fell down on Herriman Avenue, taking down a powerline and blocking the street.

flood in the past 25 years, which has resulted in billions in damages.

In the mountains north of Santa Cruz, floodwaters reached chest-high levels while the Carmel River rose to almost 13 feet at Robles del Rio on Jan. 9. Muddy waters pushed cars, stop signs, trees and propane tanks into the streets, even reaching Soquel where the parking lot of a shop was flooded with three feet of water. Highways were also shut down for hours, including Highway 101, Southbound Highway 17 and Highway 9 due to the flooding and landslides.

Despite all the damage on the roads, there have been certain benefits from the heavy rain. Reservoir levels are rising quickly now, with Lake Oroville rising from 28% of total capacity to 47% in less than a week. The storms also produced a ton of rain on top of snow in areas like the San Bernardino Mountains, which have acted as sponges to keep the rainwater up in the mountains. California's mountain snow now holds twice as much water content compared to previous years, further increasing California's water supply once the snow melts.

For a drought-ridden state like California, this rainfall has downgraded drought conditions in Fresno and the Central Valley, moving from extreme drought to severe drought. Select areas such as the Bay Area have even moved from severe to moderate. While the recent rain won't be enough to fully recharge the water table in the soil, it has helped relieve some problems with reservoir storage and improved the groundwater situation.

"This is the worst storm I've seen since the '90s," said English teacher Megan Laws, who grew up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. "El Niño caused bad flooding then and the '80s storm before that resulted in mudslides in the Santa Cruz area."

Historically, all counties in California have experienced at least one significant

that area. The damages caused by the storm will take weeks to fix due to the amount of debris and water gathered in the roads, according to an article by the Times.

Some staff members, such as art and Media Arts teacher Joel Tarbox and APCS teacher Brandon Petersen were unable to come to school for several days after the power outage due to closed roads and loss of power in their homes. Petersen missed three days of school, due to his power being out for 230 hours starting on Jan. 8.

"This is the worst storm I've seen since the '90s," said English teacher Megan Laws, who grew up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. "El Niño caused bad flooding then and the '80s storm before that resulted in mudslides in the Santa Cruz area."

Historically, all counties in California have experienced at least one significant

**SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE**  
*continued from pg. 1*

Thanking the SHS community, students, staff and parents, Ward ended her speech with an emphasis on not being a bystander by speaking out to support those in need.

"Speak even if your voice trembles. Take up space. Be physical. Speak for those who have no or diminished voices. Take risks, be yourself. Support individuality and diversity. Help those who don't have the power and privilege, and stand with us for equity, equality, and justice. Speak up for change, and don't ever shut up," Ward said.

## Timothy Leung on sexual assault: "I am OK with being myself"

"Prior to 2020, if you had asked anyone to describe me, they would have said crazy, energetic, theater kid," Leung said. "Which was true."

Leung spoke about an experience at the beginning of the pandemic, when he was molested by a longtime theater director and mentor of his in a one-on-one Zoom call.

Participating in various forms

of theater from second grade until the pandemic, Leung was a member of a local theater community program. He grew close with the director of the group, who was a local fifth grade teacher, even referring to him as a second father at the time.

Leung described how the strong trust he had for the director was completely shattered in spring of 2020. He had feelings of denial, believing that sexual abuse could not happen to males, and he had to suppress any and all emotions he was feeling.

Persevering through the first few months after quitting theater, Leung found his home in speech of debate. He began to speak about topics which related to his experiences and gained courage by using his voice. Leung realized he could pick himself up, and glue himself back together.

"There were many previous victims with this similar pain. And there would be many more, if I didn't speak up," Leung said. "I finally gained the courage not to be a victim, but to be a survivor."

Nidhi Mathihalli: Body dysmorphia and accepting yourself

Mathihalli spoke about her struggles with body dysmorphia and eating disorders, as well as health issues that arose as a result. She described an incident in middle school P.E. in which she was compared to an elephant by a couple of her closest friends.

Mathihalli began to shut out friends and family as a result of growing anxiety. Her grades began to drop, she lost interest in extracurriculars, put herself through harmful diets and would only sleep two to three hours every night.

During this time, she was diagnosed with insomnia, a binge eating disorder and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) after losing her period.

"While I'm not a celebrity, I do have a public voice, perhaps giving me public responsibilities," Mathihalli said. "Body dysmorphia is a silent killer — our subconscious actions can heavily influence another's mental state, as it did mine."

At the end of her sophomore year, with the influence of her family, Mathihalli forged prestigious research programs to spend a summer focusing on herself and participating in activities she enjoyed, such as reading, tinkering,

ing with electronics and spending more time sleeping. Though Mathihalli hasn't fully recovered from body dysmorphia, she has grown to accept that she is human, and is allowed to make mistakes. She learned to not revolve all her thoughts around her physical appearance. While she knows that her speech won't "miraculously cure anybody's body dysmorphia," she hopes that her message will help anyone who is struggling.

She emphasized the importance for people to speak with more mindfulness, and to "foster a culture of comfort, solidarity and empathy starting at home and academic settings."

She hopes for the community as a whole to overcome the mental health stigma and combat the toxic academic culture.

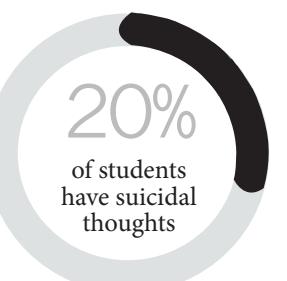
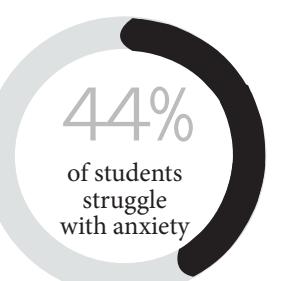
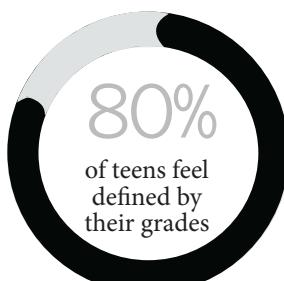
"When prioritizing academic achievement over our mental health, we fail to protect our students and our faculty from other prevalent issues such as rape culture, racism, ableism, and more," Tan said.

With the gathered experiences shared from Leung, Mathihalli, Tan and Ward, along with the supportive cheers from students, the four speakers have created an even more welcoming and inclusive environment in terms of coping with trauma, and healing from the past.

"We hope speaking up for change can inspire meaningful conversation and that you'll all find solace in the fact that we're not alone," Potluri said. ♦

Participating in various forms

## Struggles with mental health are prevalent among teens.



Data from UCLA HEALTH

## THIRD PERIOD

### STAFF POLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published 12 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

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# Colleges should release application ratings to all, including the rejected

growing surge of colleges deviating away from their stated goal of holistic admissions.

### Are admissions truly holistic?

The idea of holistic college admissions started in some colleges in the early 20th century, but today is a valued component of admissions. Colleges essentially look at applicants as a whole, considering factors other than grades and achievements, prompting many students with lower measurables such as GPAs to apply.

With college serving as an instrumental factor of social mobility, it is important that students facing educational barriers are evaluated in proper context, and that academic pedigree is only one of many considerations. Yet colleges likely spend more time on applications with high GPAs and test scores, and only mere seconds on others, often skimming materials quickly rather than allotting a reasonable amount of time per application.

This wouldn't be an issue alone, as of course a solid high school GPA is an indicator of success in college, but holistic admissions are among the most advertised parts of college admissions. Colleges attract students to apply with holistic admissions pitches: if they do not live up to it, they are essentially swindling applicants with potential potholes in their application to lower their acceptance rate to increase their perceived prestige.

Releasing numerical ratings to rejected applicants would ensure a holistic process, because instead of glossing over students with lower academic stats, admission officers would be forced to assign a fair rating to every student, rather than just applicants that they feel would be more likely to gain admission.

This transparency may seem a little bold; after all, the longstanding thinking is that colleges do not owe students any more information than a final decision. However, releasing the objective metrics used in the process would reduce some of the downsides of the inherent subjectivity associated with the process — namely, implicit bias and discrimination, as well as a

college admissions will continue to feel like a roll of the dice for applicants. But by providing more information on why an applicant was rejected, colleges will demystify the process.

Moreover, such knowledge could help students improve future applications, especially in the regular round after receiving early feedback. Certain factors such as officer notes and letters of recommendation may be too subjective and volatile to release or standardize into a number, but metrics in more neutral qualifications would be much appreciated in understanding how an application was evaluated.

Getting a rejection from a hoped-for college is a painful experience that tens of thousands of seniors experience each year. And the whimsical aspect of it is that though you may have been qualified, your admissions officer may not have gotten their coffee in the morning.

In an age when more and more laws call for pay transparency in all jobs, rejected applicants deserve to know how their file was analyzed and how admission officers ranked them.

Without better transparency,

### Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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Christina Chang  
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**Opinion Editors**  
Shannon Ma  
Arnav Swamy

**Writers**  
Nilay Mishra  
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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 35-0 in favor of this article.

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In December, Yale University was sued for discriminating against those with mental health issues, with treatment such as forcing involuntary leaves of absences and then using police officers as escorts for students who are being reintroduced to campus.

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Many colleges believe that students who write about depression or suicide may not have the academic rigor or stability it takes to attend an elite school. Do we have to erase parts of ourselves to increase our chances of admission?

College admissions leave us with too much ambiguity. We are stuck trying to figure out what quantifies a golden-ticket emotional essay into an Ivy League without appearing as another Bay Area sob story with first-world problems. What do colleges really want to see — an applicant who has successfully faced enough adversity, or an applicant who continues to struggle through it? ♦

## THIRDPERIOD

## STAFFPOLICY

The Saratoga Falcon is published 12 times per year by the Advanced Journalism classes of Saratoga High School, 20300 Herriman Ave., Saratoga, CA 95070. Views expressed in The Saratoga Falcon are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration, faculty or school district.

## MISSIONSTATEMENT

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<sup>2023</sup> EDITOR

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

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# Colleges should release application ratings to all, including the rejected

Last year, Harvard University accepted a mere 3.16% of applicants, much lower than the 7.1% of applicants accepted a decade ago. But student achievement has not significantly changed in this time period; instead, tens of thousands of more high school seniors are applying to more colleges, causing yield and acceptance rates both to decrease.

In 2018, elite colleges like Harvard came under scrutiny for alleged discrimination in their admissions process against certain races, especially against Asian Americans. In the resulting court cases, judges analyzed admissions records for thousands of students.

According to these filings, admission officers rated each applicant on a scale from 1-6 in 14 different categories, using both "+" and "-" marks to distinguish further in each rating level. These categories ranged from cookie-cutter standards like academics and extracurricular involvement to more abstract qualities like athletic prowess, humor and grit. Subsequent court filings have shown that such an internal rating system is widespread among prominent colleges such as Harvard, Stanford and the University of Michigan.

To ensure that college admission processes are more equitable and that students regain some of their agency over the process that they have lost over the years, colleges should release these ratings and their associated comments to students, instead of simply giving an accept, defer or reject decision.

This transparency may seem a little bold; after all, the long-standing thinking is that colleges do not owe students any more information than a final decision. However, releasing the objective metrics used in the process would reduce some of the downsides of the inherent subjectivity associated with the process — namely, implicit bias and discrimination, as well as a

growing surge of colleges deviating away from their stated goal of holistic admissions.

## Are admissions truly holistic?

The idea of holistic college admissions started in some colleges in the early 20th century, but today is a valued component of admissions. Colleges essentially look at applicants as a whole, considering factors other than grades and achievements, prompting many students with lower measurables such as GPAs to apply.

With college serving as an instrumental factor of social mobility, it is important that students facing educational barriers are evaluated in proper context, and that academic pedigree is only one of many considerations. Yet colleges likely spend more time on applications with high GPAs and test scores, and only mere seconds on others, often skimming materials quickly rather than allotting a reasonable amount of time per application.

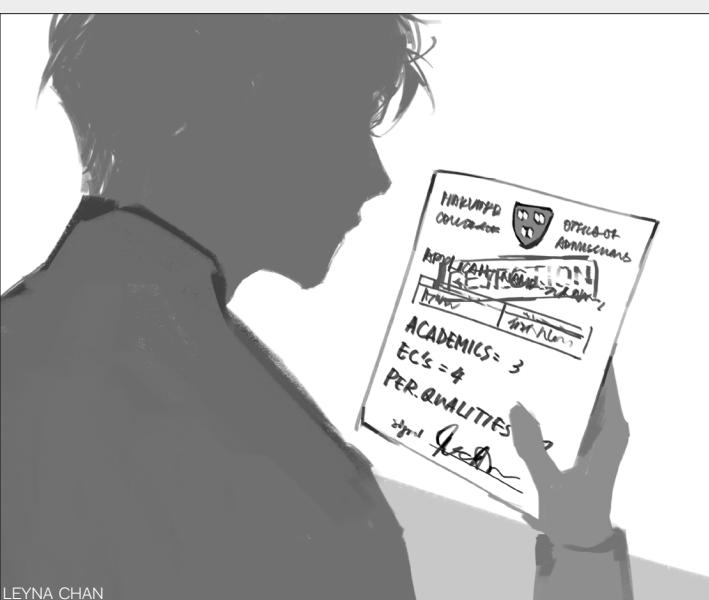
This wouldn't be an issue alone, as of course a solid high school GPA is an indicator of success in college, but holistic admissions are among the most advertised parts of college admissions. Colleges attract students to apply with holistic admissions pitches: if they do not live up to it, they are essentially swindling applicants with potential potholes in their application to lower their acceptance rate to increase their perceived prestige.

Releasing numerical ratings to rejected applicants would ensure a holistic process, because instead of glossing over students with lower academic stats, admission officers would be forced to assign a fair rating to every student, rather than just applicants that they feel would be more likely to gain admission.

Without better transparency, releasing numerical ratings to rejected applicants is cracking the elusive and strenuous admissions process. However, the process is still a game: as applicants, we are the pawns, so we want to know more about how to play. ♦

## Releasing data will better reveal the agendas of universities

Organizations such as Students for Fair Admissions have



argued that admission officers tend to give Asian American students lower personality scores. In the case *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard*, the Supreme Court is already analyzing the numerical ratings of thousands of students; releasing these records to each student would reduce the implicit and explicit biases of the colleges we are considering to praise so much.

Getting a rejection from a hoped-for college is a painful experience that tens of thousands of seniors experience each year. And the whimsical aspect of it is that though you may have been qualified, your admissions officer may not have gotten their coffee in the morning.

In an age when more and more laws call for pay transparency in all jobs, rejected applicants deserve to know how their file was analyzed and how admission officers ranked them.

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## Mental health in college applications: Being truthful comes with frustrating downsides

By Shreya Rallabandi & Allison Tan

*Describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?*

The ever infamous UC personal insight question. We all want to write a perfect essay that highlights our growth without overplaying the adversity we have faced, but this feat proves near impossible. We're tired of the standard college counselor advice: "For every one sentence you write about your struggles, you should write three about you overcoming them."

Many colleges believe that students who write about depression or suicide may not have the academic rigor or stability it takes to attend an elite school. Do we have to erase parts of ourselves to increase our chances of admission?

It feels as if there is a correct way to discuss mental health — using just vague enough language for admissions officers to get an understanding of the issues discussed, but sending colleges the

message that we're fine and capable (so accept us, please!). There's also an incorrect way: revealing a raw version of ourselves that is deemed as "oversharing" and "not quite hopeful enough."

As seniors, we must decipher how much is too much to share as well as when and how we discuss trauma that has shaped our lives. How do we talk to colleges about overcoming them we are still vulnerable to it? How are we supposed to present our best selves without hiding behind a facade of strength?

Many colleges believe that students who write about depression or suicide may not have the academic rigor or stability it takes to attend an elite school. Do we have to erase parts of ourselves to increase our chances of admission?

Students cited unfair treatment, such as Yale forcing them to take involuntary leaves of absences, excluding them from campus activities and using police officers as escorts for students who are be-

ing reintroduced to campus.

In December, Yale University was sued for discriminating against those with mental health issues, with treatment such as forcing involuntary leaves of absences and then using police officers as escorts for students who are being reintroduced to campus.

Do we have to erase parts of ourselves to increase our chances of admission?

ing reintroduced to campus.

tangible conditions.

A Yale official described a student who was struggling with self-harm as a "liability" if their symptoms amplified and became problematic. Despite the university's publicized statement claiming they were being cognizant of their students' well-being, situations like these have painted an unsafe picture of the school for prospective applicants, who — for every reason aside from mental health support — are vying to attend.

College admissions leave us with too much ambiguity. We are stuck trying to figure out what quantifies a golden-ticket emotional essay into an Ivy League without appearing as another Bay Area sob story with first-world problems. What do colleges really want to see — an applicant who has successfully faced enough adversity, or an applicant who continues to struggle through it? ♦

# AI-generated images cannot be the future of art

BY GeorgeHuang, AndrewLin & EricShi

Picture da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," Michelangelo's monumental "David" or Van Gogh's colorful, swirling "Starry Night."

These are among the most recognizable images in art or human culture. In a word, they are irreplaceable. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are threatening the once-indomitable station of artists. Will AI just be another creative tool like digital cameras or filters, or will it replace artists entirely? Our bet is on humans.

AI art has been developing for decades, but only gained mainstream attention a few months ago. Though these images were originally smeared amalgamations, nearly unidentifiable without the prompt used to generate the image, AI is now able to create incredibly detailed images that make spectacular use of light, shadow and color. Popular software like Dall-E, Midjourney and Dream are seeing an unprecedented rise in popularity, with Midjourney's website in particular receiving three to four million visitors a month.

With the rise of AI comes new innovations. Not only is the artwork generated by the software more convincing, but some AI art programs can also emulate the styles of specific artists. As AI art develops, the attention to detail also improves, further muddling the line between AI-generated artwork and manmade artwork.

Moreover, such knowledge could help students improve future applications, especially in the regular round after receiving early feedback. Certain factors such as officer notes and letters of recommendation may be too subjective and volatile to release or standardize into a number, but metrics in more neutral qualifications would be much appreciated in understanding how an application was evaluated.

We're not trying to put a hole in the system; after all, part of the surprise of an acceptance is cracking the elusive and strenuous admissions process. However, the process is still a game: as applicants, we are the pawns, so we want to know more about how to play. ♦

## Art is now entering a new era with digital mediums of nearly infinite possibilities.



The Falcon generated the above image using Midjourney by entering the phrase "AI Art Story by George, Eric, and Andrew."

derivative. This is where human artists have the edge.

What is the point of art if not to say something new? For better or worse, AI cannot come up with an idea as ludicrous as it is extremely effective at producing art we have already seen, but it cannot produce original, groundbreaking pieces — the art that matters.

Allen's "Théâtre D'Opéra Spatial" will at best be a footnote in art history, because it does not introduce anything new. His prediction that "Art is dead, dude. It's over. AI won. Humans lost," is arrogant for someone who won a paltry sum of \$300 from a local contest.

The online debate over this topic has become very heated in the last few months, with artists viciously attacking AI art and some also vigorously defending it. Many artists fear that AI art will eventually make their craft obsolete, mirroring the overall fear of AI art acting as competition for humans.

This fear isn't unwarranted, as situations like this have happened before — consider the Industrial Revolution, where many traditional artisans were swiftly replaced with factory machinery. Art contests could create a separate category for AI-generated works, requiring digital artists to send recordings of their creation process to prove their submission was made by a human, but what's the point? At the end of the day, art is most memorable when it offers a new insight, challenges norms or acts aesthetically striking. The amount of effort put into the creation does not matter. We tend to humanize AI or see it as competition, when in reality it is just another tool, like paper, ink, cameras and computers.

As we move into a more digital age, it is inevitable for art to evolve along with us. Like factories, AI art will get rid of the "manual laborers" diverting the art world away from realism.

Yes, the Twitter artists charging a flat rate for commissions may suffer, but because AI will always create art within the limits of human imagination, the limits of creativity will always be pushed by humans. ♦

## &gt;&gt; falconfigures

54 percent of people cannot tell if the art is generated by AI

87 percent of people thought an AI photo to be a real person

49 percent of people cannot recognize AI generated music

23 percent of people say AI generated images look unnatural

Information from TIDIO

## Letter to the Editor: Do not diminish Spielberg's experiences as portrayed in 'The Fabelmans'

BY BillTeeple

*Editor's Note: Bill Teeple wrote the following Letter to the Editor in response to 'The Fabelmans' puts spotlight on antisemitic abuse directed at school's most famous alumnus by Shreya Rallabandi and Shaan Sridhar. Teeple is a Class of 1990 alumnus who resides in San Jose.*

I wanted to offer my opinion from another era. While I graduated some 25 years after Steven Spielberg, the bullying and mentality shaped by a misogynistic alpha male society was still very prevalent, and I was subjected to this my freshman through junior year.

Unfortunately, I was tormented by a person one grade ahead of me — that is why my senior year I was mostly unscathed. But being 6'2" and 150 lbs didn't help as I was tall and very skinny. Not an academic, not a jock, I was more of an outcast, breaking into the computer science scene early on and reading fantasy and science fiction novels. Definitely a geek out of the '80s.

While the attitudes that occupy Saratoga High might be "better" than they were, I believe those attitudes have simply shifted to other areas of discriminatory practice. Audrie Pott is a prime example that the alpha male culture still exists, but just may be under the radar currently.



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With the rise of AI art comes new innovations. Not only is the artwork generated by the software more convincing, but some AI art programs can also emulate the styles of specific artists. As AI art develops, the attention to detail also improves, further muddling the line between AI-generated artwork and manmade artwork.

There are still some things AI art cannot do. While human artists tend to use the most detail on the important parts of their composition, computers currently have no way of anticipating the interpretation of their images by a human audience, so AI-generated images are generally equally detailed everywhere. This points to a bigger weakness in AI: Since they follow a written prompt to generate artworks based on thousands of existing images matching the prompts, they are derivative rather than being truly creative. Human artists are deliberate in their choices for a piece, and often use their platform for sociopolitical com-



Courtesy of MIDJOURNEY

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mentary or other points they want to convey.

Additionally, AI art still has imperfections. There are several types of image artifacts one can look for, such as the remnants of signatures by human artists or disfigured hands (hands are notoriously hard to draw), that are a dead giveaway that an image is AI-generated.

## Art is now entering a new era with digital mediums of nearly infinite possibilities.

Of course, with further development, many of these problems will be solved, along with compositional problems that require people to generate images hundreds of times to find the desired

effect. Soon, AI art generation will be streamlined, allow for incredible specificity and become almost indistinguishable from digital art created by humans.

This does not necessarily spell doom for digital artists. While there has been widespread coverage of Jason Allen, a tabletop game designer, winning first place in the Colorado State Fair's art competition with an AI-generated artwork, a local contest is not the arbiter of museum-level art.

The backlash he received was unwarranted as well: He didn't break any contest rules. More importantly, art evolves with human culture, and the quality of art is not dependent on the effort put into it. An acrylic painting is not inferior to an oil painting just because acrylic is an easier medium.

Digital art is not inferior to physical mediums just because computer programs provide many convenient functions, such as undoing actions, filling large areas, or adjusting large areas of color. The Pop Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s is not an inferior representative of human culture compared to other eras in art history just because it focused on the mundane and was mass-produced. Similarly, though Allen's "Théâtre D'Opéra Spatial" is not a particularly inspiring piece, the fact that it was generated by an AI is not a valid criticism.

Over the years, great artists have pioneered their own artistic styles. It is easy to tell a Picasso apart from a Dali, a Manet from a Monet, a Kandinsky from a Kollwitz. Since AI art is generated from existing images, it cannot create new art styles in any significant aspect. One of the worst insults to an art piece is to call it "derivative" or a copycat of another artist's work — and all AI art is

derivative. This is where human artists have the edge.

What is the point of art if not to say something new? For better or worse, AI cannot come up with an idea as ludicrous as this. It is extremely effective at producing art we have already seen, but it cannot produce original, groundbreaking pieces — the art that matters.

Allen's "Théâtre D'Opéra Spatial" will at best be a footnote in art history, because it does not introduce anything new. His prediction that "Art is dead, dude. It's over. AI won. Humans lost," is arrogant for someone who won a paltry sum of \$300 from a local contest.

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# Letter to the Editor: Do not diminish Spielberg's experiences as portrayed in 'The Fabelmans'

By Bill Teeple

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I wanted to offer my opinion from another era. While I graduated some 25 years after Steven Spielberg, the bullying and mentality shaped by a misogynistic alpha male society was still very prevalent, and I was subjected to this my freshman through junior year.

Unfortunately, I was tormented by a person one grade ahead of me — that is why my senior year I was mostly unscathed. But being 6'2" and 150 lbs doesn't help as I was tall and very skinny. Not an academic, not a jock, I was more of an outcast, breaking into the computer science scene early on and reading fantasy and science fiction novels. Definitely a geek out of the '80s.

While the attitudes that occupy Saratoga High might be "better" than they were, I believe those attitudes have simply shifted to other areas of discriminatory practice. Audrie Pott is a prime example that the alpha male culture still exists, but just may be under the radar currently.

The article minimizes Spielberg's experience of the event by referring to it as "his memory" which was contradicted by interviews with his friends.

I don't discount that to Spielberg, this was "hell on earth." School should be a safe haven, but I found myself preoccupied with navigating the hallways, avoiding my attack more than worrying about my grades.

Being bullied is a lot like being battered for women. It is a silent crime that occurs outside of the visible spectrum of society for the most part. A passing punch in the shoulder in the hallway, or an extra push and punch in a P.E. class. It isn't the "Karate Kid" media-driven exacerbation you would expect to find sensationalized.

And believe me, as a young boy trying to grow up and become a man, you don't advertise the fact that you are getting assaulted by a classmate to others. Be careful in your wording as the victim is often mischaracterized and a bit of the middle of the article implies that the bullying only existed in his mind. ♦

The Saratoga Falcon welcomes all signed letters of opinion, which are subject to editing for length, accuracy and grammar. Please send them to shannon.ma@saratogafalcon.org and arnav.swamy@saratogafalcon.org. For ad information, email meher.bhatnagar@saratogafalcon.org.

# Ten years following Sandy Hook, a mass shooting took place every week in 2022

By Sunny Cao  
& Saachi Jain

Six-year-old Allison Wyatt crouched in the corner of her first-grade classroom, terrified. The gunshots of 20-year-old Adam Lanza's AR-15 rifle pierced the air as the screams intensified in Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012. She heard the splinter of her classroom door being kicked open, followed by more gunshots. The last things Wyatt heard were the terrified screams of her classmates.

Allison was one of 26 victims of the Sandy Hook shooting. The rampage, part of a 33% increase in gun deaths from 2011 to 2020, left 20 students and six teachers dead, as well as Lanza's mother, who he killed before arriving at the elementary school, and Lanza, who shot himself with a handgun shortly before police arrived.

Other shootings have taken place in grocery stores, night bars and malls, the deadliest of which ended up taking over 20 lives. California is no exception. This year, six were killed and 12 wounded outside a nightclub in downtown Sacramento.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, California experiences an average of 44 mass shootings in a year, or one approximately every eight days.

Even more residential communities aren't safe from the possibility of mass shootings. On May 26 last year, just 20 minutes away from Saratoga, a gunman killed nine people before committing suicide at a facility in downtown San Jose.

All victims were essential workers who were reporting to their jobs during the pandemic.

These numbers always shock the public at first, but more have become desensitized to so much death and are starting to have a muted emotional response to shootings, given their frequency.

In an interview with Vox, Dr. Paul Slovic, a psychology professor at the University of Oregon, coined the phenomenon as "compassion collapse."

In essence, after society has experienced so many tragic events, people's ability to empathize with others' plight is worn down.

Despite these protections, law enforcement has still failed to respond in its responses to many shootings. When 18-year-old Salvador Ramos walked into his former fourth grade classroom in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24 and claimed the lives of 19 students and two teachers in one of the most horrific shootings this year, law enforcement determined that Ramos was a "barricaded subject," or not suspected of committing a crime, preventing SWAT teams and local police from responding to the scene.

Following the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, many schools across the country ramped up security precautions, stationing armed safety enforcement officers at over 150,000 schools across the country.

While understanding the motives of shooters is difficult, investigating the root causes of their behavior is key to preventing mass shootings in the future. According to clinical psychologist Peter Langman, however, that's no easy feat.

"There's no one thing, [but] a couple of dozen different things that come together to put someone on the path to committing an act of mass violence," Langman said during an interview with NPR.

In another NPR report, Ron Avi Astor, a mass shooting expert and UCLA professor, points to almost all shooters having suicidal tendencies that spill over into wanting to kill others.

"In other words, they're gonna do both," he said. "And finally, most want to be remembered. They don't want to be forgotten."

steps like these will help ensure that professionals and the public alike begin looking at mass shootings through a lens of improvement and helping rather than judgment.

## How has the government taken action?

Ten years since the deadliest school shooting in history, gun reform has seen little change mainly due to partisan disagreement in Congress. In 2013, a gun bill emerged in the wake of Sandy Hook and allowed for background checks of most gun sales, but it was overruled in the Senate. At the time, then vice president Joe Biden offered an encouraging note and said that this failed vote would infuriate the American people more and help start a movement. However, his optimism was misplaced. Since Sandy Hook, mass shootings in our nation have only increased.

Comparing the failed bill in 2013 to the one that was passed this year, there have been improvements. While both proposed to run background checks on individuals between 18 to 21 years old seeking to buy a gun, Biden's bill did more by including incentives for states to pass red flag laws that allow groups to petition courts to remove weapons from people deemed a threat.

However, according to some, the bill is not enough. Legal fellow Amy Swearer from the conservative Heritage Foundation, a group based out of Washington, D.C., critiqued the efficacy of President Biden's gun control bill, saying it was pushing for politically divisive measures that could seriously damage rights to keep and bear arms without making the nation any safer.

"I think that these [calls in the bill] were very vague," Swearer said. "None outlined specific measures — for example, what should constitute a so-called assault weapon in any of these bills? Would these bans be merely future bans?" she said in an interview with the Heritage Foundation. "You can keep the guns you have now, but we're going to ban future sales or is it going to be a full-on Australian-style confiscation measure?"

Astor, the UCLA professor, compared the need for a driver's license and a passport to the need for certification to own a gun.

"I don't really understand why [there hasn't been] more gun control legislation. Maybe it is money. Maybe it is the gun lobby. Maybe it's become politicized and an ideological thing, but it should be treated as a public health measure," Astor told NPR.

In just 12 months, 662 mass shootings have occurred in the U.S. Some shootings have occurred just 20 minutes away from Saratoga. Each week dozens of lives are taken. These shootings are reminders that advocacy for gun laws must increase and bills have to be passed to decrease mass shootings. The media has a big part to play as well with so many people becoming desensitized to mass shootings. Above all, we must finally learn from the loss of too many young lives that took place ten years ago at Sandy Hook. ♦

## >> falconfigures

26 lives taken at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012
33 percent increase in gun violence from 2011 to 2020
5 mass shootings in California since January 1
39 mass shootings in the U.S. since January

Sources: BBC News, The New York Times, CNN, and Everytown.org

# Lovestruck: The Falcon plays matchmaker

**Start**

**Move forward 2 spaces**



**Is Valentine's Day an official Holiday?**

**In which empire did Valentine's Day originate?**

**Skip a turn**

**What are your Valentine's Day plans?**



## Instructions:

To play, you need a small object (eraser, scrap of paper, figurine) to move along the path as your character, a small group of people to play with and a dice (you can also generate a dice on your phone).

All players must begin at the "Start" space. Roll the dice and move along the path the number of spaces displayed on the face of the dice. Upon

landing on your new space, answer the question/obey the instruction displayed on your space if applicable. If you do not know the answer, you must skip your next turn. Then, the next player may proceed to roll the dice. Be the first player reach "Happily Ever After" to win the game.

Have fun and good luck!

## Synopsis:

In honor of the nation's "holiday of love," The Falcon set up four potential couples to go on dates recently. Though Valentine's Day is dedicated to romantic love, the four pairs came out of this experience with a new friendship.

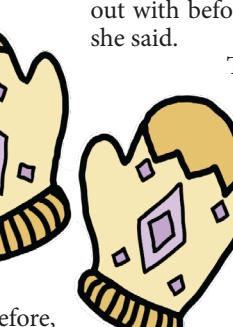
Though each pairing may seem completely random, there was actually a lot of thought put in to make sure the two students would be compatible. We paired Shane Timmons, the SHS varsity quarterback, with Elsa Blom, a talented runner, since they both share a love of fitness and many of the same interests.

Paul Hulme and Ela Machiroutu are both part of Toga's leadership, and Machiroutu is close friends with Hulme's older brother, Jonny Hulme. Tevita Pahulu is also a part of SHS's varsity football team, and Dahlia Murthy plays for the water polo team; the two's shared interest in sports and compatible personalities led to their pairing.

Lastly, Nathan Lim's introverted nature and Charlotte Debecker's welcoming energy complemented each other entirely, making a perfect pairing. ♦



**What's your favorite candy?**



plans, family and their interests.

"People should definitely make plans with people they haven't hung out with before and just give it a try," she said.

Though the two are both too embarrassed to disclose who fell the most on the ice, it is safe to say that both were complete beginners.

The couple went to In and Out, where they enjoyed dinner.

"The whole experience was really fun, and I'd probably do it again," Timmons said. ♦

Shane Timmons & Elsa Blom



**What's your favorite Valentine's Day memory?**



**Move forward 3 spaces**

**Who is Valentine's Day named after?**

**Move back 3 spaces**

**What bird symbolizes Valentine's Day?**

**Who would you like to see paired together?**

**Skip a turn**

**Roll Again**



**Match No. 4: Heart rates accelerate for seniors Charlotte D. and Nathan L.**

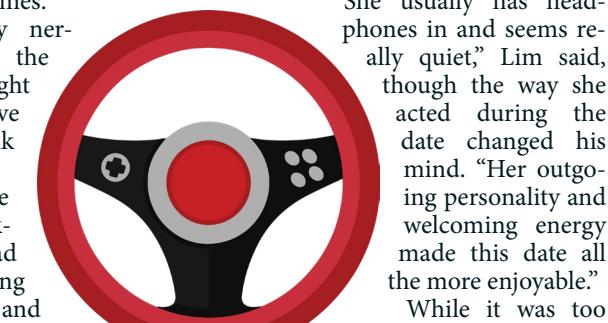
With butterflies in their stomachs, seniors Charlotte Debecker and Nathan Lim went to K1 speed to enjoy an evening of go-karting and arcade games.

"I was really nervous going into the date since I thought we wouldn't have anything to talk about," Lim said.

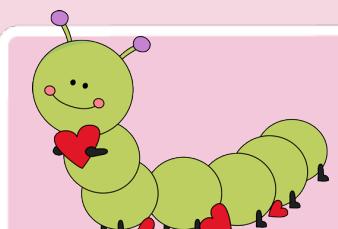
However, the pair's fear of awkwardness instead became an evening full of laughter and fun.

"Unlike what I expected, there wasn't a moment of silence or awkwardness between us," Debecker said.

Not only did their date result in hours of fun for the two, but it also



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**Skip a turn**



**What does it mean to "wear your heart on your sleeve"?**

**Match No. 3: Dahlia M. and Tevita P. strike a connection**

A common classic for first dates is bowling, which is exactly what sophomores Dahlia Murthy and Tevita Pahulu spent their Sunday night doing. The pair played four rounds at Bowmor lanes in Cupertino. In between strikes, spares and gutter balls,

they deepened their friendship. "I've never talked to him outside of school, so it was nice to see him from a different perspective," Murthy said.

The two are both relatively shy people, and they were both nervous about going on the arranged date. Though it

started off a bit tense, the pair agreed that they warmed up to each other as they began to play.

"We had a lot of fun bowling and just talking," Pahulu said. After their games, the pair played some games in the arcade to conclude their night. ♦

**Move back 2 spaces**



**Move forward 4 spaces**

**Who is Cupid?**

**Skip a turn**

**Who was your childhood crush?**

**Move back 4 spaces**



# Drama program works to increase student membership, provides new opportunities

BY JonnyLuo

During the fall play, "The Crucible," players experienced a strange sight for a high school production: Eight actors, none with speaking lines, stood out in the cast by sheer virtue of their diminutive stature. These eight actors were, in fact, middle schoolers who took part in a new pilot program by the school's drama department intended to provide more drama experience to middle schoolers and encourage them to continue theater in high school.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the drama department has struggled with low enrollment, primarily due to the face-to-face nature of drama that the pandemic interrupted.

"When you have a performing art that is all about being with each other, not many people liked the Zoom plays — that just wasn't very popular," Brotzman said.

However, as the school returned to in-person learning, the numbers show signs of improvement. The program had 68 students in the 2018-19 school year, 60 students in the 2019-20 school year, 28 students in the 2020-21 fully online school year, 53 students in the 2021-22 school year, and 45 students in the 2022-23 school year.



Eight Redwood Middle School students were invited to join the cast of "The Crucible."

As pandemic restrictions loosened, more students also returned to participate in extracurricular plays and musicals, which are separate from the drama program, though many participate in both.

This year, for example, over 36 students participated in the fall play, which was higher than the 25 in last year's fall play.

To increase interest in the program, Brotzman and the drama program have been working with Redwood Middle School to teach drama workshops, inviting the mid-

dle school musical students to the school to provide opportunities to work backstage at the McAfee Center. They are also planning for electives night to show off the program for prospective students.

Despite these numbers rebounding, Brotzman attributed the lower numbers in the program to two main reasons: a precipitous drop in drama participation from middle school to high school and an increase in elective opportunities at the school that has taken place even as overall school enrollment has fallen in the past few years.

Though the middle school does not have an official drama program, it has high enrollment in its yearly musical, sometimes as high as 60 to 80 students, Brotzman said.

The program has also been expanding through collaborations with classes, such as by working with English teacher Amy Keys' creative writing class to promote playwriting and the New Work Festival, a series of 6 to 12-minute student-written and directed plays. The festival started with seven plays last year and is continuing this year.

"All we can do really with a decline in enrollment is that we can continue to do good work and provide lots of great opportunities and provide a comfortable space that people want to be in," Brotzman said. ♦

## A filmmaking journey continuing beyond SHS

BY LynnDai

During his time on campus from 1964 to 1965 in his senior year, alumnus Steven Spielberg, the "highest-grossing film director in history," recalled the school as "hell on Earth." At the time, he experienced heavy antisemitism and felt isolated, occupying himself in journalism as a sports reporter for The Falcon and continuing his fascination with the world of film as documented in the recent autobiographical film "The Fabelmans."

Now, nearly 60 years later, Saratoga High alum Luke Salin (Class of 2016) describes the Media Arts Program (MAP) as a place where he has developed lifelong friendships and discovered how to express his voices through film, a complete turnaround from the time Spielberg was a student at the school long before it was a hotbed of student filmmaking.

**"I have so much appreciation and admiration for the teachers and the program itself!"**

ALUMNUS Luke Salin

Salin grew up watching typical American films — "Toy Story 2," "Twilight Zone," "Star Wars," "Indiana Jones" and, of course, Spielberg's movies, including "Catch Me If You Can," "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "Jurassic Park" and "Jaws," all of which he enjoyed from an early age for their diversity and ability to appeal to a wide range of audiences.

Years later, when his older sister, Class of 2010 alumna Mikenna Salin, took the late Steven McCue's photography class, Luke Salin discovered the behind-the-scenes

workings of the camera. He was hooked. He took McCue's art class in his freshman year and joined MAP, where he started to look at movies from a different viewpoint: as an art form that allowed him to communicate with his mind at the time — believing that "high school Luke could do anything with his team" — and the creativity and willingness to "just go for it" that came with it.

At New York University (NYU), Salin was able to further build on that vision. In particular, he took Set in Sound Filmmaking during his sophomore year. Through trial and error navigating the quick-paced nature of the class, Salin said he was able to discover what he enjoyed doing the most: not just the aspects of creating an idea visually, but going through the process with a team.

"There's kind of a magic feeling when you can get it all to click and work out," Salin said. "I think I first found that in MAP and then continued finding that in college. Even when things were hard, it felt like a bright flashing sign that was telling me I was heading the right way."

During his senior year, MAP teachers unveiled an annual award named to his high level of support for others while in high school: the Luke Salin Outstanding Service Award. It honors students for their teamwork and collaboration skills.

For Salin, the award remains to be one of the "coolest things" that has ever happened to him. He said he still keeps in touch with many of his MAP friends above and below his grade, something that attests to his personal experience as a Korean American. For Salin and Lewis, the film was about figuring out their identity as half-Asians, processing grief and paving their way forward.

"I know I'll find my way back to making my own films sometime soon," he said. "It's a long and taxing journey to push for your own talent in entertainment." ♦

The TV pilot world-premiered at South By Southwest in 2021 and played at nine festivals nationwide, including locally at Cinquest in San Jose.

In addition to Salin's teamwork mental-

said that New York City also helped push him out of his comfort zone, take more risks and "grow up." The city opened his mind to "total other corners" not only in entertainment, but also new perspectives in other kinds of art and politics.

"As someone who grew up in Saratoga, which is a pretty privileged bubble, you might not feel like there's a lot going on, but I was able to find the feelings and memories that could be shared and helped me grow by working on that project," Salin said.

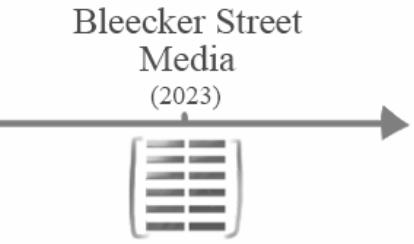
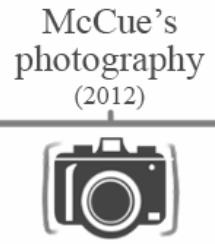
Salin said his project characterizes the experiences that many young people like him feel: The struggle of figuring out what to share with the world comes with gaining more life experience and is a process that changes an individual's identity constantly. He said that such a process doesn't just apply for an artist — it applies for being a person as well. And it can be tough for people coming from an isolated place like Saratoga.

"I'm still figuring out my personal style. That's the real honest answer," he said.

Besides his full-time job at Bleecker Streets Media, Salin is taking a temporary pause from making films. While he said that he feels that he currently lacks the inspiration and financial capability to carry out independent projects, Salin acknowledges that there are "a lot more important things going on in the world and thus more important stories to be told and heard" than what he feels he can contribute at the moment.

"I know I'll find my way back to making my own films sometime soon," he said. "It's a long and taxing journey to push for your own talent in entertainment." ♦

To read about Class of 2017 alumna Kanika Vora's filmmaking journey, scan the QR code to the right.



Graphic by MINSUI TANG

# Sophomore expresses creative stories of her culture through dance

BY KathyWang

For the past year, the date of August 6 has been prodding sophomore Anika Ramakrishnan's mind. On that significant day, Ramakrishnan, dressed in a carefully picked and tailored costume, along with Indian jewelry and meticulously done hair and makeup, will take the stage at the Cubberley theater for her Arangetram, a 3-hour traditional Indian solo debut. She will be performing in front of roughly 300 people.

Typically, a live orchestra accompanies an Arangetram dancer. Besides vocals, the musicians use Western instruments like flutes and violins, as well as traditional Indian instruments like the nattuvangam, tabla and mridangam.

This traditional Indian solo is a culmination of nine years of hard work, where she has been practicing Bharatanatyam, a type of classical Indian dance.

## What is an Arangetram?

Arangetram, which translates to "ascending the stage," is a solo debut of an Indian classical dancer and a rite of passage, according to the Noor Dance Academy. It showcases the training, technique and beauty used within the art form.

## Arangetram performance training

Training for the Arangetram performance takes one year, consisting of strength training and rigorous practice to perfect dance techniques and facial expressions.

Ramakrishnan currently trains in the Jayendra Kalakendra dance school with her two teachers: Suganda Sreenath and Shreya Iyer. She calls them gurus, which means "teacher" in Sanskrit.

"There's a lot of memorization involved [in the dancing] since you are taught the dances very quickly," Ramakrishnan said. "You also need to develop the endurance to perform for several hours."

Every Sunday, Ramakrishnan attends a lesson to practice for her Arangetram, along with a one-hour group dance class.

In addition to practicing techniques and facial expressions in classes, Ramakrishnan also learns the historical background of the character she embodies through the dance.

"As the dancer, we can put ourselves in [characters'] shoes and feel the emotions as we dance," Ramakrishnan said.

In addition to the weekly training, Ramakrishnan practices her individual pieces at home daily.



Courtesy of ANIKA RAMAKRISHNAN

## Sophomore Anika Ramakrishnan practices for her Arangetram in weekly Sunday practices.

### Rundown of an Arangetram performance

Each Arangetram performance is structured to fit the desires of the dancer. Ramakrishnan's Arangetram will include eight dances as well as a costume change in the middle.

The dance starts with a pushpanjali, translating to "invocation to God." The dance embodies the blossoming of a flower, and is performed with a major focus on technique.

The pushpanjali is followed by a jatiswaram, a dance that showcases beauty and rhythmic stability, and varnam, a 30-minute technique-oriented piece consisting of storytelling that must be expressed with perfection.

After a quick costume change, Ramakrishnan performs two keerthanams, dances consisting of storytelling to praise the Hindu gods and goddesses.

This is then followed by a thillana, an energetic form of dance focusing on intense technique and rhythmic patterns within the music.

Finally, the dance ends with a mangalam, where the dancer performs a small piece "thanking the audience, their teachers and musicians for blessing them on the auspicious day." The mangalam also embodies the closing of the flower, referencing the beginning of the dance where the dancer embodies the blossoming of a flower.

"Personally, I like to do [the sections of the dance] that are technique-based, where the music is slowly edging its way into the

"Like any dream, the process will be tough but you're always looking forward to the outcome."

SOPHOMORE

Anika Ramakrishnan

Ramakrishnan plans to invite her relatives, friends and teachers to her Arangetram.

"It's an important day that you have trained so hard for, and you would like to showcase your talent and efforts to those you care for," Ramakrishnan said. "[You'd also want] to get blessings from elders for a successful journey as a dancer."

With years of hard work and training, Ramakrishnan is confident in her technique. However, like many dancers, she is nervous about simple aspects such as maintaining stamina throughout the performance.

"Training is a lot of hard work, but it's like any dream, where the process will be tough but you're always looking forward to the outcome," Ramakrishnan said. "In the end when you look back, you'll realize that it was all worth it." ♦

## This year's unbalanced class sizes due to elective classes with single periods result in challenges

BY EmmaFung

classes that stray far above and below that number.

Sophomore Lucie Le Toquin, who is the Student Life section editor and in her second year on staff, believes the downfall with having a large class is that it is difficult to teach all the freshmen how to do their tasks.

This year, the second largest class is the Journalism 1 and Yearbook class, with 42 students in total consisting of students from all four grades.

Viewed from the perspective of students, bigger classes sometimes mean teachers can't assign as much work.

Yearbook adviser Megan Laws said having such a big class in yearbook caught her off guard at first. In her past years of being a yearbook adviser at her former school, Scotts Valley High, she had classes of 8 to 30 students.

Despite the surprise, Laws said the large number of students means a smaller workload for each student. Having more students and fewer students is hard for the district to justify in a time of declining enrollment.

However, she acknowledged that there were drawbacks too. While having a big class reduces the assigned work for each individual student, Laws said it can prevent students from achieving their full potential.

"I think [larger classes] can be great for students who might struggle with assuming a larger role right off the bat, but at the same time, having such a large class could be detrimental to those students who are hoping to get more responsibilities," Laws said. "There's just not enough to go around."

The students in her yearbook class also have mixed feelings about the class size.

ber of students can be challenging when it comes to group activities, I'm trying to make the most of what I have," Lee said. ♦

### >> falconfigures

65 Students in eighth-period (after school) Winterguard

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**"It's an important day that you trained so hard for, and would like to showcase to those you care for."**

SOPHOMORE  
Anika Ramakrishnan

"Classical Indian dancing is something you start when you're very young," Ramakrishnan said. "For me and lots of other kids, you don't have a passion or really enjoy it at first. But over time, when you learn more about the history of the dance and enjoy the movement and technique, you follow up with passion, which is very beautiful."

An Arangetram can be performed with different Indian classical dance forms, including Kathak, Odissi, Mohiniyattam and Kuchipudi. The basic skills and expressions of each dance form take around 7 to 10 years

to learn.

Ramakrishnan performs Bharatanatyam, which focuses on footwork, facial expressions, beat and technique.

"Personally, I enjoy recognizing the beats of the music while creating a structured dance to go along with it," Ramakrishnan said.

Typically, a live orchestra accompanies an Arangetram dancer. Besides vocals, the musicians use Western instruments like flutes and violins, as well as traditional Indian instruments like the nattuvangam, tabla and mridangam.

I've watched other dancers perform with the live musicians and they're really talented," Ramakrishnan said. "Not only are they performing alongside the dancer, but they're also indulged in music associated with the dancer's story."

## Arangetram performance training

Training for the Arangetram performance takes one year, consisting of strength training and rigorous practice to perfect dance techniques and facial expressions. Ramakrishnan currently trains in the Jayendra Kalakarana dance school with her two teachers: Sugandha Sreenath and Shreyas. She calls them gurus, which means "teacher" in Sanskrit.

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"Training is a lot of hard work, but it's like any dream, where the process will be tough but you're always looking forward to the outcome," Ramakrishnan said. "In the end when you look back, you'll realize that it was all worth it." ♦

# This year's unbalanced class sizes due to elective classes with single periods result in challenges

By Emma Fung

classes that stray far above and below that number.

Class sizes at the school are much more varied this year than previous years. While some are crowded with over 40 students, other classes function with as few as 13 students.

Viewed from the perspective of students, bigger classes sometimes mean teachers can't assign as much work.

On the other hand, large classes also mean fewer opportunities for students to speak out and share their thoughts in class and for their teachers to get to know them.

Ultimately, money is one reason class sizes are tough to reduce. Adding another section of a class means spending thousands more annually on teacher salaries and benefits, and adding teachers is hard for the district to justify in a time of declining enrollment.

However, she acknowledged that there were drawbacks too. While having a big class reduces the assigned work for each individual student, Laws said it can prevent students from achieving their full potential.

"I think [larger classes] can be great for students who might struggle with assuming a larger role right off the bat, but at the same time, having such a large class could be detrimental to those students who are hoping to get more responsibilities," Laws said. "There's just not enough to go around."

According to registrar Robert Wise, the average size of an academic class this year is 28 students. However, there are quite a few

story of the performance," Ramakrishnan said. "It's not necessarily easy to do, but it's easier for me to adapt to the coordination and learn about what's going on in the story."

"Like any dream, the process will be tough but you're always looking forward to the outcome."

SOPHOMORE  
Anika Ramakrishnan

Ramakrishnan plans to invite her relatives, friends and teachers to her Arangetram.

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With years of hard work and training, Ramakrishnan is confident in her technique. However, like many dancers, she is nervous about simple aspects such as maintaining stamina throughout the performance.

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"Although having a really small num-

The Saratoga Falcon

February 3, 2023

The Saratoga Falcon

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# in-depth

# Take a step, ... step again

**Students talk mental health, its stigma and the efficacy of therapy**

BY Martin Xu

*Editor's Note: Kaylen and Rylie are pseudonyms used to protect the identities of the students interviewed for this story.*

Kaylen acknowledges therapy is not the best option for everyone, saying individuals have different ways of dealing with mental health issues. Occasionally, she even questions how it helps her compared to other forms of treatment such as medication and hospitalization, which can involve more personalized daily treatment.

For her, therapy serves as an outlet to share in an objective and safe space.

"I'm now able to open up to my therapists about events that have reoccurred in my life for a while, which has led to major improvements in my life," Kaylen said. "But I honestly feel like any progress, or lack thereof, that I've had after seeing other previous therapists has been of my own accord."

**>> falconfigures**

1/3

60

3

most prevalent issues: academic stress, peer relationships, and family concerns

— Lead Therapist Shobha Vaidyanathan

Students reach out and seek therapy

**Therapy stigmatized behind closed doors**

After realizing the extent of her mental health issues, she reached out to a Counseling & Support Services for Youth (CASSY) counselor at Redwood Middle School, which was her first experience with therapy. Despite the ability to talk about her experiences, she found CASSY therapy there didn't help her find lasting solutions.

To seek more effective help, Kaylen briefly met with her sister's professional therapist, which she deemed her "first ever positive experience" in therapy.

Kaylen said: "At SHS, everyone knows mental health is a legitimate issue. Nobody would laugh at you and say to your face, 'You have depression; you have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; you're so weird.' But behind closed doors and face-to-face interactions, I sense stigma."

According to research conducted by The Lancet, a peer-reviewed medical journal, stigmas against therapy and discrimination for those who seek it can contribute to worsening symptoms and reduced likelihood of getting treatment.

One way the school has combated this is by normalizing the presence of mental health issues and integrating them into the school through services like personal counseling offered at the Wellness Center.

However, despite the school's best efforts, Kaylen said she noticed some students don't take the school site therapists seriously. Moreover, she thinks the resources the school allocates on mental health awareness — schoolwide lessons, for example — contributes to the stigma because students too often trivialize their message. Though she agrees they spread more awareness, the general connotation of these programs is negative because programs like MOSAIC take away from students' time during tutorials.

**Behind closed doors and face-to-face interactions, I sense stigma.**

until seventh grade, when she attended a therapy session for the first time.

"I thought if someone went to therapy, they were automatically mentally ill," she said.

Rylie was ultimately guided into school-based therapy by her parents. Over time, Rylie said her perception of therapy changed "drastically."

"After I realized it was helping my life a lot, my perception of therapy changed to a much more positive view," Rylie said. "I learned a lot of coping skills, such as breathing exercises, since I struggle with panic attacks and massive depressive episodes. Even when I was in a good state of mind, I continued to go to therapy because it was a healthy and a safe place for me to go."

**Though limiting, school counselors provide a safe place to share thoughts**

In Rylie's experience, school counselors have been a convenient way to get help whenever she needs it on campus. She feels the school's counseling services are not as mentally taxing as outside therapy counselors, since the former focuses more on academics rather than personal life, though she encourages others to try both options.

However, she noted that teens might not feel free to open up to school counselors than outside counselors because of mandatory reporting requirements.

"If someone taking therapy doesn't want to do anything about it, they can't talk about it," Rylie said. "I understand where CASSY therapists are coming from and it's not bad. It's just a little bit restrictive."

Another challenge she has faced with the school counseling system is transitioning between therapists, who frequently leave their positions for other jobs. Rylie has had to re-explain her personal experiences to new counselors twice during the start of high school and after her counselor left at the beginning of her junior year. While it's "OK" for her to talk about her history since she's already gone through it, she acknowledges that it may be tough for others.

**Student conquers her own self-stigma of therapy**

Though Rylie feels that therapy in general has become less stigmatized and more frequently discussed, she said it still needs improvement at SHS specifically.

"At Saratoga, therapy is still a bit stigmatized because of how academically focused everyone is," Rylie said. "It feels like you don't have time to be mentally ill or unhealthy, especially because school counselors pull you out of classes."

Still, Rylie is happy she was able to open her mind to therapy since it has greatly helped her talk about her struggles and lessen the strain of her mental health on her life. She hopes as more people openly discuss mental health, the stigma will decrease at SHS and more will have the courage to reach out.

"Therapy has been really helpful and super healthy for my life overall, especially since I had some medical problems which were very overwhelming," Rylie said. "It may be scary to reach out, but I personally think it has a lot of benefits. Even if you aren't mentally ill or struggling, it's still good to reach out since it's a safe place to share your thoughts." ♦

**Therapist urges more CASSY visits**

SHS lead therapist Shobha Vaidyanathan encourages students to seek mental health services whenever possible — either through the Wellness Center's activities or the free counseling sessions the school provides.

"I think [therapy] gives a lot of clarity and a very safe place for students to share what is happening," Vaidyanathan said.

In Rylie's experience, school counselors have been a convenient way to get help whenever she needs it on campus. She feels the school's counseling services are not as mentally taxing as outside therapy counselors, since the former focuses more on academics rather than personal life, though she encourages others to try both options.

She emphasizes that counseling sessions with school therapists are very client-focused, consisting of check-ins and discussions depending on what works best for the student.

Vaidyanathan says students are validated and do not have to worry about confidentiality except for things they cannot keep private (physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or safety concerns). Despite this, she stresses that students are informed that CASSY therapists are mandated reporters to prevent students from accidentally walking into this "blind spot."

Vaidyanathan acknowledged that students in that past have expressed concerns regarding peer-stigma surrounding therapy and emphasized that the on-campus counseling should be utilized without any shame.

"Some students have said they were worried about others noticing their therapy sessions in here — but they shouldn't be," Vaidyanathan said. "It's just like going to a doctor if you have a headache. We are trained professionals here to support you."

The school administration has worked with therapists at the Wellness Center and student leadership to decrease the stigma surrounding therapy at the school. Of these services, the Wellness Center is highlighting Talkative Thursday every blue Thursday during lunch and Meditation Friday every week during Friday tutorial.

With these newly-introduced initiatives, Vaidyanathan has noticed a decrease in stigma — especially since the Wellness Center "is always packed this year." Even then, Vaidyanathan encourages students to suggest new ideas to decrease stigma surrounding therapy and to provide different mental health services to more students.

"Providing a safe space and being with students without any judgment [is why] I love my job," Vaidyanathan said. "Students know they're respected and treated with kindness — we are here for them." ♦ — Martin Xu

**17% of youth (6-17) experienced mental health disorders in 2016. Only HALF received treatment.**



Data from NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS



## BOYS' BASKETBALL

# Falcons strive to recapture magic of Gunn victory

BY George Huang  
& Zack Zhang

The air was electric with four minutes left on the scoreboard in the Falcons' home game against the Gunn Titans on Jan. 13. The Falcons were down 52-50.

**"We must trust everybody to compete when we are the smallest school in our league by far."**

COACH Mike Davey



Senior point guard Nick Tjaden shoots a floater in the game against Palo Alto on Jan. 20.

Attempting to score, senior point guard Nick Tjaden hovered at the 3-point line but couldn't find an opening.

Suddenly, senior shooting guard Julian Berkowitz-Sklar appeared next to him. After receiving a swift pass from Tjaden, Berkowitz-Sklar rose in one fluid motion

and swished a 3-pointer. Later, after being fouled, Berkowitz-Sklar made two free throws, and the crowd erupted with excitement. It was an unlikely comeback. The

Falcons ended with a 55-52 victory over the Gunn Titans, all achieved in the furious last minutes.

The victory against the Titans was impressive due to Gunn's front line, with some as tall as 6-10; Tjaden credited the win to "good teamwork and resilience."

In the next three games, the Falcons fell on hard times, losing three games straight to garner a conference record of 2-4: 56-39 against a tough Los Gatos team on Jan. 18, 50-44 at home vs. Palo Alto on Jan. 20 and 70-61 at Los Altos on Jan. 23. (Due to printing deadlines, The Falcon cannot cover more recent games in the Feb. 3 print issue.)

Senior captain Mateusz Palusinski is helping lead the Falcons along with guards Berkowitz-Sklar and Tjaden.

But coach Mike Davey has put the emphasis on the team effort in a league in which they are consistently undersized.

"We must trust everybody to compete when we are the smallest school in our league by far," he said. "We have a small margin of error and everybody needs to play well for us to win." ♦

## GIRLS' BASKETBALL

# Falcons face six tough losses, CCS prospects unlikely

BY Christina Chang

This season, the girls' basketball team has seen varsity and JV merge due to the loss of four seniors early in the season and the departures of JV coaches Ellyson Matsui and Vernon Wang, who left for personal reasons mid-season. Both teams are now led by head coach Josh Rivera and assistant coach Jaston Rivera.

The starting lineup consists of senior point guard Tanya Ghai, junior guard Zineerah Ahmed, sophomore guard Urvi Iyer and sophomore forwards Riley Adler and Saira Ramakrishnan.

In the De Anza League, the Falcons have a 1-6 league record, as of Jan. 27. The team

lost 63-44 against Monta Vista on Jan. 26; lost 51-41 against Lynbrook on Jan. 1; lost 60-34 against Los Gatos on Jan. 17; lost 48-44 against Leland on Jan. 14; won 45-42 against Homestead on Jan. 12; lost 54-36 against Palo Alto on Jan. 10; and lost 54-42 against Homestead on Jan. 5.

He attributed their losses to a "plague of injuries" as "the majority of the team has been hurt in some capacity," whether it be a concussion or injuries involving the ankle, quad, ligament, foot and arm.

"We've had a lot of good practices as of late and we're trying to stack those," Rivera said. "It's been a long season, but we try to make sure everyone can be available to play in games and contribute."

To make CCS, a team must win half their

games in either preseason or league, or have notable victories.

The Falcons do not meet this requirement "on paper," but head coach Rivera said he hopes their notable win against Homestead and potential future victories will allow them to qualify for postseason play, under the requirement of notable wins.

Despite uncertainty about CCS prospects, Rivera said he's proud of the athletes' development over the season.

"For us, if someone is hurt, we have the mentality of 'who else is ready?' Who else is holding that role?" Rivera said. "That's been the theme this season: We've asked these players to essentially do more

to improve for future games, he emphasized consistency.

"They show up, they work out and they put their best foot forward." ♦

## BOYS' SOCCER

# Despite hiccups, the team works toward a comeback

BY Victoria Lin  
& Daniel Wu

After dropping into the El Camino league, the Falcons began their season with an electric 2-0 victory against rival Los Gatos on Dec. 15. Since then, however, the Falcons have stumbled in the first half of the league season, achieving a 2-3-2 record as of Jan. 25.

The Falcons tied 0-0 in their game on Jan. 24 at home against Fremont.

They won 4-3 vs. Lynbrook on Jan. 17 during an away game and lost 1-0 against Monta Vista on Jan. 13. The Falcons' loss against the Monta Vista was attributed to Saratoga underestimating their defense, which enabled the Matadors to slot a goal in near the end of the match.

Team captain and right back Dylan Sinton said illness and injury have hindered the team's progress. He mentioned that key players have often been unable to attend practices. As a result, on-field coordination has proven a struggle.

"Luck simply isn't by our side, and despite our rigorous training, practices have been difficult when not everyone can show up. The first half of the season is crucial to build cohesion between the team, and we've simply been unable to," Sinton said.

Also hurting the Falcons' progress in early January was atmospheric river conditions that dumped huge amounts of rain in



Sinton

## GIRLS' SOCCER

# In De Anza League, team faces difficult uphill battle

BY Victoria Lin  
& Isabelle Wang

the area. Practices were either held in the stormy conditions with players braving the wet and cold or canceled altogether.

Significant improvement has been seen with the underclassmen on the team, who have substituted for the lack of returning juniors. Junior center midfielder Mohit Gandluru believes the heavy strength and endurance training, which the team has incorporated into daily practices, has greatly increased the intensity at which the underclassmen can play at.

"During the first few practices, a lot of the underclassmen were struggling to handle the ball and maneuver at the pace of the other players," Gandluru said. "But we've effectively transformed them into formidable players who can apply constant pressure and defend when necessary."

With players gradually returning to the field, Sinton said the team is prepared for the second half with camaraderie among teammates at a high. Sinton has led practices by doubling down on drillwork to help identify and improve weaknesses.

The team hopes to avenge their loss against Monta Vista when they play again on Feb. 2, which should push them closer to securing a CCS playoff.

"Our momentum is strong," Sinton said. "I've seen significant improvement in terms of on-field cooperation, so I'm expecting smooth sailing from here on out." ♦

sitions — senior Maya Singla, juniors Jiah Jung, Reva Gupta, Elena Burgos and sophomore Hillary Gonzalez.

"It's been a bit difficult to fill [defense], but we've got players who are willing to play, and they've done pretty well," Jung said.

**"It's been difficult to fill [defense], but we've got players who've done well."**

JUNIOR Jiah Jung

In the first part of January, rainy weather proved to be a challenge, forcing the varsity team to reschedule two games due to slippery and flooded fields.

The team also needed to cancel a few practices, affecting preparation for future games.

With a smaller roster of 22 players and injuries becoming a bigger issue halfway into the season, the coaches and players have begun to focus on staying healthy and fit to put more emphasis on recovery.

"Usually we don't plan too far into the future, but we're optimistic about playing in CCS and we train hard anyways, even if we don't make it," Verga said. ♦

# Athletes turn to trainer Caitlin Steiding for their injuries

BY Kathy Wang

Throughout her high school years at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma, California, athletic trainer Caitlin Steiding recalls spraining her ankle often during her soccer games. Since she was never able to find a comfortable brace, she learned how to tape her own ankle and would often tape her teammates' as well. She never anticipated that dealing with those injuries would lead to her lifelong interest in athletic training.

"She gave me an experience that I would not have gotten at a four-year college had I gone to one right after high school," Steiding said. "I like the fact that I got to do a lot of rehabilitation and be on the field with the athletes during games — I love being able to immerse myself in those teams."

After graduating from Santa Rosa Junior College, Steiding enrolled in San Jose State University's (SJSU) athletic training program. There, she earned her Bachelor's of Science in Athletic Training. At SJSU, she attended various internships located in SJSU, Foothill College, Santa Clara University, Harker Upper School and Irvington High School. Through these internships, she furthered her knowledge on taping techniques by preventing and taking care of injuries, and she even had an opportunity to travel with the Spartan football team to Boise and Fresno State away games.

During Steiding's past job before working at Saratoga High, she lost her rhythm with athletic training. She wanted to work somewhere that would make her love being an athletic trainer again, so after seeing a job opening at Saratoga High, she decided to apply for it.

As the athletic trainer, every day looks different for her, though it is often packed with preventative care such as concussion testing, mending injuries and being out on the field to assist athletes. Most weekdays, she is usually in the training room from 1:30 to 6:30 p.m. helping athletes. However, if there are late-night sports games, she will stay until they end to help with injuries.

Besides injured athletes, regulars in the training room include her student helpers,



Courtesy of CAITLIN STEIDING

sophomores Dahlia Murphy and Ava Sadeghi. They often assist Steiding during football games and others.

"I think my favorite part about helping out was the Friday nights," Murphy said. "It gave me something to do and it was fun when you get to see all the players and talk to everybody. It felt like I was a part of a bigger community, and I can actually help people out."

Steiding especially enjoys the comfort of having student helpers by her side, as well as taking them under her wing and guiding them through different tasks. She said she is also grateful for P.E. teacher and former trainer Liz Alves for helping her have a smoother transition into the role as well as covering for football games when she was sick.

"My favorite part about working here is just working with everybody," Steiding said. "I actually enjoyed my time here, and I like being able to take people under my wing." ♦

**"I actually enjoyed my time here, and I like being able to take people under my wing."**

ATHLETIC TRAINER Caitlin Steiding

After graduating from high school, Steiding attended Santa Rosa Junior College, where she earned her associate's degree in Kinesiology: Athletic Training Preparation, a degree focused on sports medicine. During her time there, she worked under the wing of Monica Ohkubo, the head athletic trainer and kinesiology instructor at SRJC.

Not only did Ohkubo teach Steiding in her kinesiology class, she also helped her

# One teacher's journey toward muscle, strength and health

BY Sam Bai  
& Aiden Ye

"I'd work out for several months and then sort of fall off," he said. "And then maybe a year later, I'd pick it back up. I started consistently going about five years ago."

He later conformed to a rigid schedule after trying out morning workouts, which he realized was an easier way to stay consistent.

"It was really hard not to let other activities interfere with my routine in the afternoon, and there were always reasons I couldn't go. But there's no conflict in the mornings," Welander said.

He spends most mornings in the gym from 6 a.m. to 7 a.m., and he credits his workouts with helping him stay energized throughout the entire school day while maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

When he first started exercising, he tried to find the best way possible to structure workouts. Through careful research on the internet, Welander adopted a common five by five by five schedule.

"It was just easy to remember," he said.

"You break your workout routines into

five sets of five different exercises rotating through five different days."

Since then, he has deviated from following five by five exactly. On some days

like arm days, he does six exercises instead: three bicep exercises and three tricep exercises. His favorite type of exercises are tricep exercises such as dips, cable pushdowns and overhead cable tricep extensions, as through his experience, these exercises isolate their target muscles the best.

Since he began to regularly work out, Welander has noticed significant changes, both physically and mentally. While he used to struggle to bench 115 pounds, he now benches over 200. In particular, he is most proud of once doing 100 push-ups in a row.

"This eventually started bothering my

shoulder so I stopped doing that many push-ups, but I continue to be able to do a lot of pull-ups," he said.

Welander stresses the importance of training safely and progressing slowly to mitigate injuries, as recovery can be a long process. When he hurt his shoulder after pushing himself too hard and tried to resume the shoulder exercises, the pain came back and the injury worsened. Welander no longer pushes himself to try to achieve new personal bests each time, but rather works out simply to stay healthy and fit.

"I definitely feel the difference between days I go to the gym and days when I skip it. Beginning my day at the gym helps me feel more energized throughout the day, especially in the morning, but even when I'm driving home from work," Welander said. "Overall, working out just makes me feel healthier." ♦

# Despite challenges, dance team strives toward Nationals

BY Michelle Wan

no. They compete in a total of five dances consisting of one pom, one jazz, one lyrical and two hip-hop dances, along with three solo dances performed by the captains.

The team took a major hit in 2021 when former coach Maleia Fernandez had to quit due to pregnancy, leaving the team without a coach or proper dance routines to compete for the 2022 competition season. With their year-round practices and occasional guests to help refine dances, the team managed to place in some divisions during regional competitions and won in the Lyrical Division during Nationals.

In the past few years, the team has struggled with a lack of leadership due to difficulties finding consistent coaching, placing their captains and dancers under tremendous stress while preparing for competitions. The current senior captains Kiana Compeau, Risha Desai and Avani Gupta have worked alongside the team's first-year coach, Namaad Jackson, in an attempt to achieve better results this season.

The dance competition season started in January and extends through late March. The team expects to compete in four regional competitions taking place at Valley Christian, Homestead, Monta Vista and Cupertino.

The shift in leadership left the team feel-

"We wasted a lot of time during the summer when we should've been learning competition dances, and now we're incredibly behind," Desai said. Desai noted the multiple absences Jackson has due to his second job and other circumstances, placing more pressure on all dancers to perform at their best on their own.

Despite these obstacles, the dancers have persevered. They utilize every practice by drilling, reviewing and cleaning dances the best they can. The team communicates with their coach and advisers about major concerns they have with the dances in order to maximize their chances of winning.

"Although none of us enjoyed our competition routines this year, the one thing that has kept us going is the bond and pride we have for every single girl on the team," Gupta said. "Our team huddles before each dance reminds us why we dance together, no matter what." ♦

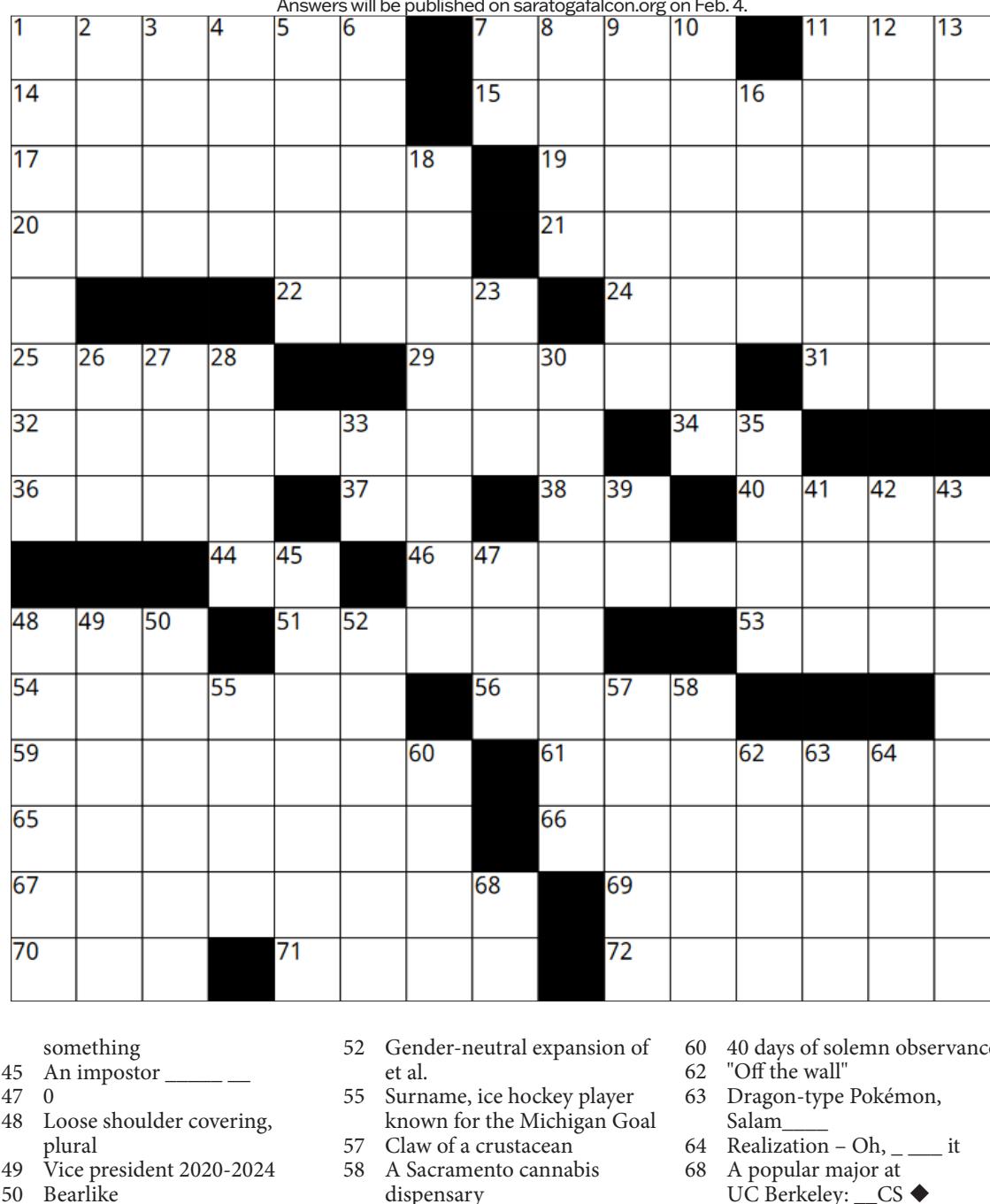
In turn, the captains worked hard with the team in an attempt to clean and perfect their dances by reviewing each step of every dance little by little — an excruciatingly tedious process. Desai described her frustration with their lack of preparation, which reduced the confidence of all participants.

# The Falcon Crossword: Early 2010s web games

BY Christopher Chen

- ACROSS**
- Cleveland Cavaliers forward
  - A double reed woodwind instrument
  - Stage name \_\_\_ Rida
  - Broadcasting now
  - The final Club Penguin party before its discontinuation, the \_\_\_ Party
  - Virtual pet website owned by NetDragon
  - Fixes the spine of a book
  - Raised without synthetic chemicals or hormones
  - MCU Doctor \_\_\_\_\_
  - General \_\_\_ Chicken
  - It's nice \_\_\_ you
  - Blame, responsibility
  - Sew again
  - Certificate of deposit
  - Grater and lemon
  - First word babies learn
  - 525,600 minutes
  - Pixar Movie with balloons
  - Too strong, needs nerfs
  - Hopefully liveable
  - Help teachers grade homework and take attendance, usually
  - National Geographic MMO
  - Chinese for book
  - Team Fortress 2 character shipped with Heavy?
  - Japanese spear
  - Dated word for prostitute
  - An action with your tongue
  - Store of weapons
  - Expression of frustration at someone: \_\_\_!
  - Often performed by worms
  - Collection of many (usually) unrelated things
  - Pasta meaning "little tongues" in Italian
  - Mitsubishi \_\_\_ , also known as Colt \_\_\_
  - An initiative by the UN for

- sustainable stock exchanges
- Enough human sacrifices to \_\_\_ a dragon
  - Posessions and money
- DOWN**
- Board game that usually ends in crying and yelling and hoping for jail
  - Extraordinary individual
  - Probably hosted on Tumblr or Wordpress
  - Dua \_\_\_
  - Scheduled time and place for something to happen
  - Plural, abominable snowman
  - Instinctive sound of pain
  - Spitting \_\_\_
  - Heroine of Swan Lake
  - Controversial 90 Day Fiancé star; alternatively, a binding decision plan for the Rhode Island Ivy League university
  - Desert fox
  - Past tense, stuck deeply
  - Plural, beginnings; alternatively, \_\_\_ and rimes
  - Hemsworth
  - Paper pad used to keep score
  - Equivalent to general or flag officer, but works for the US federal government
  - Formerly called (especially for maiden names)
  - Thurman
  - Bogo \_\_\_
  - Philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium, centered around resilience and virtue
  - Also be romanized as "tsu"
  - Can be used to describe large eyes that can see well
  - Liz Truss's role, at least for two months before defeat by lettuce
  - 6th album by Steely Dan
  - Jim Davis's \_\_\_field
  - Devices that give off

Answers will be published on [saratogafalcon.org](http://saratogafalcon.org) on Feb. 4.

- something
- Gender-neutral expansion of et al.
- An impostor \_\_\_
- 0
- Loose shoulder covering, plural
- Vice president 2020-2024
- Bearlike

- 40 days of solemn observance
- "Off the wall"
- Dragon-type Pokémon, Salam \_\_\_
- Realization – Oh, \_\_\_ it
- A popular major at UC Berkeley: \_\_\_CS ♦

## On being emotionally attached to every single one of my many stuffed animals

BY Amy Luo

As someone who gets attached to everything, I will never be ashamed of my attachment to my countless collection of stuffed animals, a habit of mine since I could perform bodily functions.

When I was little, my collection started and came together aimlessly. It was the irresistible plushies I came across every now and then that I held to sleep for comfort or simply admired in awe. Above all, playing House was the highlight of my childhood, when my mind drifted elsewhere through reenactments of cheesy plots.

When my friends say that every single one of their stuffed animals live on their beds so none of them feel left out, I'd think to my overpopulated collection and my twin-sized bed.

I've come to the ruthless realization that I never really cared about hurting their feelings, despite full-heartedly believing they had feelings and the intangible attachment I felt toward them. Ever since I was little, the uglier, unpreferred ones would be packed away in my closet, while the dainty pastel dolls sat prettily on shelves throughout my room. The

ones truly privileged were found on my bed.

By my pillows sits a giant Totoro that my grandpa shipped me from overseas many years ago. At the foot of my bed is a big marshmallow fluff-like Kiiroitori, which I brilliantly shortened to Tori, and Memo (Nemo with an M), my clown fish.

Whenever I travel, it's customary to select one of my stuffed animals to take with me, as I depend on the sense of safety that it brings me. Despite being OK with stuffing them away in closets back at home, I insist on holding them in my arms through airport security so they aren't suffocated in a suitcase. Unfortunately, what'd usually end up happening 95% of the time is that I'd set my eyes on a new stuffed animal at some souvenir shop, and the one I had brought would get neglected and stuffed in a suitcase

for the trip back.

Throughout the past couple of years, the emotional attachment to my stuffed animals has weakened slightly.

Although my heart will always melt looking through shelves of squishy plushies, my consciousness kicks in to contemplate whether spending \$50 on one is really sensible. Sometimes, another voice chimes in to reason that the possession of it will make my life better (and \$50 is a small price to pay for eternal happiness). Over time, though, more for the reason that I'd get yelled at for all the "junk" I hoarded in my room than anything, a good portion of my collection has been donated or sold.

Though sentimental attachment gets in the way, anything beats the inconvenience of having them packed away in my closet. ♦



## topten

### ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

- Weekends/holidays.** You want me to stress about homework during break? (I'm sorry, I'm kidding; I'll turn it in whenever you want for a good grade.)
- 6 p.m.** To all teachers who do this, I'm genuinely curious: do you do this on purpose? Or has your grading ability been possessed by the ancient soul of a sleep-deprived vampire?
- 9 p.m.** I just feel bad for all the band kids who end practice when these assignments are due.
- Midnight.** I feel like I'm having a heart attack whenever I open Canvas to submit my paper and see that it was due at midnight.
- 3 p.m.** After school? A decent time, but that means I'll probably forget to click submit after I get back home.
- 5 a.m.** Mixed feelings. It's not as common of a due date, so I might accidentally think it's due in the evening on that day, thus turning in my assignment late. However, it's also later than midnight, meaning I have more time to work on it.
- 11:59 p.m.** A classic. You can't go wrong with 11:59 p.m. When I see a paper assigned, I'm going to expect it to be due at 11:59 p.m.
- 8 a.m.** Amazing. I can stay up as late as I want and will still (probably) finish it on time.
- Beginning of next class.** So I can procrastinate until I end up doing it during my other classes? Yes please.
- End of next class.** The best of the best. I don't have to work on it the day before and I'll be able to work on it in class? Sign me up.

&gt;&gt; Nicole Lee