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THE saratoga falcon

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Saratoga High School Saratoga, CA

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SWIMMING SUPERSTAR





Top: Freshman Kelsey Zhang charges down the pool during her 100-meter butterfly event at CCS Finals. Top right: (left to right) Freshman Emma Geng and Kelsey Zhang, junior Meher Bhatnagar and senior Zeynep Tokuz gather for a pose following CCS finals. Bottom right: Zhang prepares to dive into the water at the CIF state championship.

Photos by MEHER BHATNAGAR

Zhang wins state 100-meter fly race

BY Nicole Lee

Freshman Kelsey Zhang left her mark in the school's athletic history when she won the state CIF race in the 100m butterfly with a time of 52.94 on May 13. She defeated 17 qualifying swimmers for the victory.

She was also part of a successful relay team consisting of freshman Emma Geng, junior Meher Bhatnagar and senior Zeynep Tokuz who raced in the 200-yard medley relay and finished 30th out of 40 teams participating in the preliminary round.

In addition to her recent CIF championship victory, she was nominated for athlete of the week by Mercury News on May 12.

Eight days before the state meet, Zhang had also won first place in CCS with times of 1:59:03 for the 200-m individual medley, in which swimmers compete with

each of four strokes (butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, and freestyle) for 50m, and 52.62 seconds for the 100m butterfly.

"I think we're all really happy for her and really proud of her," assistant coach Kristen Thomson said. "Obviously, she's worked so hard for this her entire life."

Zhang's records indicate the continuation of an illustrious career, marked by her qualification in 2022 for the upcoming Olympics trials with a 2:13.18 in the 200-meter butterfly. Even so, Zhang's goal at the CIF state championship was not to win, but rather to enjoy the time with her team members.

"I was at States [CIF state championship] to have fun and talk to my friends that I haven't seen for a long time, which was nice," Zhang said. "I was just mostly happy for my relay team that we made it to the States."

Zhang started swimming at age 5 at Saratoga Star Aquatics (SSA). She then

switched to PEAK swim team when she was around 6. She swam at the Santa Clara Swim Club from 6 to 10 years old, and switched to Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics (PASA) four years ago.

At just 14, she made it into the Palo Alto Stanford Aquatics team's National Group and swam a qualifying time for the Olympic Trials. Since then, Zhang has been training hard to improve her skills even further.

She practices six days a week, with 6-hour practices each day on Monday, Wednesday and Friday — each starting at 6 a.m.

On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, she starts at the same time but instead practices for three hours at a time. This often meant that she couldn't make it to many of the practices held at the school and mostly competed at meets.

>> **KELSEY ZHANG** on pg. 21

Track and field closed for summer renovations

BY Kathy Wang

Due to safety concerns expressed by the administration and athletic director Rick Ellis, the school board has OK'd summer renovations of the school's track and Benny Pierce field. As a result, the track and field area will be closed from June 12 until Aug. 17, the first day of the 2023-24 school year.

Large cracks posing safety hazards have accumulated on the track since its last renovation in 2011. The turf field has also worn out from overuse, and a large dip has also formed on the edge due to recent storms.

The district did not respond to requests for information about the cost of the project in time for publication.

The turf failed the most recent GMAX test conducted in June 2022, which measures the ability of a playing surface to absorb shock or kinetic energy from a collision.

Large cracks posing safety hazards have accumulated on the track since the 2011 renovation.

"The track and field gets used daily and it is open to the public," maintenance supervisor Paul Weir said. "Our community enjoys it, but that also contributes to accelerating wear, so 15 plus years is when it's ready to be replaced."

According to assistant principal Mathew Torrens, the renovation project will involve excavation and replacement of the underlayment for the turf, along with installation of a new turf surface that "has been used in other areas of the school and is confirmed by the state as safe." The top layer of the track will also be resurfaced and restriped, meaning new number and line signals will be painted on it.

"When you're doing a construction project, you're gonna have to balance safety, usage, the utility as well as cost, so all these factors are at play," Torrens said. ♦

ChatGPT usage raises alarms

BY Andrew Lin & Kathy Wang

From May 5-12, 53 AP U.S. History (APUSH) students came under suspicion for using ChatGPT to complete a collection of four review assignments. Following an investigation by the administration, 25 students were found to have not cheated while the remaining 28 received zeroes and referrals.

Although the APUSH incident received the most publicity, it is just one of many AI-related academic integrity violations in humanities courses this semester after the controversial technology debuted in November.

In recent weeks, the English department has also faced similar troubling issues with students possibly using ChatGPT on essays and other assignments.

For years, the school has used Turnitin.com to check Canvas assignments, an internet-based plagiarism detection service, which recently gained AI-detection functionality in April.

However, the nascent nature of AI means Turnitin.com's AI-detection is unreliable. Turnitin.com claims that its model "may not always be accurate so it should not be used as the sole basis for adverse actions against a student."

>> **CHATGPT** on pg. 6

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2022-23 valedictorian and salutatorian announced

Lisa Fung will be honored as this year's valedictorian and Anushka Sankaran is the salutatorian. They received these honors because they have the highest weighted academic GPAs among the senior class.

Fung took 18 AP and multiple honors courses throughout high school. She also participated in girls' volleyball and was a captain of the track and field team, on top of competing in Olympiad math competitions and doing science research. Sankaran took 10 AP and five honors courses. She also serves as the president of the speech and debate team. Fung will attend Stanford and major in computer science while Sankaran will attend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and major in math and computer science. ♦

— Mitchell Chen

Course changes for next school year announced

Five elective courses in this year's schedule won't run next year while six others have been added to the course list for the 2023-24 school year. Courses generally didn't run if they received fewer than 20 sign-ups, school officials said.

The classes that won't run are Introduction to Digital Animation, Creative Writing, Creative Writing 2 Honors, Japanese 3 Honors and Marine Biology.

The added classes are AP Music Theory, AP 2D Art Design, AP 3D Art Design, regular Statistics, AP Japanese Language and Culture and Stage Technology and Design 2.

Senior Kunal Singh, who is a teaching assistant for this year's only period of Digital Animation taught by Alex Hemmerich, feels that there is no real substitute to the class.

"The removal of the class is tragic since it is a gateway into a fairly unknown industry, so a lot of future talent may be squandered," Singh said. "As a result, there is a loss of potential in the field for students, and many now will not be able to find out if it might be a path they want to pursue." ♦

— George Hu

Prom held at beach made an amazing experience

More than 500 juniors and seniors dressed in handsome tuxedos and intricate prom dresses filed onto buses that would take them to the combined prom held on May 20 at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalks.

Students were allowed on all rides and games after paying with their reloadable game cards, which had 21 credits (\$21). Some also chose to reload their cards with their own money in order to go on additional rides, as some popular rides like Typhoon cost up to \$8 of credit each.

Attendees who chose to have a calmer night took a peaceful evening walk with their friends or went with a date along the sandy shores as the setting sun shined upon the horizon.

Senior Allison Tan, the senior class president, felt this year's prom was held far more efficiently than last year's prom, with a multi-course meal with desserts and enough tables. Last year, the venue only offered finger foods, and there enough tables for everyone. In addition, combining the junior and senior proms helped the school save \$14,000.

"I really like the prom this year; the decorations, food and venue made for a really amazing experience," Tan said. ♦

— Mitchell Chen and Neal Malhotra

Correction: In the previous print issue (April 7, 2023), the story "Dance team takes home back-to-back trophy without coach" did not report the adults who had been taking care of the dance team as advisors and choreographers, including Julia Peck and Monique Young, long-time dance team advisors; both went to Anaheim with the dance team, along with Toni Glover, who had also helped dance team clear all their dances and medium jazz dance last year. Other adults who helped dance team with choreography and cleaning are Nikki Schulte from USA Dance, who had helped revise all choreographies, and Morgan Wahl, who had choreographed the large pom dance. Additionally, Kaitlyn Thompson, previous dance team captain (Class of 2020), assisted the dance team during nationals and with all choreography.



Photo by NATALIE CHUA

Falconpuff | Freshman Keatyn Spendlove falls to the ground as senior Brianna Lee attempts to pull her flag. The freshmen, with their higher numbers, eventually won 0-0 because they ended with more yards.

MAP teachers Hemmerich and Muñoz leaving Saratoga High

BY ANAMIKAAAND

Next year, Hemmerich will be teaching traditional and digital arts at La Entrada Middle School in Menlo Park. He also hopes to introduce filmmaking and graphic design classes for students there.

MAP junior Rishab Melkote praised Hemmerich as being both skilled and helpful in his teaching and emphasized Hemmerich's approachability and willingness to help any student who needed it.

"He's achieved the perfect balance between genuinely helpful and extremely entertaining," Melkote said. "On top of that, you can tell he's really passionate about what he teaches. His disposition and energy has made the school a much better place to exist in."

Muñoz seeks a school that is a better fit

This year, Muñoz, who was new to the school this year, taught two Ceramics classes and two Media Arts classes at the junior level. The fall semester got off to a challenging start when Muñoz caught COVID-19 and faced difficulties with using Canvas and applications like Premiere Pro for Media Arts.

By the spring semester, however, Muñoz had settled into the school and its systems and was happy with the projects students were able to create in both Media Arts and Ceramics.

Muñoz overall had a good experience teaching at SHS, happy with the students' work and community.

Though Muñoz was not heavily involved in the Adobe applications aspect of Media Arts, Muñoz particularly enjoyed the community aspect of MAP and watching students bring their ideas to life in films such as the American Story project.

Comparing the two different classes, Muñoz liked teaching Ceramics more than Media Arts because of the freedom to plan the curriculum and the way students dove into their pieces and incorporated personal aspects into them.

"Their work was excellent," Muñoz said. "In Ceramics, students sometimes made pieces that have a deep personal meaning, and I am honored that they felt safe enough to do that work here at school."

In the future, Muñoz will continue to focus on teaching ceramics, sculpture and other kinds of hands-on art and possibly also Media Arts.

"I have been blown away by the creativity, ingenuity, camaraderie, kindness and work ethic of my students," Muñoz said. "I did my best to build a safe and creative class atmosphere, inspire students, communicate the curriculum and teach well." ♦



Hemmerich



Muñoz

MSET Fish make finals at Championships

THIS YEAR WAS THE TEAM'S SIXTH APPEARANCE AT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

BY BEVERLY XU

On April 19, 27 of 47 students from the school's FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) team, 649 MSET Fish, boarded a plane to Houston to attend their second FIRST World Championship in a row — capping off the team's most successful season yet.

For the rest of the week, the team competed in the George R. Brown Convention Center, swimming their way to the finals. Within their assigned division — the Curie Division — the team's countless hours of work and modifications came to fruition: They seeded 17th out of 78 teams, and were picked to play with the first ranked alliance.

Hours of countless work came to fruition as the team had their most successful season yet.

The team qualified for the World Championship after winning the regional Engineering Inspiration award at the Silicon Valley Regional (SVR) as a result of nearly every student on the team giving time to organize and volunteer at the outreach programs various initiatives.

"I've seen the new autonomous paths increase flexibility for our strategy," said junior Govind Buttar, the team's software lead. "We were less restricted to our middle starting configuration, and scored more points during the autonomous period [at the World Championships]."



Courtesy of SHEEBA GARG

The team gathers for a group photo on April 27 after their final match of the tournament.

The three days the team had between when regional competitions ended and when the robot was shipped to Houston were dedicated to maintenance on the drivetrain and electronics, adding a slope on the plastic covering the drivetrain to prevent game elements from getting stuck, with a focus on software improvements. The team prioritized tuning autonomous paths, adding a 180-degree orientation lock for ease of scoring and pickup as well as programming a dunking routine in the arm for higher scoring accuracy.

Once the software changes were made, the team moved their playing field from the MAP Annex to the band room to fit a full-length field.

When the team arrived at the Curie Division Tournament — one of eight World Divisions in Houston — they seeded 17th of 78 teams and formed an alliance (a group of three teams that play together, chosen round-robin-style for playoffs but randomly generated during qualification matches) ♦

Student speaker SED talks capture power of language

BY SARAH ZHOU

such as National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and blog posts.

Additionally, Glass — who is blind — spoke about her experiences telling her own story and within literature studies. She read some of her own poetry, which incorporated imitated bird chirping.

Hinton also added the perspective of a visual artist using photography as a form of advocacy and storytelling.

Growing up during the Vietnam War, Hinton participated in advocacy against war efforts, and more recently has advocated for foster youth and homeless people facing displacement from construction projects.

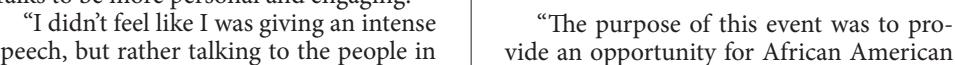
Hinton, who also works for nature conservation, presented photography from a project about Saratoga Creek.

Gupta decided to speak at the event because she believes that it is important to share why she loves language and help spread this love with the community. Compared to previous public speaking events Gupta participated in for clubs such as Model UN, Gupta found presenting at SED Talks to be more personal and engaging.

"I didn't feel like I was giving an intense speech, but rather talking to the people in front of me," Gupta said. "I also really liked the Q&A panel because I could ask other speakers questions about their interests, and how they became involved in writing."

During her own talk, Gupta discussed the impact that moving from Sunnyvale to India and in the fifth and eighth grades had on her relationship with language, and other experiences that shaped her passion for reading and writing.

"I love [words] because they have the power to captivate everyone — even children in preschool," Gupta said. "I talked about how journalism and other forms of writing can be a means for changing a community and help create a community of people who are working towards the same goal." ♦



Zhou

"I wanted to have an event where people could listen to more perspectives."

SUPERIOR Taylor Wilson

Over 100 students and staff members gathered in the library on April 26 to listen to a panel discussion about the implicit and explicit racism experienced by Saratoga's African American community.

For this reason, Taylor pointed to the community member panelists who shared their experiences with racism outside of the Saratoga community. Making up slightly more than 0.1% of Saratoga's community, Black community members' experiences are often diminished and disregarded.

"I've only had experience with racism here," Taylor said. "I thought it was important for people to get insight about how racism can manifest outside of our community."

Aside from discussing institutional and systemic racism, members also shared personal anecdotes of being discriminated against. Harris recalled that when she needed medical care, she would worry about her appearance, fearing discrimination if she didn't look presentable at the hospital.

"Normally, you hear about [instances of blatant racism] on the news or social media, but when you get to hear it from people a few feet away from you, you can understand it better," Taylor said.

Senior Arshi Chawla, who attended the event, was especially impacted by hearing Byran Wilson speak about how racism could potentially lessen or even end in young people's lifetimes, due to the normalization of interracial or intercultural marriages and the increasing number of multiracial people.

By speaking out, Dylan's goal as a panelist was to highlight the importance of understanding the African American experience.

"I wanted people to understand that the African American experience is different from that of the average person," Dylan said. "I hoped people could leave the event with a better understanding of the experience and the harm that microaggressions can cause." ♦

African American panel discusses racism realities

BY SARAH THOMAS

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Fun activities planned for graduation week

BY LenaAribi

Following extensive planning, the senior class is eagerly anticipating a graduation week filled with numerous fun and memorable activities.

And it will be one with no COVID-19-related restrictions, unlike the past three years.

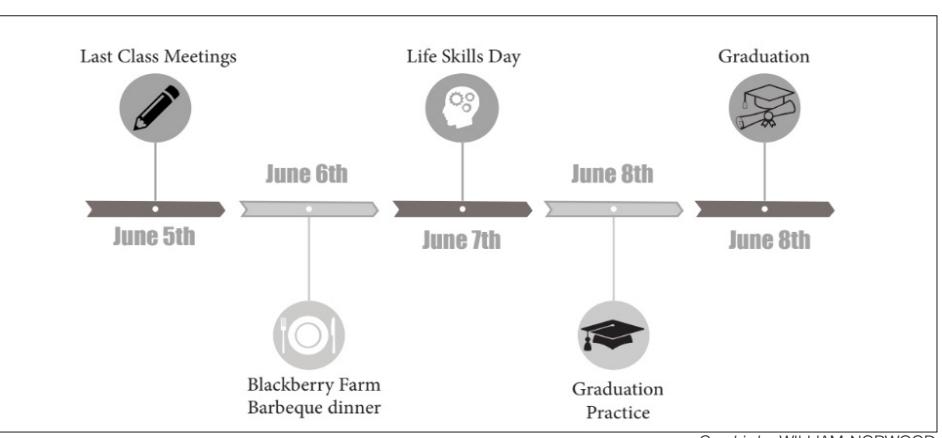
The week will commence with an activity-filled "field day" on Monday, June 5, followed by a barbecue at Blackberry Farm in Cupertino the next day.

On Wednesday, the senior class will participate in a life skills day seminar at school along with graduation practice on the football field. Finally, the long-awaited graduation ceremony and Grad Night will occur on June 8.

A senior class meeting will be held at the McAfee Center on June 5 at 9 a.m. to discuss the week's agenda and provide an opportunity for students to ask questions.

The seniors will have access to the Saratoga High pool where they will be supervised by lifeguards and be able to swim until noon.

The senior class officers also purchased inflatable basketball hoops and an inflated volleyball net.



The Graduation week schedule is shown with the six different events taking place.

"With all the activities we have planned, I'm sure that the field day will be a very enjoyable experience," senior class representative Seth Hulme said.

"I'm super excited to be released from all academic stress and just focus on having fun with my friends."

Because this year's prom occurred at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, where the senior class has previously gone for celebratory day, they will instead go to Blackberry Farm on June 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. There,

they will enjoy food provided by the Farm as well as have a chance to roam around the grounds.

To avoid the risk of overspending, the senior class office has decided that transportation to the farm must be arranged on an individual basis.

In addition, there will be a \$10 entrance fee to the event that will cover the expenses of renting the farm.

According to senior class president Allison Tan, an issue that arose during the planning process was the lack of information about what would happen if the weather was bad.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the organizing committee was finding a suitable location for the barbecue. They eventually settled on Blackberry Farm, which offers a large outdoor space and a variety of food options.

"We really wanted to be able to have an opportunity to swim, so instead of booking lifeguards for the barbecue, we secured them for the field day," Tan said.

After the barbecue, seniors will continue celebrations with an invite-only award ceremony at 6 p.m., celebrating recognized seniors who were awarded scholarships as well as those nominated by teachers for awards.

On June 7, the seniors will attend the annual life skills day from 9:15 a.m. to 11:40 a.m.

This year, Class of '22 alumna Sadaf Sobhani and Kaylie Wong, in addition to two other to be determined alumni will come to SHS and share advice on topics provided by the seniors.

"Because COVID has been officially declared over, we are finally able to invite all of our family members to come to graduation," Hulme said.

"I'm super relieved as a couple of years ago for my older brother's graduation we had to reserve seats which was pretty tough."

Following tradition, the themes and activities of grad night aren't to be disclosed until the night of. ♦

Class of 2023 Senior Assassin results in controversy

BY SarahThomas

Senior Assassin is a game where seniors compete in pairs for a cash prize, with rules that vary by school and often by class. For the class of '23, Senior Assassin became a topic of contention throughout the game. The organization of the game began toward the end of the first semester, and the role of moderator was originally held by senior Jacqueline Ryu, who had already decided not to participate in the game.

The incentive of the game was \$1275 in cash as a prize, which was funded by the \$30 entry fee to play per team.

Each round lasted from Monday morning to the end of Saturday evening, and teams were tasked with "assassinating" both members of an assigned team that was given to them on the Sunday night before the round ended to advance by shooting them on video with a water gun. Teams could be eliminated by being assassinated or failing to assassinate their target.

The rules laid out "safe zones" where no participants could be killed. In addition, players could wear safety items that would protect participants from being killed if worn correctly — with the exception of

purge days. Safety items included helmets, swim goggles and pool floaties, while safe zones included the school campus and parking lots or a location where someone is participating in a sport or other school activities.

People became more competitive and came up with 'gray area' kills."



SENIOR Jacqueline Ryu

Purge days were days throughout the round in which competitors could not use safety items; additionally, teams could eliminate people who weren't their targets.

The rules regarding what kills were valid or not were a source of conflict for many teams, and communication was difficult as Snapchat was used for their location as well as communication within teams, while Instagram was used for the moderators.

"This year, Snapchat was a really big

obstacle for us," Ryu said. "You needed everybody to be active on Snapchat for their location, but many people forgot to keep opening the app."

Over the course of three rounds, eliminated players argued over the validity of their kills, and the number of questions along with the updates and organization that the game required prompted Ryu to ask Arnav Garg, another senior who wasn't participating in the game, to serve as a co-moderator.

"Because our cash prize was so large, people naturally became more competitive, and came up with more 'gray area' kills that were ambiguous to the rules," Ryu said.

The first round began on April 3 and the final round began on May 2.

Finalists included seniors Anand Agrawal and Erin Sun in one team, seniors Ryan Jain and Jason Cheng in another, and Ishan Jagadish and Julian Berkowitz-Sklar as soloists as their teammates had been eliminated.

The structure for the final round of the game was that the person with the most kills would be the winner, which was different from the game's structure last year.

Ryu shared that last year, the winners were chosen through the total number of

kills, which worked because people utilized purge days to kill people that weren't their targets.

"We couldn't do that [this year] because people didn't really use purge days," Ryu said. "It made sense for us to do a free-for-all, and the winner would be the person with the most wins." Some argued that the single-person competitors were at an advantage going into the final: in a two-person team, you and your partner can only kill a maximum of four other people while a single competitor would be able to eliminate five.

The first competitor to be eliminated was Berkowitz-Sklar, who met his fate at the hands of Jain and Cheng.

After that, Agrawal shot Cheng at Jamba Juice, but since the video was unclear and Cheng claimed that they shot at the same time, both kills were invalidated.

Sun and Agrawal were upset by the decision of the moderators to invalidate both kills and decided to allow Jagadish to shoot both of them, eliminating the possibility of Cheng and Jain winning, in exchange for splitting the prize money with their team. Jagadish ended up with \$65 dollars, and Sun and Agrawal split the other \$635. ♦

to them, either clearing or confirming their use of ChatGPT.

After a large influx of flagged assignments, however, other teachers overheard APUSH students bragging about how they lied to Daly to get their assignments cleared.

This created a more serious academic integrity problem, and any student whose assignment was detected as any percentage AI-composed on Turnitin.com was then asked to speak to an administrator.

Meanwhile, history teacher Margaret Morelle's APUSH students who were flagged were directly sent to the administration.

However, students who were found to have used ChatGPT were given a chance to rescue their grades through an alternative assignment offered by Daly and Morelle, raising their grades for assignments in which they used ChatGPT from 0% to up to 70%.

Meanwhile, the English department is discussing viable ways to pre-

vent ChatGPT use in the future.

One possible solution is having students hand-write the beginnings of their assignments in class and type the rest at home, allowing teachers to check the typed version against the handwritten version's writing style and ideas.

English teacher Natasha Ritchie said the downside of handwritten, in-class essays is that they severely limit the possible depth of ideas.

With a challenging book like "Beloved" to analyze, students may struggle to meet writing standards if all assessments are in class or handwritten.

"I would be disappointed if we have to change everything to in-class essays, and I think there'll be some students who won't perform as well on the spot like that," Ritchie said.

According to principal Greg Louie in a recent email to APUSH students, technology like ChatGPT will force students to

contemplate the kind of students and people they want to be.

"Like calculators, SparksNotes, the internet, and mobile devices, AI and GPT are more than likely here to stay; how we incorporate the resource and teach our students responsible and ethical use will be up to all of us," Louie said.

Saratoga High is not alone in this struggle to figure out AI issues.

Across the country, colleges have been using various solutions to combat ChatGPT use, with mixed results.

Some are getting rid of take-home assessments, while others are placing more emphasis on oral assessments and group work or assigning essays with more complicated prompts that ChatGPT may struggle with.

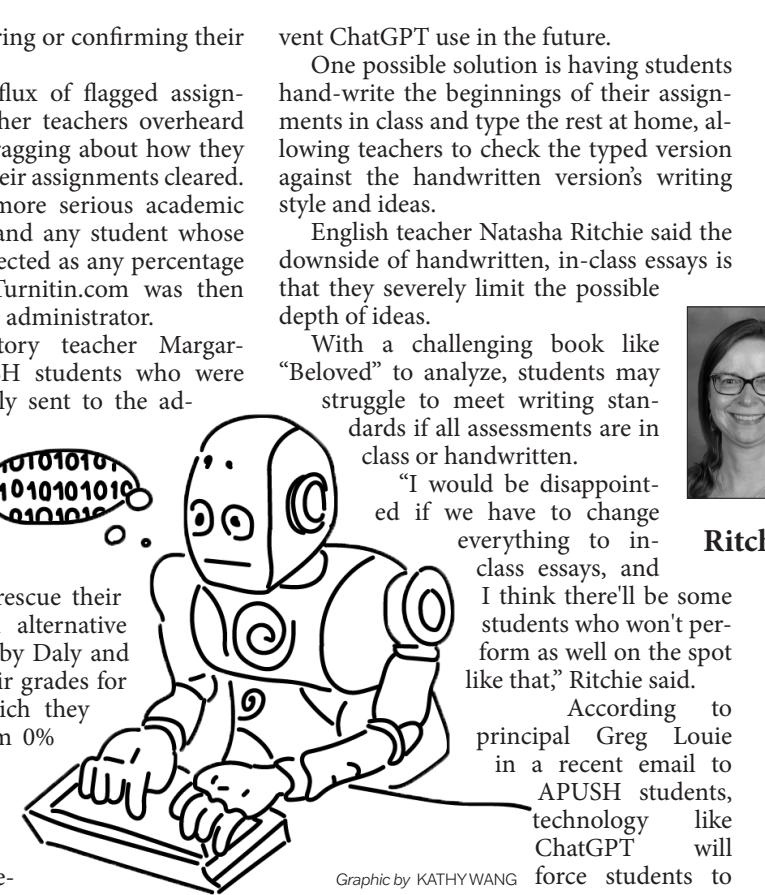
The best way to prevent cheating with ChatGPT remains an open question for humanities teachers, but the effects of cheating on students and teachers remains the same.

"I think most students don't think that it's personal when they do this, but teachers take it extremely personally because they take time away from their families to engage with students," Keys said. "When a student phones it in and outsources it, it feels like a punch in the stomach." ♦

"I would be disappointed if we have to change everything to in-class essays."

ENGLISH TEACHER Natasha Ritchie

Initially, students in history teacher Faith Stackhouse Daly's class whose work was detected as above a certain threshold percentage written by AI were called into her class during tutorial, and she spoke individually



SARATOGAFALCON NEW EDITOR'S EDITION

STAFF POLICY

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ChatGPT cheating issue warrants changes to class grade weighting



ANDREW LIN

so, not to mention the frustration among students about the work split between members.

Moreover, projects do not necessarily cover all the important skills to learn. Not all projects force students to think critically, an aspect that's directly challenged with, say, analytical essays about literature. While writing literary analysis essays is not relevant to many jobs and might be duplicated by AI, these kinds of open-ended writing assignments strengthen students' ability to think critically and create cohesive, persuasive arguments and formulate original insights, skills that are vital beyond school assignments.

These students were flagged by ChatGPT detectors, which are notoriously inaccurate and produce many false positives. After an investigation, administrators determined that 28 out of 53 students had used ChatGPT to do the assignment and were punished.

Suddenly, teachers and administrators are scrambling to figure out what to do to stop what may be a wave of potential AI-assisted cheating.

ChatGPT usurps the learning of basic critical thinking and argumentation skills in students, so to minimize its use, classes must place more emphasis on in-class assessments or projects while making careful completion of homework and classwork necessary to do well on said assessments and projects.

Even if pencil and paper submissions were required, students could just manually copy ChatGPT responses onto their paper.

The current methods the school has to regulate cheating via ChatGPT — AI detectors and meeting with teachers or administrators — are arduous and impractical for the rate at which incidents are likely to happen.

The week-long investigation into the APUSH cheating incident makes clear that trying to prevent students from using ChatGPT by threatening punishment is ineffective and only drains the school's resources.

While the school may not be able to combat all AI-assisted cheating, these policies of deterrence and incentive can ensure students actually learn from these classes. And, as an added benefit, these policies might also help discourage students from taking more APs and honors classes than they can handle. ♦

APUSH and English 11 Honors to favor assessment grades, consistent with other AP classes like AP Calculus BC and AP Physics 1 and 2, students would be incentivized to use homework and classwork to fully digest concepts and score well on assessments, projects and essays.

This policy might be highly unpopular with students who depend on classwork and homework grades to boost their grade. However, the fact that most students are not getting A's on tests or essays and still feel entitled to an overall A grade sends a concerning message about the school's academic culture and students' mindset.

More schools need to give a thumbs-up to American Sign Language education

BY DIVYA VADLAKONDA

The lack of effective communication access in a society that prioritizes spoken languages causes many obstacles for the hearing impaired — at its worst, the language barrier between the hearing and the hearing impaired can cause significant healthcare concerns.

Hearing clinicians who cannot effectively communicate with deaf or hard of hearing patients can unintentionally give poor assessments and medical mistreatments; deaf people are often deprived of quality health care and critical health information due to this lack of efficient communication.

TraciAnn Hoglind, the founder of national nonprofit organization Health Signs Virtual Care, recounts the moment where she was misdiagnosed because of a severe communication barrier with her doctor.

"It was evident in his physical shaking and awkward demeanor as he tried to engage with me," she said. "Although doctors have the best interests of their patients at heart, these same doctors are not always appropriately educated to become culturally responsive practitioners."

Additionally, a lack of ASL knowledge can raise future concerns for hearing parents of deaf children. With approximately 90 to 95 percent of deaf children being born to hearing parents, families often struggle to learn and teach their children sign language before they enter school.

The ignorance of hearing individuals to ASL will remain a problem and continue to negatively affect the lives of the hearing impaired if we do not advocate for an institutionalized ASL curriculum in schools.

Offering the course through the community college is only the first step of many — ASL courses should be offered in more public high schools, including Saratoga High.

If SHS offered the course for language credits along with Spanish, French, Chinese and Japanese, more students will be aware of such an opportunity as they wouldn't need to take the steps to complete a dual enrollment application at the community college.

Offering the course is imperative in order to breach the communication barrier between users of spoken and visual languages.



Graphic by DIVYA VADLAKONDA

At a collegiate level along with French and Spanish — there is no reason that those languages are widely taught at high schools, while ASL largely is not.

Offering the course can also broaden students' opportunities for future jobs. Employment of ASL interpreters rose 46% from 2012 to 2020, and continues to be in high demand in places such as hospitals, courts, governmental agencies, community activities and state legislatures.

Offering this option means instilling high school students with a passion for sign language early and enabling them to pursue such career paths.

By making access to this knowledge less convenient, the school system alienates them and future generations of access to a fully developed autonomous language with its own unique cultural identity, grammar, vocabulary and syntax — and most importantly, a chance to connect with those who use it.

But if ASL courses are made widely available in schools, hearing individuals can help reduce the stigma surrounding the hearing impaired.

Christine Yoshinaga-Itano, professor of audiology at the University of Colorado at Boulder, put it the best — at its core, "Deafness is a sensory difference."

It only becomes a disability when the educational system fails the child and the family." ♦

It is the fourth most-studied language

Driving earlier in life will prove to be a better decision

BY VICTORIA LIN

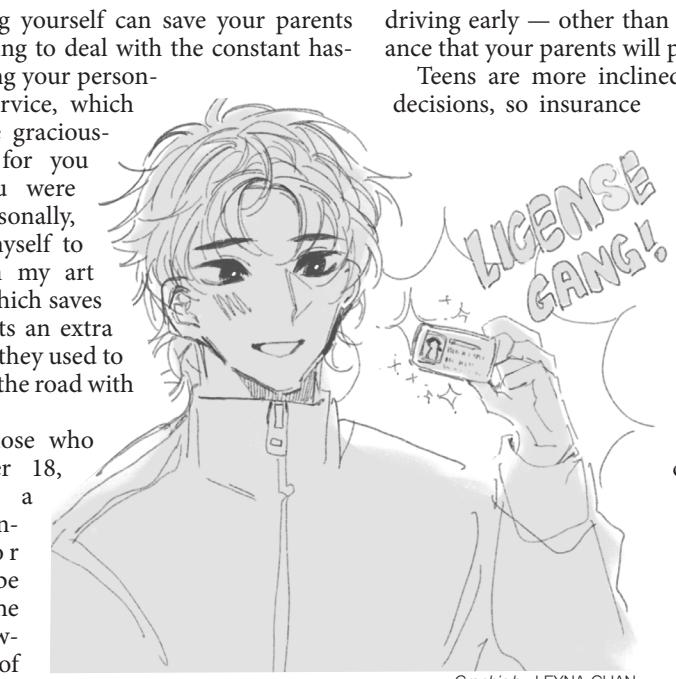
My car slowly edged down the street as I anxiously gripped the steering wheel and began my first driving lesson with my driving instructor calmly telling me directions in the passenger seat.

My fear was justified. Driving is a scary thing. In the U.S. alone, around 40,000 people died in 2020 due to car crashes, a fact that plagued my mind as the lesson progressed.

It was one month after I turned 15 and a half, the cutoff age for receiving a permit.

Six months later, after dozens of hours of practice with my instructor and parents, I passed the license test (a short loop around Los Gatos Downtown), albeit with few mistakes. With a new driver's license in hand, I could drive around without bothering my parents every time I wanted to leave the house.

Among other benefits, teen drivers enjoy more freedom and earn their parents' trust (as long as the car doesn't crash).



Driving yourself can save your parents from having to deal with the constant hassle of being your personal taxi service, which they have graciously done for you since you were born. Personally, I drive myself to and from my art classes, which saves my parents an extra half hour they used to spend on the road with me.

For those who are under 18, getting a driving instructor might be one of the only drawbacks of

driving early — other than the hefty insurance that your parents will pay.

Teens are more inclined to make rash decisions, so insurance companies charge a premium.

As a qualified driver, I haven't gotten into an accident yet (even though there may have been some close calls), so as long as you're not sleep-deprived or intoxicated and don't speed, chances are that you'll be OK.

What better use to spend all that extra time in your sophomore year than to learn driving?

After junior or senior year, the only time left before college to dedicate to learning to drive would be the summer after you graduate, as you would be busy with college and summer internships afterwards.

Additionally, you can be a chauffeur and drive your friends around after one year. As a full-fledged driver who got her license shortly after I turned 16, I can say it saved both me and my parents multiple trips back and forth from classes, school and other activities.

All things considered, you'll be doing yourself — and your parents — a huge favor. ♦

Calculus is important for many career paths

BY ERIC SHI

As a fundamental pillar of higher mathematics, calculus is extensively taught in high schools across the world. And for good reason: Calculus is a genuinely useful subject — it not only lays the groundwork for advanced mathematics like real analysis, but it also enables tangible applications ranging from calculating the length of power cables connecting buildings to improving the acoustics of various rooms and instruments.

At Saratoga High, students have three main options for learning calculus — through regular college prep Calculus, AP Calculus AB or AP Calculus BC. These courses are designed to build on each other — regular Calculus is solely a high school

level calculus course while Calculus AB and BC are both college level courses, with AB covering the equivalent of Calculus I in college and BC covering both Calculus I and Calculus II material.

This is not the case for most real-world situations. It is almost impossible to launch a rocket into space at a perfectly constant acceleration, for example.

Thus, calculus is needed to accurately find the work done on an object for a non-constant force.

Even for non-STEM students, calculus can change the way people understand their world. Outside of academia, it is short-sighted to assert that in the professional world, calculus is useless.

Far from it. Calculus, a key component in many jobs, will always be a foundational part of any worthwhile high school math curriculum. ♦

especially important here in California.

Oncologists use more complex logistic functions to analyze the growth of cancer tumors and pandemic epidemiologists can use them to track the spread of future diseases like COVID-19.

While calculus is an inherently difficult subject, learning it thoroughly matters more than the grade.

Content in each class somewhat overlaps and the more advanced AP courses cover material at a faster rate.

One of the main sciences with a heavy reliance on calculus is general physics. For example, calculus helps explain the movement of objects under the influence of various forces and fields.

Consider structural engineering, where calculus is used to calculate heat loss in buildings, forces acting on complex structural configurations and structural analysis in seismic design requirements — which is

always constant. However, with calculus, a wider range of problems in this category can be solved.

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Parent-controlled screen time is necessary for kids

By Zack Zhang

During my middle school years, when the clock quietly struck 10 p.m., all the applications on my phone would gray out, locking me out until 7 a.m. the next day. No music, no social media, no websites — nothing could escape the tight grasp of my iPhone 6's screen time control.

At the time, I thought unlimited access to my phone was my personal right. Not only was there downtime between 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., but my phone had a daily total of only 30 minutes of screen time, barely enough to watch a single YouTube video. After 30 minutes, I could only access necessary functions like making a phone call — not even texting — or taking a picture.

As I entered high school, my parents released their tight grip on my screen time, trusting that it was time for me to learn more self-control. Despite how unfair I perceived this screen time limitation to be when I was younger, I now understand my parents' decisions more.

The self-control that screen time taught me has allowed me to greatly improve my mental and physical health and have more discipline than friends who struggled to shut off their phone when it's time to study; according to Jai Medical Systems, reducing screen time can lead to a "healthy lifestyle" by improving sleep habits, brain focus and physical posture."

Since its inception, electronics have become extremely addictive to everyone, no matter the age.

Many entertainment applications such as social media platforms or video games have been designed this way to attract the users to stay longer online. In fact, an article by Brill Mindz Technologies said that such apps are built "with the motive of offering different types of content to different individuals."

When people are hooked to countless online activities and lose track of reality, they do not realize that their brain structures are also changing simultaneously.

An article by the Specialty Clinic of Austin attributed this addiction to "brain chemical imbalances similar to what is seen with drug and alcohol dependency." Research in the article also showed that technology addiction may be related to a change in the brain's prefrontal lobe, which is responsible for "prioritizing life tasks."

However, self-control for a teenager whose brain is still developing is especially challenging. The same even happens for many adults.

In fact, the average screen time for American adults is 7 hours and 4 minutes per day, according to Jai Medical Systems.

All of this suggests a certain level of

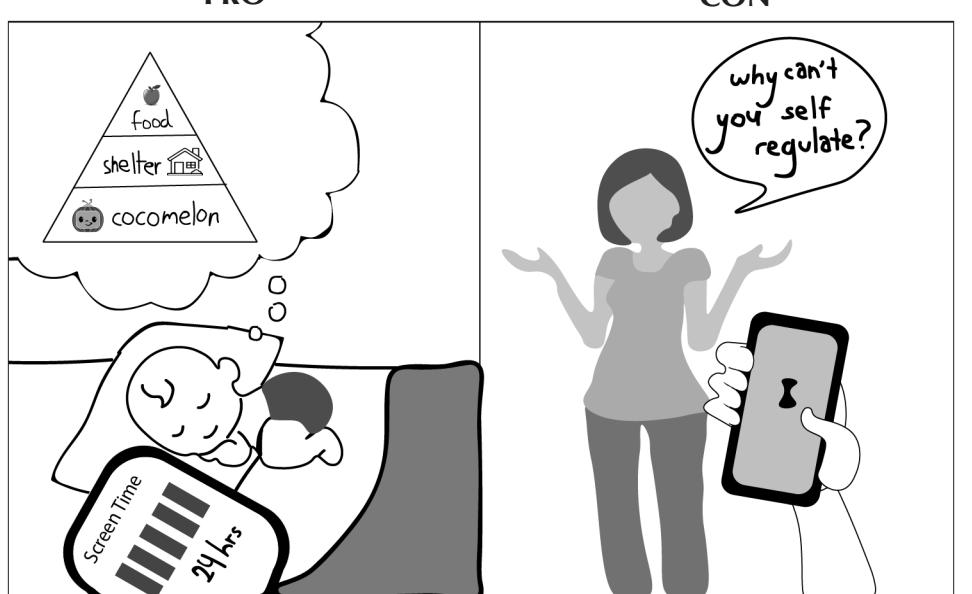
guardian interference is essential for children's development.

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed that 86% of parents of a child aged 5 to 11 limit the time of day or length of time their child can use screens, while 80% say they take away their child's smartphone or internet privileges as punishment.

Yet, on the other hand, parents and adults often see only evil in technologies: They may attribute electronic devices as the root cause of any failure for their child. But that explanation is too simple and ignores benefits such as improved problem solving and communication skills.

Even after my parents removed my screen time restrictions, I maintained the same screen time.

PRO



manage their time better.

This assumption is wrong. An outside force "helping" a developing child to control themselves means they no longer need to do it themselves.

While the time spent on screens will probably be lower in the short term, the result is an absence of natural self-control coming from the child themselves; as soon as the restrictions are lifted, children will have a harder time managing themselves on their own.

Eventually many teens will have to go to college, where they will have to manage everything independently. The more stringently parents restrict screen time in their teen's life, the harder the harder it will be for them to develop their own good habits.

This relapse from the potential effects of restricting your teen's devices is comparable to that of dieting. While some people come out of their diet and continue to eat healthy and stay fit, others relapse, at times binge eating uncontrollably and becoming even more unhealthy than when they started off. Restricting screen time often has the same effect.

After my screen time was finally lifted earlier this semester I found myself unable to stop browsing social media and playing games because they had been restricted for so long.

It doesn't help that the Apple "Screen Time" function is full of holes either. If a child wants to use their devices after their time limit, the loopholes in the program are numerous, easily accessible with a single Google search. This makes it so that screen time becomes simply an obstacle children must work around rather than encouragement not to; consequently, it has the effect of developing qualities like sneakiness and disobedience over self-control.

While I'm not saying screen time is a function a parent should never use, I don't think they should rely on it as an easy fix for a teen's self-control issues. While it seems counterintuitive, giving teens a little more room to be independent and manage themselves is the best way to help them naturally develop responsibility.

Parents could remind their teens once in a while of how much time they've spent on their phone that day or how much work they have yet to complete.

If they consistently sleep late, parents can help them plan out their time in the afternoon so they have a healthier sleep schedule.

I'm not denying many teens are addicted to screens. Some stay up late at night on their devices.

But I wouldn't recommend just setting a screen time and assuming all problems have been solved. A little more trust in a teen's ability to learn and develop goes a long way. Sooner or later, teens will have to figure it out themselves anyway. ♦

100-WORD RANT:

Dear UCs: please don't reject me

In 2022, the San Francisco Chronicle reported that 76% of Class of '22 Saratoga High graduates who applied to the UCs were admitted, many to the top two UCs: UC Berkeley and UCLA. This year, however, finding a senior that has gotten into the top two is almost impossible.

Even though official SHS student admission rates are yet to be released, it's clear that the UCs are no longer the safeties that students used to rely on many years ago. While more seniors have gotten into the other UCs, it feels as though the overall number of SHS

admits has dropped across all of them.

For students who can't pay the \$60k tuition for many private universities, yet don't fall in any of the financial aid brackets, the UCs are an enticing option for undergraduate programs.

Unfortunately, admissions rates for in-state students have dropped to a pitiful 64.4% in just one year. Though many UCs have shared their plans as individual schools and as a system to give priority to in-state students, it is unclear how quickly and to what degree these changes will come.

You're burned out and exhausted. You should have crossed the finish line weeks ago, but here you are, still studying. Does this sound like hell to you, or is it just me?

This tragedy would be our reality if AP teachers gave their finals in June. Having finals right before the AP exam gives an incentive to study and helps with procrastination, which helps you on the final and is also valuable for the AP exam as well.

I have just one thing to say to my future admissions officer: "Dear UCs, please don't reject me." ♦

100-WORD RAVE:

Exams before AP finals are a godsend

Imagine this awful alternative universe: It's the beginning of June. You're stressed and, despite taking the AP exam three weeks ago, you have to keep studying for the final exam in, say, AP Chemistry.

You're burned out and exhausted. You should have crossed the finish line weeks ago, but here you are, still studying. Does this sound like hell to you, or is it just me?

This tragedy would be our reality if AP teachers gave their finals in June. Having finals right before the AP exam gives an incentive to study and helps with procrastination, which helps you on the final and is also valuable for the AP exam as well.

Once both exams are over, you're free to take a much-needed break after a hectic semester, reducing stress later in the year for

upperclassmen as they end their senior year or begin thinking about college applications.

Most AP teachers use the time for fun projects that further solidify the learning we do during the year.

For example, in AP Environmental Science students work together to create solar ovens and toast marshmallows, allowing friends to connect through experiential learning projects. Other teachers use the time to help students relax, like through movies.

It doesn't make sense to give another final after APs — after all, the AP exam marks the culmination of the course and provides a clean finish after two semesters of hard work.

More than that, you have time to relax with peers after trauma-bonding through your mutual AP experience.

Having spent months obsessing over the exam, it only makes sense for the last few weeks to be a welcome relief and opportunity to make new connections with the knowledge they've worked so hard to attain. ♦

— Sanjoli Gupta

All graphics by SARAH THOMAS

lifestyles

Unrooted: my induction into the gardening Hall of Shame

IT'S A SHAME THAT MY BELOVED PLANTS AND I DON'T STEM FROM THE SAME ROOTS

By Beverly Xu

out to see my mom watering that same place in the soil. So as the kind, considerate child I was, I walked over to tell her that reviving my plant was a hopeless task.

But lo and behold, my "cilantro" plant had returned from the dead before my eyes.

It was completely unrecognizable, with its stems sprouting in every direction and its bright green leaves fluttering picturesquely in the breeze, like the reverse of a pomeranian getting dunked in a bath.

Since when do plants pick favorites?

Later, after trying to cook and eat my beloved plant-child, I also learned that parsley looks a lot like cilantro, but tastes absolutely nasty. What a waste of water.

So I moved onto what I naively hoped would be a more fruitful plant journey: strawberries. In the first few months, everything was going berry well; I seedlessly transitioned my plant from pot to ground, where it grew to cover a square foot of soil. But all of a sudden, hungry garden pests rolled-polluted into the scene.

But the more I watered it, the more yellow the leaves became, and so began a cycle of watering in exponentially greater volumes.

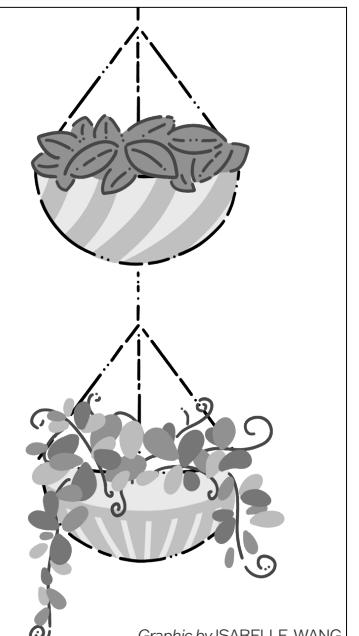
Within two weeks, my "cilantro" plant was out of thyme. If anyone doesn't understand the saying "crawl into hole and die," then look no further than my beloved "cilantro" plant. I placed its remains — a wilted stalk flopped over lifelessly on damp soil — in a shady corner of my garden, leaving it to decompose in its final resting place.

However, a week later, I walked

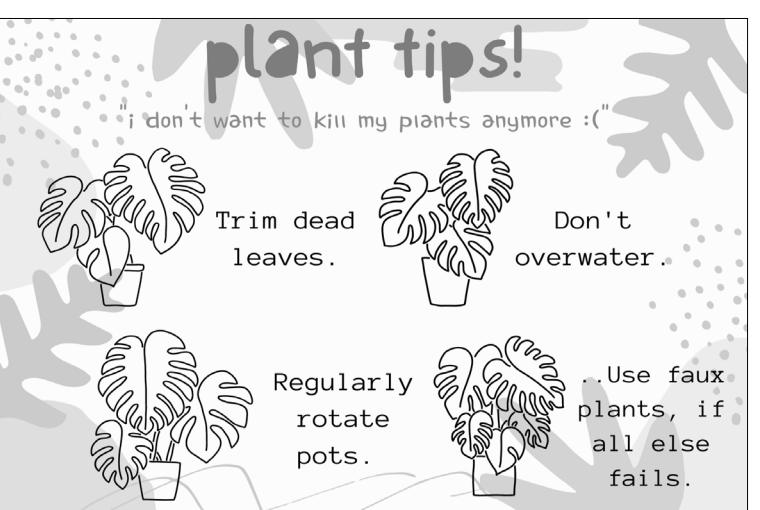
out to see my mom watering that same place in the soil. So as the kind, considerate child I was, I walked over to tell her that reviving my plant was a hopeless task.

But maybe a bit too well — my succulent grew so tall that I had to make a little structure out of toothpicks to prop it up. Despite my best efforts at structural integrity, my succulent was so bent over that I could have diagnosed it with severe scoliosis — I suppose spine issues were inevitable.

That soul-crushing moment ended my ascent to gardening nirvana. No matter how much time and effort I put into those plants, I got nothing in return, so as I learned from freshman year health class — it was time to put an end to those toxic relationships. Maybe plants and I were not mint to be, but at the very least, I was able to chloro-fill this story with plant puns! ♦



Graphic by ISABELLE WANG



Graphic by LEYNA CHAN

The time Covid claimed: bonding with grandparents

By Kathy Wang

begged our grandparents to stop by the public exercising parks — outdoor gyms built by the Chinese government — which are always crowded with elderly men and women. There, we tested the arrangement of colorful exercising machinery, rating each one by its "fun-ness." As my sister and I swayed on a rusty swing-like machine that supposedly resembled a treadmill, our grandparents chatted with their elderly friends, casual conversation disguising amiable boasting about their "wonderful, smart" grandchildren.

After my sister and I finally returned to their apartment, we spent the rest of our afternoon binging Chinese TV shows such as our favorite, "Xi Yang Yang," which translates to "happy sheep." The popular animated series follows the life of goats that are constantly escaping a bad wolf. While I watched TV, my grandmother braided my hair into a variation of braided hairstyles. I remember whining about the braids being too tight while she told me that "pretty hurts" in Chinese.

During the evening, my uncle took us to visit the famous Terra-Cotta warrior sculptures. Our parched throats ached from the dry weather as my nerdy sister enthusiastically examined the hulking, sturdy terracotta warriors. I, being the annoying younger sister I am, couldn't help but pestle my uncle with questions like "When are we going to eat?" and "Is there a gift shop?"

To end our day in Xi'an, my relatives often hosted a gigantic family reunion at a high-end Chinese restaurant. While we waited at a round table with a glass lazy susan, my sister and I drummed our chopsticks on the fancy china plates, only to be scolded by our parents. Once dinner finished, my sister and I fell asleep on the sofa ride home, dreaming of what wonders would await us in the days to come. ♦

Memories of snowy days and childhood in China

By Sunny Cao

house, watching old classic Chinese kids' shows on their TV like xi yang yang (happy sheep) or xiong chu mu (bear out) and zhu xia (GG bond).

Thinking back to those shows and memories now immediately brings a smile to my face. I loved the laughter always floating in the air and nonexistent stress — in fact, we were only remotely stressed if an episode of our favorite show happened to air off schedule. We would make up completely bizarre stories of our future and huddle over the aroma of our mom's amazing jiu niang, a kind of fermented sweet rice made with rice wine. And when night fell, my parents would come to their house to play a round of poker and pick me up.

Another key memory of my childhood was, of course, kindergarten and elementary school. Now, of course, my memories are hazy, but I will always recall the first two best friends I've had; we were all in the same homeroom, which was a classroom where students assemble daily with the same teacher before dispersing to other classes.

These were accidental friendships — you never know how it happened, just that the three of us were inseparable. Every spring, after annoying our parents and running away from them when they picked us up, we would all go see the cherry blossoms that bloom annually on a street near our school.

Every winter, we would also go hiking up a mountain near my house to play in the snow. Of course, all of our parents would roll their eyes at our mischief, but we loved it.

Now, every summer that I go back to China to visit, we have a reunion, and it's become a tradition to go to arcades to hang out and relive our childhood moments together. Although I cherish the newer memories made in the U.S., I will always attribute my prominent memories of childhood to growing up in China. ♦



Photo by SUNNY CAO

Summer Specials

joyriding under the gleaming sun. 2 months to make memories!

Ways to spend your free time in the Bay

BY Sarah Zhou

Immediately after AP exams ended last year, my friend, Class of '22 alumna Nicole Lu, and I began planning activities for the summer. However, Nicole, having lost her pink Driver's Ed slip from freshman year, and I, not being 16 yet, realized that neither of us could get our licenses or drive anywhere. This left us with the options: A.) drag along a licensed friend (thanks, Cary!), B.) beg a parent or C.) take an Uber and risk being kidnapped.

So, this brings me to my first point: if you can't drive already, get your license ASAP. With the exception of junior Victoria Hu, by the start of junior year, every single member of my friend group already had their permit or license. Don't be like Hu. A license is something you must pursue.

Your parents will (hopefully) not be able to follow you to college to chauffeur you around in their 2006 Honda Minivan. If you don't get your license in high school, it won't be easy to find the time to learn to drive.

Once you actually manage to find your form of transportation, this story will give you a few recommendations for activities to do around the Bay Area this summer that my friends and I enjoyed last year.

Last summer, "Minions: The Rise of Gru" wowed audiences and even prompted a nationwide TikTok trend of dressing up in formal attire to see the movie. Obviously, Nicole and I had to jump on the bandwagon and rounded up a few of our friends to get our IHOP minion meals and taste bananas at the screen at AMC Saratoga 14.

This summer, we — and all other self-respecting Barbie fans — will be decked out in pink on July 21 for the release of the "Barbie" live-action movie. (Yes, I am aware I wrote a story criticizing every possible aspect of the trailer, but sometimes movies are so bad, they become good). Alternatively, if you're more of a history buff, Oppenheimer — which is about the Manhattan Project — also hits theaters the same day.

If staring at a vinyl screen for hours on end isn't your thing, stop by Glow Candle Lounge or Petroglyph in Willow Glen for some hands-on fun. Both stores are owned by the same person, so purchasing a studio pass allows you to both make your own candle and paint a ceramic piece (similar to in Color Me Mine).

Neither activity requires much concentration, leaving you and your friends plenty of time to gossip with the privacy of being surrounded by people from downtown San Jose — no one will know you, so feel free to drop as many full names and talk as loud as you want.

While both stores can be rather expensive, costing upwards of \$40+ per medium-sized, decorated candle or ceramic piece, you'll definitely leave Glow Candle Lounge smelling REALLY good after sniffing all the sample candle scents.

When you're hungry or ever feeling like you're ready to start your foodie blogger, mukbang or TikToker era, visiting popular restaurants such as Eataly, Din Tai Fung and Hero Ranch Kitchen in Valley Fair and downtown Saratoga can also be a fun experience.

On the other hand, if you're looking to have a fine dining experience to cap off a monumental night after watching "Barbie", visit one of the multiple Michelin-starred restaurants in the Bay Area such as Chez TJ in Mountain View or the Plumed Horse in downtown Saratoga. After all, if you're going to have a once-in-a-lifetime meal, might as well safe! ♦

togatalks

What plans do you have for this summer?

sophomore Claire Zheng

"I'm going to China to visit my grandparents since it's been a few years since I saw them."

sophomore Vivaan Suri

"I'm attending an economics camp at Berkeley and traveling to either Italy or Hawaii."

Why fishing is my favorite tradition

BY Nicole Lee

As 9-year-old me leans over the edge of the swaying and rocking boat, I wait patiently for something (hopefully a fish) to bite when I suddenly feel little taps at the end of the string. With a nudge, I flick the rod up and start frantically reeling. Soon after, I'm yelling for my dad to help me fight against the fish that is half my weight. That day, I found my new favorite type of fish: a one and a half-feet, 15-pound sheephead.

We went home that night and I saw my fish coming out of the oven freshly steamed to perfection. At that moment, I knew it would be the best fish I would ever taste — despite my inherent biases, I still wholeheartedly consider it the epitome of flavor.

Ever since I was in kindergarten, my family and I have gone fishing annually, occasionally even venturing out weekly for several months year-round. You see, my parents and their family friends love fish — and apparently by extension, they love fishing too.

Our typical fishing spots consist of calm lakes, trickling streams, bustling beaches and docks — including the fan-favorite (the fan being elementary school me) Capitolia, a beach in Santa Cruz, where they sold ice cream on the dock. Of course, the fishing was fun too, but who could win against the irresistible lure of ice cream? Unfortunately, I have not been able to go this year, as the heavy storms had wrecked over half the dock.

Of course, during our outings as an elementary-school kid —

when we fished more often — my needs were always taken care of by my parents, who usually did all of the organizing. All I had to do was tag along and wait to be handed my rod and bait.

In the summer of third grade, my parents extended this hobby of theirs to geoduck-digging; theoretically, digging for geoducks were a level-up from digging sand for sand castles, so the activity gave little-me a sense of accomplishment and a tasty reward at the end of the day.

Geoducks are a large type of clam that consists of two parts: one part looks like a typical flat-shelled clam and the other, called the neck or siphon, juts out of the edge of the clam. The first time we attempted finding them, however, we came back home after three hours, with only a single geoduck.

Over the following month, my dad spent his free time scrutinizing several more YouTube videos. We returned prepared. Equipped with waterproof overalls and ice cream scoopers for sturdier digging, we made use of our refined strategy: My dad would shovel off the surface of the sand where we saw the geoducks occasionally spouting water, and the rest of us would dig around and locate two feet deep

Spending the summer of 2020 in quarantine was like being told to entertain a toddler for three whole months — you've got to be creative — and with my sister back from college early, our combined "creativity" had no limits. I mean, we quite literally found ourselves above the ceiling in our roof. In order to escape our cabin fever, we ended up turning our roof into a treehouse.

It all started with my obsession over music videos — I couldn't sing for my life, but I could dance a bit better, and what better way to pass the time than to choreograph a film and edit a music video? (Saratoga parents and peers, please refrain from answering that rhetorical question.) And while trying to find unique shots from around my house, I realized that the roof, being the most exotic location within the perimeter of my home, was the perfect stage for me to record myself dancing to Billie Eilish's "Strange Addiction".

You might be thinking: "Hold up, since when was the roof even an option?" Well, ever since I started playing badminton with my sister in our backyard, we (mainly me) had a habit of swinging a little too hard and sending the birdie soaring into our roof gutters. So we got accustomed to dragging out a ladder, propping it up against the edge of the roof where the birdie

wrestle the geoduck itself out of the sand. Lo and behold, our 6-hour outing yielded us over 20 geoducks. After experimenting with various techniques, we started digging enough to fulfill the daily limit (10 geoducks per person), and soon began bringing a few family friends along each of our geoduck-digging quests.

Usually, our outings to either fishing or geoduck-digging supplied us with many times more fish or geoducks than my family could stand to eat, so we often made use of our extra resources by giving them to friends or feeding them to our chickens as a nutritious snack.

Recently, these family outings have mostly consisted of me and my parents going down to Los Angeles to visit my siblings in college and going fishing on boats nearby. As a result of the frequency of my trips, I have since dubbed it my new favorite fishing spot.

I've learned a lot since my first fishing trip. At the time, my impatient kindergarten self would constantly flick the rod, turning up empty-handed. My dad taught me that flicking the rod too early while the fish hasn't bitten hard enough would scare the fish away. Through this process, fishing has taught me how to be a bit more patient, while also being an activity that shaped my childhood summers.

Although I don't have as much spare time as I did in elementary school — a trend that will likely persist heading into junior year — I still make time to go fishing with my parents and family friends during my breaks or weekends, as it will forever hold a precious spot in my heart. ♦

My version of a treehouse: my roof

BY Beverly Xu

ie went over and retrieving the birdie. But every so often, the birdie landed a bit further onto the roof, which made it necessary for us to climb onto the roof to find it. As it turned out, crawling onto the roof was not so difficult.

Back to that summer — by the time I had finished recording, my sister had gotten tired of tap dancing incessantly on her square wooden plank in our front yard. So I invited her to join me on the roof, and the minute she got on, both of our eyes lit up; it was the childhood treehouse that we never had, a high place far from our parents' eyes where we could talk, work and decorate to our liking.

Nevertheless, the roof wasn't perfect at the beginning: The roof tiles were burning hot from the direct sunlight, we were fully exposed to the obnoxious hair-throwing wind and the tiles weren't the comfiest place to take a nap. So we went up and down the ladder bringing pillows, snacks, books, board games, umbrellas and even a small table until the roof resembled an outdoor pillow fort. But, we did all these "renovations" right above our mother's head — literally — and within an hour, she got completely fed up and yelled: "You're going to make a hole in the roof!" We tried stealth — yet even with our best efforts at tiptoeing around the roof, every step earned an angry "xiao mei" or "xiao jie" from our mom.

My dad, however, was more concerned about the safety of our heads than his own. While we were fooling around on the roof, he threw two bike helmets up and insisted we wear them, or else: "xia lai ba" (get down in Mandarin).

Now tasked with dancing as quietly and safely as we could, my sister and I, with our helmets on, put on a whole show on every corner of the roof. We pranced around to Adele, Billie Eilish and Halsey without worry that any of our neighbors passing by would take notice of us — that is, until our new neighbor hopped out of his moving van and stared us straight in the eye. He was one year younger than me, and with his first impression of me being that my idea of fun was dancing on rooftops wearing a bike helmet, there's no hope of redemption. Farewell to my chances of being a chill, respectable upperclassman.

No matter the shameful first impressions we made, the parent grievances we received and the beet red sun burns we gained, my sister and I would do it all over again. Those hours spent on our rooftop treehouse remain among my favorite summer memories, so take this as a sign to try it out yourself! (For legal purposes, don't try this at home. Try it ON your home.) ♦

All graphics by LEYNA CHAN, ANNIE LIU, AMY LUO and ISABELLE WANG

MET Gala Glamour

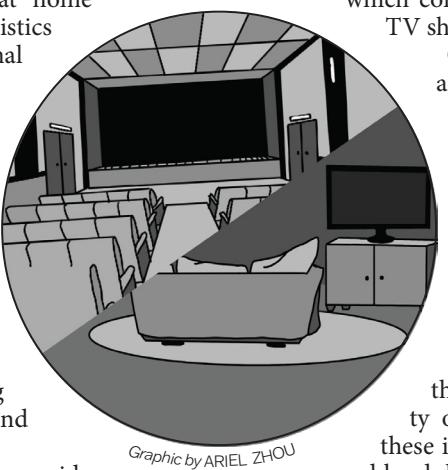


Why you should watch your next movie in the theaters

by Sanjoli Gupta

There's something so comforting about sitting in bed and watching a movie at 2 a.m., knowing that you still have math homework to complete and a quiz the next day. Or, when you're not up at ungodly hours, friends can always come over and watch a movie with you in the comfort and convenience of your house — without a lengthy trip to the theater, hefty ticket prices or the need to look presentable.

However, despite these advantages, watching movies at home lacks the key characteristics that make the traditional movie-going experience so special. In a theater, you're completely immersed in the movie-watching experience. There are no distractions, no parents walking in to check on you and no screaming of a sibling in the background; it's just the big screen, the dialogue, and the food.



Graphic by ARIEL ZHOU

Attending a theater provides a truly immersive experience with the big screen, loud music and overpriced popcorn that you just can't get at home.

As the entire theater collectively experiences the movie at the same time, shocking reveals during a mystery movie or a jump scare during a thriller are felt among watchers, and you can hear the reactions of those around you, adding to the shock or fear factor. Such reactions are just as essential to the movie-watching experience as the movie itself; a jump scare set at 20% volume on your TV at home as dishes are being washed in the background just isn't the same.

While watching at home saves more of your hard-earned money, theaters provide a better, more immersive watching experience and act as a fun social activity with friends.

The next time you find yourself jumping to watch a new movie, consider paying that extra sum for a better experience in theaters. ♦

King Charles's coronation needed a comedy slot on SNL

by William Norwood

Sharing buttery popcorn is another staple. Call it placebo, but that overpriced, steaming theater popcorn somehow feels more fulfilling than the microwaved kind at home — it adds to the feeling of watching a movie being a special experience rather than just a way to pass time.

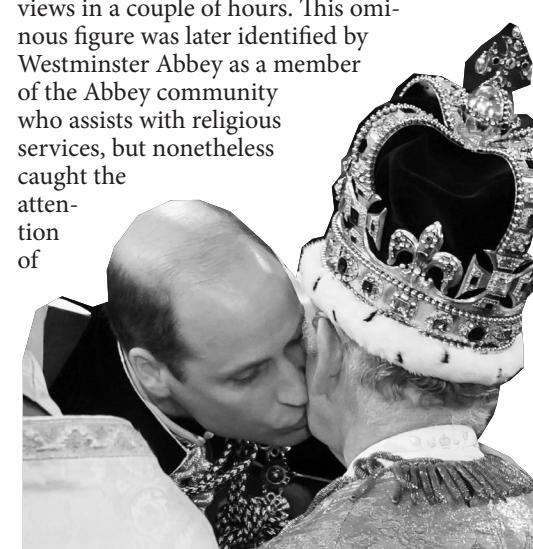
However, one big drawback with the theater experience is the ever-growing price. While a single ticket at AMC costs \$14 to \$18 per person, a month of online streaming can cost from \$4.99 with Apple TV+ to \$15.49 for Netflix, each of which comes with hundreds of TV shows and movies.

Of course, there can also be minor annoyances in theaters. Viewers may forget to turn off their phones or talk loudly during the movie. Then there is the overactive AC that is often at full blast, making for a freezing experience throughout the entirety of the movie. Despite these issues, the large screen and loud dialogue makes the experience special.

As for me, I primarily go to the theaters for long-anticipated movies and ones I certainly don't want spoilers for, such as murder mysteries, in order to keep my wallet from running dry.

While watching at home saves more of your hard-earned money, theaters provide a better, more immersive watching experience and act as a fun social activity with friends.

The next time you find yourself jumping to watch a new movie, consider paying that extra sum for a better experience in theaters. ♦



Courtesy of GETTY IMAGES

many on the internet.

To Gen Z viewers, the service also feels like a hilariously outdated affair, remaining in line with the rest of the British monarchy's odd traditions.

For example, Prince William, King Charles III's son, had to pledge his loyalty to his father and then kiss him on the cheek.

To me, it seems odd to have to look your father in the eye and say, "I, (insert your name here), Prince of Wales, pledge my loyalty to you and faith and truth I will bear unto you, as your liege man of life and limb. So help me God," and then proceed to kiss him on the cheek in front of billions of people.

It seems slightly incestuous, but what can you expect from a family whose motto has historically been "keep it in the family"?

After the crowning of both the king and queen consort, Camilla walked down the aisle while a children's choir sang what many thought sounded like "why not retire, Camilla" or "I want Diana, Camilla."

The choir was apparently singing "Vivat Regina Camilla," though it is my belief that "I want Diana, Camilla" is the clear right answer.

Clearly, people in the younger generation — like myself — are starting to lose more respect for the monarchy and continue to make fun of what it stands for.

The next time a coronation comes around — it might be very soon considering the looming threat of the grim reaper — I urge others to turn on the TV, grab a bucket of popcorn and watch the spectacle that is the British coronation.

I guarantee that although you won't go in with the intent to laugh, you'll be going down a TikTok rabbit hole of jokes as I did by the end. ♦

The iconic event brought about many memorable outfits.

Morgan Wallen's new album 'One Thing at a Time' conveys dynamic emotions, pays homage to family

by MeherBhatnagar

With his new album "One Thing at a Time," American country singer Morgan Wallen has achieved groundbreaking commercial success. His songs have remained at the top of the Billboard charts for 8 weeks since the album's release on March 3. "One Thing at a Time" is his second consecutive U.S. number one album, marking the biggest week of 2023 for album units earned and overall the biggest week for any country album since "Red (Taylor's Version)" by Taylor Swift in November 2021.

Through heartfelt melodies and vivid storytelling, listeners immerse themselves in his personal experiences.

With his songs reaching wider audiences than before, Wallen's music has emotionally resonated with listeners around the world.

In an interview with Music Mayhem Magazine, Wallen said he intended for the album to express the emotional highs and lows he's experienced over the past few years of his life, with many songs inspired by "the good, the bad, the love and the heartbreak."

This is seen with the wide emotional range of music produced in the album, from solemn songs about his son like "Dying

Man" to upbeat tracks about his love life like "Everything I Love." These songs display a unique lyrical dissonance; "Dying Man" uses a sorrowful tone as Wallen reflects on how he shifted away from destructive habits after the birth of his son while "Everything I Love" portrays Wallen's heartbreak through an upbeat melody. Opening with the poignant track "Born With A Beer In My Hand," Wallen's distinctive musical motifs and captivating vocal melodies immediately seize the attention of his audience. The song recounts Wallen's youthful recklessness and unwavering dedication to his country roots, despite the hurdles he has encountered along the way. A standout track on the album, "Last Night," resonates deeply with its listeners and is destined to grace summer playlists for years to come. Wallen masterfully reflects on a conversation with his former partner, encapsulating his raw longing in an introspection of their final night together. Through heartfelt melodies and vivid storytelling, Wallen invites listeners to immerse themselves in his personal experiences, fostering a profound connection that lingers long after the song ends.

In addition to capturing his own emotional rollercoaster and personal experiences, Wallen's album also pays homage to family members who have supported him throughout his career and helped him get where he is today.

As such, the album cover itself depicts Wallen standing outside his grandmother's house in Sneedville, Tennessee. Wallen, in the same interview with Music Mayhem



Courtesy of BIG LOUD RECORDS

Magazine, talked about the special bond he shares with her and how he wanted to honor her with the new album. The album also features other prominent artists in the country music industry, such as HARDY, ERNEST. Wallen sincerely apologized for his actions and entered rehab, taking time to reflect and work on himself.

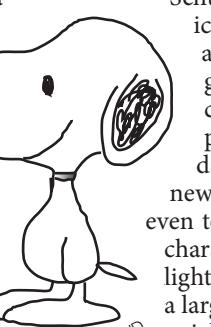
Wallen's resilience and dedication to his music have clearly paid off, as "One Thing at a Time" continues to dominate the charts and his world tour draws in fans from around the world. Despite the challenges he has faced, Wallen remains a beloved figure in the country music industry, and his success shows no signs of slowing down. ♦

70 years later, 'Peanuts' remains a childhood staple

by Beverly Xu

Over 70 years ago, comic strip artist Charles M. Schulz published the first few panels of his new comic called "Peanuts" in the monochrome newspaper, St. Pioneer Press. Although the final original strip was released in 2000, the beloved comic has continued to be a staple in entertainment, a prime example of how popular media can tackle social issues and continue the legacy of its creator, who died in Feb. 12, 2000.

In the early years of "Peanuts," many characters lacked their distinct features: Charlie Brown's iconic yellow zig-zag shirt was originally a plain white top, Snoopy walked on all fours and Peppermint Patty donned a dress and bow



Graphic by ANAMIKANAND

instead of her staple green shirt and black trousers. But within a few years the characters rapidly gained popularity and became household names. Even a decade after Schulz's passing, Charlie Brown's iconic "good grief" and Snoopy's alter ego "Cool Joe" were integral, iconic memorandums of my childhood. As the comic rose to prominence as the most popular daily strip in America, it gained new characters, brand deals and even television shows that brought the characters even further into the lime-light — and with influence over such a large audience, Schulz made liberal social commentary in the midst of a period of great political turmoil.

Like other fans, I'll never get bored of the variations of Lucy swiping out the football in front of Charlie Brown's feet just as he is about to take his biggest kick, or Snoopy's adventures bravely battling the infamous Red Baron. I will forever remember Linus splitting up his blanket so that his friends could experience the same comfort demonstrated how the positive effects of sharing far outweigh the sacrifices.

But never mind the phrases and the heartwarming and hilarious situations Schulz brought to life — "Peanuts" taught me some of the most important life lessons I could ever ask for: Adults aren't always right, don't be afraid to ask your 5-cent psychiatrist for help, but, most importantly, good grief, you don't need to be perfect to be loved by all of America. ♦

sassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Schulz was urged to add an African American character into his comic strip by school teacher Harriet Glickman — and so the character "Franklin" was born.

Besides the addition of Franklin, Schulz consistently included social commentary in his daily strips, the focus of which included gender norms, gun control and even religion. For example, a 1997 strip depicts Snoopy purchasing a gun without a license, emphasizing America's loose regulations on who can purchase firearms while preserving the colorful, comforting plot and picture of "Peanuts," creating innumerable emblematic tropes, quotes and life lessons.

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As hardcore "Liv is better than Maddie" fans, we were furious with Maddie's inconsiderate behavior. After all the unconditional love, support and sacrifices that Liv made for her sister, how could Maddie do this to her? Our eyes were glued to the screen as we watched Liv and Maddie's relationship deteriorate in a matter of minutes.

However, our hopes and dreams were saved as Karen Rooney, the twins' mom, brought out the iconic drawing that they made of themselves when they were little, titled: "Sisters by chance, friends by choice." We wiped our tears and breathed a sigh of relief as the two sisters forgave each other, acknowledging that no matter what forces threatened to separate them, they would always stay together. Liv ended up moving to L.A. with Maddie.

This episode, among many others, filled our monotonous days with excitement. Although the show ended six years ago, we still find ourselves setting our work aside to replay our favorite episodes, reminiscing about the summers of our childhood. ♦

'Liv and Maddie': A show that shaped our personalities

by Emma Fung & Kathy Wang

"You, you, the other half of me, me, the half I'll always ne-ed, the half that drives me cra-a-a-a-a-a," we chanted, singing along to the theme song of our sixth-grade summer, our days included nothing but eating, sleeping — and of course, watching and re-watching "Liv and Maddie."

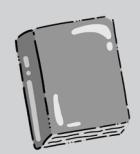
Although "Liv and Maddie" succeeds in entertaining viewers, the show also touches upon more emotional, realistic topics, such as separating from family to embrace the next stages of life. During one of our favorite episodes — part two of the Season 3 finale — Maddie is accepted into her dream college, Southern California State University (SCSU) with a basketball scholarship. In the previous episode,

decided to make a life-changing decision: to give up her lead role in a TV show — which was being moved to L.A. — in order to stay with Maddie in Wisconsin. Maddie, who has always dreamed of attending SCSU, decides to accept the scholarship and move to L.A. for college, leaving Liv in Wisconsin by herself. In our humble opinion, Maddie's impulsive decision was an absolute outrage! Her weak argument was,

"I never told you to give up your show for me," as she then proceeded to accuse her sister of not supporting her dreams — when in reality, she took away Liv's dreams as well.



Courtesy of LIV AND MADDE



STUDENTS GO ABOVE & BEYOND! IN RESEARCH

Graphic by AMY LUO and ISABELLE WANG

Junior's app aims to improve air quality predictions

by AmyLuo

Stuck as a freshman in the pandemic lockdown, Kyleen Liao, now a junior, looked out the window to the sight of red smoke blanketing the sky from wildfires. The fires obstructed access to clean air and harmed sensitive groups.

Seeing a chance to help, Liao was determined to improve the imprecise predictions of air quality available to the public.

Since 2021, Liao has been working on a web application that better predicts air qual-



A photo collage of junior Kyleen Liao's journey from getting inspiration to taking action.

ity using Graph Neural Networks, a type of machine learning (ML) model that can make predictions based on data represented as a graph.

Through her app, Liao is aiming to encourage research advancements in the intersection of environmental science and artificial intelligence to better inform the public on accurate air quality predictions. It is still in the development phase.

"Air quality prediction really can make a meaningful impact to improve people's lives as disasters are worsening," Liao said.

With the project's plentiful potential and the field's complexity, she sees herself continuing its work even as a career path. Working with Columbia allowed her to gain experience of what working in a professional research setting was like.

Throughout the past two years that Liao has dedicated to the project, numerous obstacles stood in the way. She noted that the most frustrating issue was increasing the prediction accuracy of the PM 2.5 concentration. It took months of research, discussion with Columbia's team and testing techniques to finally arrive at the desired effect.

"My biggest takeaway from the project would be perseverance," Liao said. "Find something that you're passionate about and apply the skills you have to that problem. There will always be unexpected issues, but I always try to keep in mind the end goal and the impact." ♦



Liao

tangling the effects of different sources on pollutant concentrations," Liao said. "This is beneficial to be aware of in order for people to minimize exposure to toxins in air pollution."

The project and internship with Columbia extended into the school year, and she now meets every two or three weeks with the research institution for progress check-ins.

Liao's passion for the field has increased with her project work, and she now looks to pursue environmental engineering as a major and potentially minor in computer science.

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Stanford can wait: Wang takes gap year to pursue AI

by AidenYe

Last summer, senior Mason Wang, already experienced with research and artificial intelligence, reached out to see if he could help two Stanford professors with Noora, a project designed to create a chatbot that assists those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). To his surprise, they agreed to bring him on board.

Noora is a chatbot that presents ASD patients with a variety of social scenarios and gives feedback to their various responses to help them better understand how to hold conversations or respond to questions they don't understand.

Despite his previous experience in research, Wang had to learn a lot to work alongside professors Monica Lam, who specializes in natural language processing, and Lynn Kern Koegel, who specializes in psychology.

"Overall, when working with my professors, I learned a great deal on how to ask questions," Wang said. "For example, I learned what to question when we get experimental results, what questions to ask when we look at a new problem and how to read research papers and question them."

To contribute to Noora, Wang had to learn how to prompt a Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (GPT), which is a neural network that already knows how to process and respond to words, but can be fine-tuned by users. By using a GPT, Wang no longer has to create a chatbot from scratch, but can instead modify an existing one to properly respond and connect to ASD patients.

"We're shifting away from this paradigm of gathering data and training a model on it and instead learning how to prompt a GPT," he said.

So far, the team has held informal tests with a few ASD patients and used their observations to iterate and improve Noora's responses. For example, during initial test-

ing, Wang noticed that patients would occasionally skip through large blocks of text, so he modified Noora to read aloud all of the responses instead of just displaying it on a screen.

To gather data to report in a paper with human subjects, he and his team must get approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Currently, Noora is hoping to hold formal trial runs with a group of patients near the end of summer if approval comes through. Beyond its usage in research and clinical settings like Noora, Wang also believes that GPTs will be the next great innovation in technology evolution.

"GPTs are pretty revolutionary to the point where the majority of people don't even have an idea how revolutionary it is," he said. "I think in 20 years, everyone will be using generative Artificial Intelligence (AI), even schools."

Wang has been working on Noora for the past year, spending his entire summer after junior year prototyping and testing his initial ideas. Now, since college applications are over, he is spending more time preparing Noora for the testing phase.

Compared to the theoretical aspects of his other research projects, like his dive into SFTs, Wang feels that the practicality of Noora is more interesting. Inspired by his experiences with Noora, he plans to major in computer science and minor in psychology at Stanford University.

"The theoretical things are very intellectually stimulating and satisfying to understand, but it's the practical building and testing [of the chatbot] that I love."



Courtesy of MASON WANG

Mason Wang presents his project Noora to Stanford Natural Language Processing team.

he will take a gap year next year to further work on it.



Wang

"It's the practical building and testing [of the chatbot] that I love."

SENIOR Mason Wang

Wang got his first taste of research during his freshman year working with Class of 2022 alumnus and current Harvard freshman Vignav Ramesh. They collaborated on a project for HackMIT, an event where students compete and show off recent software or hardware projects. Their project, Latent Space, used recurrent autoencoders, a type of neural network that specializes in data optimization, to compress and send audio across the internet.

Theoretically, this process would allow many widely used video calling platforms

such as Zoom or Google Meet to reduce delay between one side speaking and the sound being heard by the other users. Later, the two wrote, but did not publish, a brief to document their findings and results from implementing the neural network.

"Latent Space was born from other researchers' discoveries, as were so many of my other projects," Wang said. "After engaging with so many other people's research, I was inspired to conduct my own."

In his sophomore summer, Wang attended the Research Mentorship Program (RMP) at UCSB, where he worked under a doctoral student. Together, they created two projects and wrote a paper exploring sparse fusion transformers (SFTs). SFTs are an improvement to current transformer neural networks, a type of network better suited for processing text, aimed at reducing computational costs and memory use.

"I initially got into it [AI], because I thought it was cool, and I think that's a good enough reason to just try it out," Wang said. "Now, I'm convinced that AI is the future, and I'm excited to see where it goes." ♦

Hiring enough special education aides becomes an increasingly difficult task

BY DivyaVadlakonda

Special education resource aide Kelly Allen's fondest memories with a student she helps on a one-to-one basis are those in which the student succeeds in her daily endeavors. Allen says that seeing her and the other staff members' efforts pay off in a positive way is the most fulfilling part of her job.

"For me personally, learning the psychology of how to support another person is very rewarding," Allen said. "I got to know her parents as well and build their trust — so it feels like an extended family situation. You're so invested in this one person and everything that goes into their life."

Allen has been in the department since 2020, working alongside a current network of 19 aides that span across three programs grouped under the umbrella term special education. The aides not only support students with disabilities, but also those who experience difficulties working in mainstream classrooms.

The first of the three special education programs is Community Based Instruction (CBI), which serves students with increased support needs through specialized classes, mainstream electives and community-based instruction. The school's Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) program is designed to support mainstream students in general education classes, while also following their Individual Education Plan. The third offshoot, the Achieving Student Success with Intervention Support and Therapy (ASSIST) program, serves students who have suffered mental health struggles or trauma, offering therapy to help them make emotional and academic progress.

Though some aides work one-on-one with students and others are assigned to support classroom settings and case managers, or home-room teachers, all aides have a common goal — supporting students in their instructional classes.

In many cases, these positions are part-time and always lower paying than teaching and other certified positions, which require both a college degree and credentialing in subject areas such as math, science, or English.

The lower wages for aides often pose an issue when trying to attract people to the job. This hiring difficulty has been exacerbated in recent years due to the pandemic, Elliott said.

To help retain good aides, the district is offering more responsibilities to remaining part-time aides to help them achieve full-time working weeks. For example, a member of staff could work as an aide for six hours a day, but drive students across campus in the morning or afternoon. In doing so, they would earn full-time a salary while still receiving benefits.

"The amount of aide positions that need to be filled fluctuates each day [...] about four to five are needed on days when a few people call in sick," he said. "There have also been aides that have left in the middle of their term, so while the department fills in those positions we could have a shortage of one or two."

Currently, the department is fully staffed, but a few times a year the department suffers shortages that are hard to fill.

Douglass, a CBI general aide, observed the increasing need for special education aides while she was hired as a TPP-Job Coach, where she found jobs for special education students for them to get real-life experience. After working as a substitute aide, she decided to switch jobs permanently. Douglass believes that the main reason for the aide shortage is the demanding nature of the job.

"[It causes] burn-out quickly and nothing can prepare you for what can happen, but it's also a rewarding position when all goes right," Douglass said. "Unfortunately, we live in a very expensive area and the pay is not equivalent to the work compared to other jobs."

The difficulty in hiring and retaining aides can result in reshuffling remaining aides to the areas of greatest need, sometimes leaving the highest functioning students without the same level of support for a short period.

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14 one-to-one and district CBI aides for its 30 students

4 aides to help SAI's 120 students

1 ASSIST aide for its 15 students

3 programs grouped under the term special education

Historic atrium honors legacy of impactful parent

BY MeherBhatnagar & ArielZhou

graduating seniors established in his honor, which ran until 2015.

Though subtle, elements of the school's history can be seen throughout the campus, from buildings to various plaques.

One of these pieces of history is located at the center of its main office: a Japanese-inspired glass atrium that contains greenery and other traditional features such as fountains, vines, flowers and a miniature Japanese garden bridge at the center.

Ryan said that his father truly valued his family as well as the Saratoga community, driving him to become more involved in the school's activities. Dr. Iwanaga's legacy runs through the community, and according to Ryan, it still lives within the walls of the school.

"I think the atrium is a good reminder for me of my father's spirit. He was very devoted to the town of Saratoga and to the high school itself," Ryan said.

As a Japanese-American family in California, the Iwanaga ancestry remained close to previous generations as a result of experiencing the internment camps in the 1940s.

Ryan devotes his father's passion for his community to their upbringing in tightly-knit family structures.

Following Dr. Iwanaga's death, the community of Saratoga was involved in making his family feel at peace with the loss. Beyond the establishment of the scholarship, the school's maintenance crew has been taking care of the garden and over the past year, Principal Secretary Allison Montgomery has taken up that job as her own.

This stems from her passion for all things nature, as her desk consists of various sparsely placed plants to keep greenery around her at all times.



Photo by ZACK ZHANG

The atrium that lies within the office allows afternoon sunlight to filter through the roof.

"I really love nature and I spend most of my time looking through the glass surrounding the atrium," Montgomery said. "When I noticed that it needed a little care, I decided to take it upon myself to get it fixed up."

Montgomery has worked alongside the custodians to water flowers, repaint the deck and keep everything within the atrium in order.

Office workers, including Montgomery, are currently discussing potential upgrades to add more ambiance to the garden.

"I think recently we have been wanting

to get a chair or a small cafe set out there, where we can take a little break in the middle of the day when the weather gets warmer," Montgomery said.

"Adding a new trellis would also be nice. I am artistic by nature and I think creating an environment that's beautiful to look at will be beneficial to everyone." ♦



Graphic by WILL NORWOOD and ERIC SHI

BECOMING HER

BY Saachi Jain
& Beverly Xu

Growing up in the early '80s, a young Brad Ward lived in a world where being transgender or gender-diverse were concepts unknown to the majority of society. Almost 50 years later, after finding a career in college admissions, moving to California from Pennsylvania, battling supervisors who she perceived as trying to muffle her voice when she came out as a transgender woman and finally joining the SHS community as the school's college and career counselor earlier this school year, Ward is on her way to living the life she wants.

She is solidifying her gender identity as a transgender woman through gender-affirming care while working at SHS, where she said she feels financially and emotionally supported enough to undergo the physical aspects of gender transition. SHS was also the best place for her to publicize her transition and serve as a role model to gender nonconforming students, Ward said. (While she identifies as female, she has so far retained the name Brad.)

"I was the only transgender college counselor in this whole country until a month ago, as far as I know, and I need the national visibility that a district like Saratoga can provide for people like me," she said.

She hopes to serve as a reminder that all transgender people, just like everyone else, can flourish in any corporate or educational community.

Discovery of identity in a religious, conservative childhood

Born to conservative parents in Ohio and growing up in Marin County, California, Ward attended Mass weekly and was enrolled in Catholic schools throughout her childhood, a time in her life when she began to feel "different."

"I need the national visibility Saratoga can provide for [trans] people like me."

COUNSELOR Brad Ward

During her time in private high school, she had to wear gendered uniforms and grappled with her confusion by hanging out with girls and joining cross country and track, the only co-ed sports offered, because she did not feel like she fit in with the boys at her school.

"I should be wearing skirts, not pants," said Ward, describing her thinking as a teen. "Why do I want to hang out with the girls more than the boys, wear skirts and stereotypical [female] things like that?"

read the full story



Without knowledge of gender science beyond the binary genders assigned at birth, society labeled transgender people as "transsexual" or "crossdressers," which were derogatory, pathologically connotated terms, she said.

The AIDS epidemic of the '80s and '90s fueled false associations between HIV and homosexuality, making it even more challenging for Ward to understand her identity.

"I basically figured that I must be gay, because back then, if you were like an effeminate boy or an effeminate man [a male who displays female characteristics], people just assumed you were gay," Ward said. "But why then why was I attracted to women? It just didn't make sense."

While she attended college at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, Ward found no official transgender community or mentors to confide in. However, attending a non-religious school allowed her to detach from the misogyny she observed in the many male religious figures of her youth.

Finding transgender role models

Everything changed after she was offered a job in college admissions at Bucknell in 2008 at her 10-year reunion. A few years later, a colleague introduced Ward to the book "She's Not There" by Jennifer Finney Boylan. In the book, Boylan, a professor at Colby College in rural Maine, detailed her experience coming out and undergoing gender-affirming surgery and care (medical procedures that allow transgender people to physically transition their body to align with their gender identity).

"I read it all in one afternoon; it was the first time that I felt like I wasn't alone," she said.

Ward started trying on female clothing — just like Boylan, she experimented with wearing skirts and female-gendered clothing on Bucknell's campus, college fairs, high school visits and more.

Facing obstacles and coming out

By 2007, Ward was working at Menlo, a private high school in Atherton; she began experimenting with more easily reversible changes such as growing her hair out and experimenting with clothing.

However, two years later, two of her direct supervisors began expressing concerns for her "feminine" appearance. She said two of her direct supervisors asked her to cut her hair.

"I had only been at that school for two years, and as a trans person who was still closeted, there were very few of us out there," Ward said. "There wasn't really anything I could do but cut my hair and let it go."

Several months later, before her hair had even grown to reach its previous length, the same supervisor asked her to cut it once more. Six years later, one of the previous



OBSTACLES MET
COLLEGE COUNSELOR
BRAD WARD AT
ALMOST EVERY TURN
IN HER JOURNEY.

Facing the Capitol building of conservative Texas, Ward takes her first testosterone blockers at a college counseling conference on Sept. 26, 2022, starting her journey towards physically transitioning. Although the medications have already cost her upwards of \$900, the physical changes she has seen have made it all worth it for her.

professionals to start her treatment and found clinicians specializing in gender-affirming care who helped her feel comfortable and accepted.

On Sept. 26, 2022, Ward deliberately took her first gender-affirming healthcare supplements at a college conference in one of the most anti-transgender states in the nation — Texas, which has introduced more than 10% of all state-level legislation in the U.S. restricting transgender expression, access to gender-affirming care and more.

Girls interviewed by The Falcon cite academic stress and body dysmorphia as the main reasons for these findings, with one saying: "I would be surprised if a girl at SHS hadn't faced body image issues at some point during high school." Each year, barring 2020-21, rates of suicide and depression have continued to rise in the U.S. among men, women and adolescents.

In addition, body dysmorphia — a disorder that involves an obsession with perceived flaws about appearance — are at alarming rates in both men and women. According to a study conducted by Brigham Young University, an estimated 23% to 32% of college-age women have suffered or are suffering from some kind of eating disorder or body dysmorphia issues.

She was fed up with trying to compromise on her own identity and her self-expression.

By cutting her off from allies and restricting her gender-identity expression, Ward thought Menlo's administrators' actions during her employment there were a violation of federal law against sexual harassment, sexism, discrimination, anti-trans and an abuse of power.

But instead of taking legal action, she published her coming-out piece to her own personal blog. She was fed up with trying to compromise on her own identity and losing control over her self-expression.

She was eventually let go from Menlo in 2017 because of her being "unable to effectively work with students and colleagues." Shortly after, she began interviewing for new positions with the pronouns "she/her/hers," wearing skirts and clearly displaying her gender identity.

anti-trans healthcare bills Post-Roe

AR SB199

Makes performing gender-affirming care for minors in Arizona illegal

TX SB14

Prohibits performing or funding gender-affirming care for minors in Texas; bars those currently undergoing care for

and 74 other bills have been passed in U.S. states...

Information from translegislation.com

Finding the right community

When Ward arrived at SHS last August, she said she found the sense of community that she needed to confidently begin her permanent physical transition. Last spring, she reached out to health

Three directors approach Brad about wearing skirts at Menlo. Comes out to the Menlo staff. Is let go from Menlo high school. Starts hormone therapy.



All graphics by AMY LUO and BEVERLY XU

MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL WHO'S THE thinnest OF THEM ALL?

Peer pressure and culture prove to be problematic for students' mental health and body image

BY William Norwood

Editor's note: This story contains mentions of body dysmorphia, eating disorders and suicide. It also uses anonymous sources to discuss sensitive topics.

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Information from agendaalliance.org

elementary school — which is crazy to think about — the biggest issue I had, body-wise, was my legs, my thighs," Rachel said. "It prevented me from wearing shorts throughout elementary, middle and high school."

At that time, Christine also started to experience recurring ideas of body dysmorphia and how she, and other girls, were expected to present themselves.

"On top of needing to prove yourself and excel in what you do, you also have other pressures of people telling you how you're supposed to look and how you're supposed to behave," she said.

She recalled one particularly traumatizing experience — of a boy rating the looks of girls in a P.E. class — that occurred at Redwood Middle School in 7th grade. The boy had pointed to a conventionally attractive girl and rated her a 9, otherwise a 10 except for her wearing makeup, and then pointed to Christine and told her she was only a 3.

This experience made Christine acutely aware of how others judge her based on her appearance. Around half a year after this incident, the pandemic quarantine started, and Christine's mental health hit rock bottom.

Along with dropping grades and struggles with general and social anxiety, she also suffered from severe body dysmorphia and would often throw away her food, which eventually transformed into a vicious cycle of restriction and weight loss. She was diagnosed with both eating disorders and body dysmorphia in that same year.

"I had to wear shorts during games, so I just had to suck it up and get it over with," Rachel said. "To a certain extent, soccer pushed me to get over [my body dysmorphia], because my thighs aren't something I wanted to think about during the game. If I was playing, I wasn't going to think about my thighs — I'd be thinking about the ball."

Rachel feels that the way she has managed through her mental health struggles was her desire to get better. While she continues to struggle to maintain and navigate her mental health, she has consistently worked to better her mental health.

Body dysmorphia fueled by isolation

Starting elementary school in Asia, Christine always felt like an outsider in her school's environment.

Even before moving to Saratoga, she was bullied by other kids.

"They isolated me because I was pretty nerdy, and they would call me ugly to my face," said Christine. "My best friend at the time would fluctuate between joining them just to and siding with me. [The bullying] ruined my confidence and faith in my friendships to this day."

As a result, she was increasingly lonely, causing her social skills to decline and leading her to develop social anxiety.

"I started developing social and general anxiety in elementary school. I would have these fears of my parents dying. I had a lot of panic attacks," Christine said. "I didn't really have many friends or anyone to eat lunch with. When I started taking lunch to school, I'd be so embarrassed of this that I'd throw away my food."

Simultaneously, social media experienced a boom in promoting "healthy eating" by fitness influencers. Even so, Christine said she had never felt a major decline in her emotions and mental health until she moved to the U.S. in 7th grade.

"It's not enough to just exist. You always have to be doing something more," Christine said. "There's so much going on; there's climate change, wars, discrimination, health crises, global recessions and a pandemic."

And I'm expected to fight, but when I do, I'm told that I am only a child and should not worry about these things. What do you want from us?"

To anyone at SHS who is in a mental health crisis, please contact the suicide and crisis lifeline. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national local crisis center, which provides confidential support for people in an emotional crisis, or in a suicidal situation.



The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in the United States. They are committed to improving crisis services and advancing suicide prevention by empowering individuals, advancing professional best practices, and building awareness.



The National Eating Disorder Association is the largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders. NEDA supports individuals and families affected by eating disorders, and serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures and access to quality care.

Christine also feels the bodybuilding and gym culture is inherently toxic with a common practice of "bulking" and "cutting" through meticulously measuring calories and macros in your diet.

"As someone with a diagnosed ED I'm always going to be an anorexic so I've been conscious to stay away from the conventional notions of dietary control because it is easy to slip back into restricting," Christine said. "It really turns into a different kind of eating disorder where restricting calories turns into counting macros with this same level of unhealthy obsession."

Her mental health has improved now, thanks to therapy and eating programs to better improve her relationship with food.

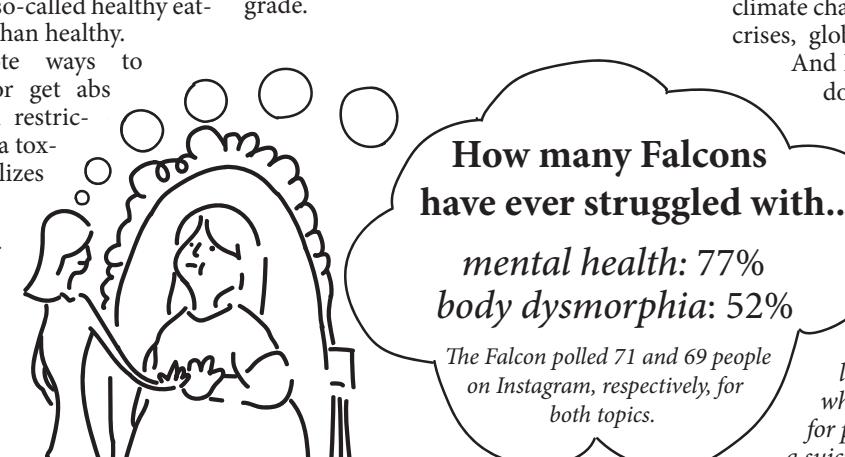
Although she feels happier, she faults society and growing expectations of parents and other teens, as well as isolation, as the main causes of her mental health issues.

"It's not enough to just exist. You always have to be doing something more," Christine said. "There's so much going on; there's climate change, wars, discrimination, health crises, global recessions and a pandemic."

And I'm expected to fight, but when I do, I'm told that I am only a child and should not worry about these things. What do you want from us?"



The Office on Women's Health is on a mission to provide national leadership and coordination to improve the health of women and girls through policy, education, and innovative programs. Their vision is to allow all women and girls to achieve the best possible mental health. Some of their goals include informative and influential policies, supporting innovative programs and educating the public.



How many Falcons have ever struggled with...
mental health: 77%
body dysmorphia: 52%

The Falcon polled 71 and 69 people on Instagram, respectively, for both topics.

The Falcon's 2023 Sports Power Rankings

CONTRIBUTIONS BY ANIKA KAPASI, VICTORIA LIN, AIDEN YE AND ANDY ZHU

Formula:
League Record: (*wins + ties*) / total games) x (value of respective leagues); Win = 1 pt,
Tie = 0.5 pts, Loss = 0 pts
League Placement: 1st - 3 pts, 2nd - 2 pts, 3rd - 1 pt, 4th and below - 0 pts
CCS: 4 pts - CIF States, 3 pts - Finals, 2 pts - Second Round/Semifinals/Trials, 1 pt - First round/Quarterfinals



Sport	League Record (win-tie-loss)	Win Rate (1-10 Peninsula-Lake, 1-15 El Camino, 1-20 De Anza)	League Title (0 - 3)	CCS (1-4)	Campus Presence (1-5)	Star Player	Total
1. Boys' Volleyball	El Camino 10-5	10	2	2	5	K. Duvvuri (11)	19
2. Baseball	El Camino 10-5	10	2	1	5	L. Dennis (12)	18
3. Badminton	De Anza 5-7	10	0	4	3	E. Oaklander (12)	17*
4. Girls' Track	El Camino 4-2	10	1	3	3	M. Tippets (12)	17*
5. Boys' Tennis	De Anza 7-5	11	1	2	3	S. Ogata (9)	17**
6. Boys' Basketball	El Camino 6-6	10	0	2	5	N. Tjaden (12)	17
7. Softball	El Camino 9-3	11	1	1	2	L. Guzman (12)	15
8. Girls' Swimming	De Anza 2-4	6	0	4	4	K. Zhang (9)	14*
9. Girls' Tennis	El Camino 9-3	11	1	0	2	S. Manea (11)	14
10. Girls' Soccer	De Anza 4-2-6	8	0	0	4	G. Golko (12)	12
11. Girl's Volleyball	El Camino 5-7	6	0	0	3	J. Song (12)	9
12. Boys' Golf	De Anza 3-1-8	6	0	1	1	H. Shu (12)	8**
13. Boys' Cross Country	De Anza 5th	4	0	1	3	W. Khan (12)	8**
14. Boys' Swimming	De Anza 1-5	3	0	1	4	T. Yim (9)	8*
15. Boys' Water Polo	El Camino 5-9	5	0	0	3	K. Nikfar (12)	8***
16. Boys' Soccer	El Camino 2-4-6	5	0	0	3	G. Wheeler (12)	8
17. Girls' Cross Country	De Anza 6th	3	0	1	3	E. Stoiber (12)	7*
18. Girls' Golf	De Anza 3-7	6	0	0	1	S. Lim (10)	7**
19. Girls' Water Polo	El Camino 5-9	5	0	0	2	R. Kline (12)	7**
20. Football	Peninsula-Lake 1-6	2	0	0	5	S. Hulme (12)	7
21. Boys' Track	El Camino 1-5	2	0	1	3	Y. Singh (12)	6*
22. Girls' Basketball	De Anza 2-10	3	0	0	3	T. Ghai (12)	6
23. Field Hockey	De Anza 2-2-10	4	0	0	1	G. Adams (12)	5
24. Girls' Wrestling	De Anza 10th	1	0	0	1	R. Bosow (10)	2
25. Boys' Wrestling	El Camino 0-7	0	0	0	1	S. Bhan (12)	1

All photos by WILLIAM NORWOOD, LORI TIMMONS, SANNIDHI BOPPANA, LUCAS DENNIS and MALCOM SLANEY

The Falcon's top seniors

By Victoria Lin, Tara Natarajan & Aiden Ye

Best male athlete: Lucas Dennis

A pitcher and shortstop for both the varsity baseball team and Zoots Baseball Club — the No. 1 club baseball team in Northern California — senior Lucas Dennis has made first team in Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL) all-league two years in a row, and finished off the season with the third lowest earned run average (ERA) in

California. He threw two no-hitters as well as pitched one perfect game, innings, had eight hits, struck out 36 opposing batters and only gave up one run.

Outside of his impressive performance with the school team, Dennis placed third at the 2022 USA Baseball National Championship in Phoenix, Arizona, last June with Zoots Baseball. Dennis cites his confidence on the mound as one of his biggest strengths.

He will be attending Pomona College in the fall and playing Division III baseball for the Pomona-Pitzer Sagehens.

"I'm excited to be heading to a place with a lot of like-minded and equally committed players," Dennis said.

Best female athlete: Zeynep Tokuz

Placing No. 3 for the medley relay team for CIF States, senior Zeynep Tokuz has been swimming competitively since age 10.

She attended multiple Futures competitions, an intermediate step for a Junior Nationals meet, and also got invited to Next College Student Athlete (NCSA) 2019, which is at a similar level of junior Nationals.

She recently reached the finals at Futures for 200-yard breaststroke and the 400 yard IM, and placed No. 16 for the 200-yard breaststroke.

Recently, she attended the Mission Viejo San Fran Crippen Memorial Swim Meet, where she placed No. 9 for the 200-yard breaststroke. She also attended two Far Western meets on April 7 and placed No. 6 for the 200-yard breaststroke.

Currently, she is ranked No. 50 in the state and she has committed to NYU for Division III swimming.

"I'm excited to be attending NYU for swimming. Maybe I can go to the Olympics, but we'll see," Tokuz said.

Runner up: Jalyin Harrigan

As both a star soccer player and track and field hurdler, senior Jalyin Harrigan proved to be a valuable veteran member on both teams this year.

Last year, Harrigan qualified for the Stanford Invitational for track and field and made CCS. Additionally, she also set a school record in the 300m hurdles of 45.53 seconds.

This year, at the Santa Clara Valley Athletic League (SCVAL), she placed first in 100-meter hurdles, 300-meter hurdles, and was part of the first place finishes in the 4x1 and 4x4 relays.

At CCS Finals, she also placed No. 6 in the 100m hurdles, and No. 8 in the 300m hurdles.♦

Junior forward verbally commits to play for United States Naval Academy Division I soccer

By Neal Malhotra

Dribbling across the field, weaving through six defenders, junior forward Yul Hong jumped up, heading the ball toward the goal, and watched the net ripple in the frigid San Francisco air. The crowd exploded as the U17 De Anza Force Major League Soccer (MLS) Next team took a 1-0 lead against San Francisco Glens SC in early May. With the team's stellar defense and Hong's goal, the game ended with a 2-0 win for the powerful Force team.

The game was electrifying and memorable, not just for the crowd, but for Hong as well. After the game, he received a phone call from the Division I Navy Midshipmen Men's Soccer coach, Tim O'Donohue, extending an offer to play soccer for the team starting in fall 2024.

Hong had been in contact with O'Donohue for six months prior to the game after the head coach watched him play in the December Palm Springs college showcase. They stayed in touch through text and phone calls and the coach came out to other MLS Next games to watch Hong play.

Hong was not just being pursued by the Naval Academy, however. Playing in the MLS Next league, the highest level of competition in the country, Hong was part of both the U17 and U19 MLS Next teams. In mid-May, he helped the U19 team win all three of their games in a playoff qualifying tournament in Washington, D.C., eventually landing them the second seed in their upcoming playoffs. Because Hong plays in the MLS Next League, he is not permitted to play for the school so he is constantly training with the same team and coaches.

Hong, who started playing recreational



nounced his verbal commitment via Instagram on May 17.

Hong noted that the Naval Academy is different from most universities because students do not have to pay tuition in order to attend.

Instead, students must enlist in the Navy for five years after graduation.

Additionally, the Naval Academy has stricter rules and customs that students are forced to abide by.

For example, students are forced to eat together at the same time every day, parties are not allowed and they have daily training sessions with their company.

"I was talking to [Princeton] but I felt that I wouldn't get the opportunities [the Naval Academy could give me]."

JUNIOR Yul Hong

Hong said that he is considering pursuing a career as a naval pilot, and the Academy provides a good training ground for that path.

The Naval Academy also allows all freshmen to come in undecided, which is an aspect Hong appreciated as it would give him the opportunity to try a wide variety of classes and fresh start before he settles on a single major.

"I'm happy I made my decision to go to the Naval Academy," Hong said. "I know they can do great things for my soccer career and my real career."♦

SWIMMING

Swim attends CIF for the first time in four years

By Mitchell Chen & Victoria Lin

attend in four years."

CCS was held at Hollister High School on May 5-6.

The swim team cheered for their girls' relay team during the CIF State championships at Clovis West High School, which took place May 11-13.

The girls' 200-yard medley relay team — consisting of senior Zeynep Tokuz, junior Meher Bhatnagar and freshmen Kelsee Zhang and Emma Geng qualified for CIF States — and placed third.

In addition, Zhang also qualified for the 100-yard butterfly, where she placed first (see story on page 1).

"It was a great feeling," Tokuz said. "I'm glad we were able to qualify for States, especially since Saratoga hasn't been able to

individual medley (IM) and the 100-yard breaststroke. Zhang swam the 100-yard butterfly and the 200-yard IM.

The boys' swim team — consisting of senior Channie Hong, senior Mark Liu, junior Jarrett Singh, sophomore Yusuf Tokuz and freshmen Taewon Yim and Kunal Bhatnagar — also competed in CCS.

The boys' relay team qualified for the 200-yard medley, 200-yard free relay and the 400-yard free relay. Liu also swam at CCS for his individual events, the 50-yard freestyle and the 100-yard freestyle. Unfortunately, none of the boys made it to CIF States.

"Even though we didn't make it to states,

it was a really amazing and fun experience to go to CCS with my team," Singh said. "Competing in such a large competition, I get to see my friends who swim in other leagues and clubs."

Despite the boys' team not making it to CIF States, the swim team had a significantly better season than last year, with the girls' ending with a 2-4 record and the boys' a 1-5 record in the De Anza league.

Last year, both teams placed last. This year, with the addition of talented new freshmen, the swim team was more competitive.

"I've always liked the swim team," Tokuz said. "Everyone put in effort this season and we all had a great bond."♦

KELSEY ZHANG

continued from pg. 1

Because of the closeness Zhang feels with PASA, she feels more comfortable swimming with her peers and always feels like she has a strong support system behind her.

"In practice, we help each other, and if it's a hard set, we can say 'Oh, you can do it!'" she said. "I feel like we can also learn more from each other."

Zhang recounts a meet when she had felt extremely discouraged after being disqualified from a relatively large meet she was hoping to win.

She said her teammates helped bring her spirit up immediately.

"All my teammates came over and gave me hugs and told me it's

okay and stuff, and then they comforted me and brought me snacks and food," Zhang said.

In addition to growing with the family in her club team, Zhang has also recently found that she has grown in regards to her personal training.

When Zhang was younger, she remembers that her father would take care of most of the logistics, such as when and what skills she trains.

Now, however, it's up to her to take initiative when training and take care of her developing skills on her own.

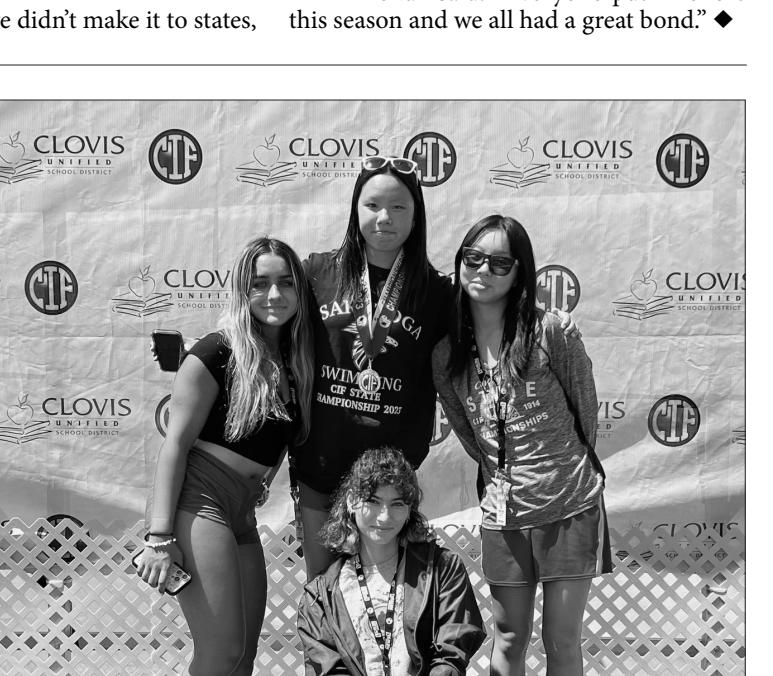
For example, if Zhang ever feels like she needs more practice in a certain area — for example to train her arms, legs or core — she might decide to go to the gym to train on her own instead of her dad taking her.

As Zhang focuses her swim-

"I want to keep swimming in college and even go to the Olympics."

FRESHMAN Kelsey Zhang

"I want to get into college for swimming, and I hope I will still be able to pursue my dream of going to the Olympics after college," Zhang said.♦



The girls' 400-yard medley relay team poses for a photo at CIF States with junior Meher Bhatnagar on the left, senior Zeynep Tokuz at the bottom, freshman Kelsey Zhang on top and freshman Emma Geng on the right.

Courtesy of TOGA SWIMS

BOYS' TENNIS

Midseason changes allow for CCS qualification

by Daniel Wu
& Ariel Zhou

From unexpected injuries to rained-out practices, the boys' tennis team faced no shortage of challenges this season, overcoming them and ending the season in a CCS semifinal loss to No. 1 seeded Menlo Park.

By the season's midpoint, the team stood at a 3-3 record as they struggled to find their groove. However, as the player injuries healed and the courts dried, the team gradually made a comeback and concluded their season with a 7-5 league record.

The Falcons began their CCS journey with a 6-1 win against Mountain View on May 8. They then advanced into the quarterfinals where they eked out a 4-3 win against Bellarmine on May 10. Ultimately, the team ended CCS in the semifinals where they fell 7-0 to Menlo Park on May 11.

No. 3 singles player junior Johan Amiranen attributed the team's early season struggles to having an underclassmen-heavy team. This involves greater cooperation compared to outside tournaments as players are often paired into doubles rather than the familiar singles. Still, the Falcons were talented and learned with each match.

"We're all really close to each other, which is a good thing for team spirit, but we hopped around a little too much so we lacked that crucial locked-in practice time

at the start of the season," Amiranen said.

Nonetheless, the underclassmen proved their ability as freshman Somei Ogata and Nikhil Srivastava currently play as the No. 1 and No. 2 singles players on the team.

Additionally, key team members were afflicted by injuries, including team captain Julian Berkowitz-Sklar, who suffered elbow tendinitis, and junior Shrey Jain, who was forced to opt out due to a heel fracture.

At the time of injury, Berkowitz-Sklar played as No. 3 doubles and Jain played as No. 1 doubles. Their injuries forced a shift in the doubles pairing, and sophomore Teddy O' Yang substituted in for Berkowitz-Sklar while freshman Andre Popas substituted in for Jain. The players were forced to adjust their play styles in order to accommodate their new teammates.

In order to facilitate an easier transition for the new doubles, head coach Florin Maricic ran circuit practice sessions where every few rounds players would be placed with new doubles partners in order to familiarize them in playing with different play styles.

Following the return of Berkowitz-Sklar and Jain at the end of March, the team swapped to their normal doubles pairings which led to a string of victories.

"I was worried that I wouldn't be able to enjoy my final high school season so it truly is a blessing that I've recovered to a point where I can play," Berkowitz-Sklar said.



Courtesy of LUKE STRATAKOS

Freshman Somei Ogata prepares a backhand hit in a match against Bellarmine on May 10.

Amiranen mentioned that the team has been able to bond through strife, as the challenges from missing key players to facing multiple losses early season meant that players had to be understanding of one another and persevere together.

"I'm definitely proud of the work that the team, and especially the underclassmen have put in this season. High school tennis was quite the ride and I'm grateful for every moment I've shared with the team," Berkowitz-Sklar said. ♦

he feels confident in the team to succeed in future seasons as the underclassmen have trained rigorously and learned to cope with unexpected challenges. He hopes that they will continue to overcome adversity.

"We definitely grew to understand that tennis is not just about winning your own match but also cheering on and looking out for your teammates," Amiranen said.

Captain Berkowitz-Sklar mentioned that

BASEBALL

Strong season ends short after a 6-1 loss in CCS quarterfinals

by Mitchell Chen

After finishing second in the El Camino league with a 10-5 record, the baseball team qualified for CCS for the second year in a row, but their season ended sooner than they wanted after a 6-1 defeat in the quarterfinals to Capuchino on May 20.

The Falcons had a rough start to the game with the scoreboard reading 4-1 to Capuchino after the first inning.

"We just couldn't hit anything and we were all a bit shaken up after the first inning,

especially after one of their players hit a grand slam," junior catcher Nathan Lee said. Star pitcher sophomore Aiden Chen had a bumpy game. Throughout the game, the Falcons tightened up their defense, with Capuchino only scoring two more runs. The key to this was junior first baseman Abhinav Kiran, who had eight put-outs.

The Falcons lost 8-0 and 6-3 against Fremont on May 11 and May 9 respectively; won 4-3, 9-0 and 4-0 against Lynbrook on May 4, May 2 and April 7 respectively; and started the season going 3-3. Chen felt that the Falcons' offense and start-

"Now we have a better understanding of what our team is capable of."

SOPHOMORE Aiden Chen

ing lineup didn't quite perform to what they were capable of.

Despite not advancing to CCS semifinals, the Falcons are proud of what they accomplished this season and hope to continue to find success next year as well.

"Overall we had a decent season, but now we have a better understanding of what our team is capable of after back to back CCS appearances," Chen said. "We need more individual commitment to create a championship environment and a championship team." ♦

BOYS' VOLLEYBALL

3-0 loss to Harker in CCS quarters ends the Falcons' season

by Derek Liang, Andrew Lin & Aiden Ye

Photo by WILLIAM NORWOOD



Junior Samuel Kau leaps up, preparing to hit a top jump serve against Los Altos on April 27.

were to Los Altos, with whom they competed tightly but were never able to beat. Junior co-captain Kali Duvvuri, who won the 16 national championship last year with his club, partially attributes the team's losses to Los Altos to their dependence on momentum.

During some games, both teams managed to get into positions where they scored many points in a row. This put the Falcons at a disadvantage when the opposing team gained significant momentum, like with Los Altos' last-minute 6-point streak that cost the Falcons the game during their final match on April 21.

"We came out with a fire this year. We didn't want to repeat what we did last year [going 0-14], so we were all determined to train really hard, even before the season started," said junior co-captain Samuel Kau. Three out of five of the Falcons' losses

were into ruts and letting our mistakes pile up," Duvvuri said.

Coach Lori Gragnola said next season, the team can break out of ruts and prevent games from being as close as they sometimes are by "coming together as a team on the court, just to make sure that everybody knows that it's OK if you made a mistake."

In addition to Si and Pak, other players anticipated to become key to next year's success include junior outside hitter Eric Norris, Kau and junior middle blockers Edmund Hsu and Scotty Rich.

Early in the season, Norris said that optimism and team energy was going to be a big factor for the team. Upon the end of the season, he thinks that both the team energy and crowd energy delivered in the games was phenomenal.

"I think that the optimism we had going into the season paid off, we've really been able to deliver and make it further than in multiple past years," Norris said. "The sense of optimism we clung onto reflects our season very well." ♦

"He [Kau] does a really good job of rais-

ing morale," Si said. "During games and timeouts, he keeps the energy up for the team."

Looking at the season as a whole, players said their teamwork improved dramatically, and although the season didn't end exactly the way they wanted, they more than met their goals.

Many of the underclassmen on the varsity team showed promise of becoming the team's new leaders next year, with Kau noting that freshman outside hitter Brennan Pak will be key to filling the large shoes left behind by senior opposite hitter Seth Hulme.

"Next year, I think [Si's] gonna step up," Duvvuri said. "This year, he was primarily a serving specialist. Next year, he's gonna have a huge role."

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GIRLS' SOFTBALL

Freshmen key to season improvement

by Divya Vadlakonda & Beverly Xu

Leigh, taking the lead to win 7-6 on March 7. They realized they could succeed, creating a tremendous positive impact on future performances.

In Weidner's eyes, softball games are one-third skill and two-thirds game mentality. From the prolonged, anxiety-inducing breaks on the bench to the feeling that each failed pitch or swing is an individual fault, Weidner believes that an optimistic mindset is crucial in winning games.

[We were thinking that] whatever happens will happen, we're just gonna play our best and play hard."

SOPHOMORE Saira Ramakrishnan

"In games where we're down by a lot we tend to get down on ourselves really easily," Ramakrishnan said. "But honestly, it really just takes one person to say something [positive] or help you out to [uplift our game]."

Ramakrishnan also mentioned how all four freshman players — Soumya Katkere, Vivian Lei, Katelynn Vasquez and Sandy Vavrousek — have greatly helped boost

the team's attitude through their rapid improvement during the season, which shone during team practices and games. With only Vavrousek and Vasquez having prior experience playing softball in elementary school, Davey started out the season by implementing extra practices to teach the four players the basics of throwing, hitting, fielding and base running.

The practices proved to be effective, as each player improved considerably throughout the season. Freshman right and left fielder Soumya Katkere said that the criticism she received from the coaches on her swing, as well as the continuous drills to refine her catching and throwing, greatly aided in improving her skills.

Due to the freshmen's contributions in outfielding, pinch running and occasional hitting, combined with stronger leadership and guidance from both junior co-captain and second base Vivienne Brooks and senior co-captain and first base Lily Guzman, the players have had a much better season than they originally anticipated.

Looking ahead to the 2023-24 season, even with losing key senior players — Guzman and first baseman Irene Frazier — Davey believes that the increased participation from newcomers this year and remaining star players such as Ramakrishnan and current shortstop Sydney Riera will help the



Courtesy of DEAN TATSUNO

Junior Caitlin Weber steps up to bat at the league game against Monta Vista on May 20.

Falcons overcome any challenges next year brings them.

"We have a lot of inexperienced people who've gotten much better," Davey said. "I'm really proud of how they contributed over the course of the season." ♦

TRACK AND FIELD

Two seniors race at CCS but do not make States

by George Hu

Sophomore distance runner Pranav Rajan trailed just ahead of the other runners in the 1600-meter race at the final dual meet against Cupertino on April 18. With the finish line in sight and two runners closely behind him, he charged down the final 100 meters, finishing first with a time of 4 minutes and 45.01 seconds.

Even with Rajan's impressive race, the boys' varsity team lost 70-55; however, the varsity girls won 78-43. Overall, the boys' team ended with a 1-5 record over the course of six dual meets, placing fifth in the El Camino league, while the girls' team ended with a 4-2 record, finishing third.

Head and distance coach Ian Tippets, head and jumps coach Archie Ljepava, sprints coach Rick Ellis, throws coach Stephen Matos, and hurdlers coach Cole Tipper helped guide the athletes throughout the season.

Although this season's results were subpar for the team as a whole, 10 athletes were able to do well enough in the El Camino League Trials and Finals to qualify for the SCVAL Finals on May 6. Five of those 10 moved on to compete in CCS Trials the following week on May 13.

Senior Jalyin Harrigan qualified for the 4x100 relay, 100-meter hurdles with a time of 15.51 seconds and eighth in the 300-meter hurdles with a time of 46.67 seconds. Tippets placed ninth in the shot put with a distance of 33 feet and 8.5 inches and ninth in the discus with a distance of 107 feet and 8 inches. With their marks, both seniors advanced to CCS finals.

Facing stiff competition, neither athlete was able to move forward and compete in the CIF State Championships.

At finals, Harrigan placed sixth in the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 15.51 seconds — coincidentally the same exact time as in prelims — and the 300-meter hurdles, while senior Mika Tipper qualified for the shot put and discus. Senior Isha Goswami qualified for the 400-meter run and the 4x100. Sophomore Natalie Zaragoza and Clara Zhao also qualified for the 4x100.

During trials, Harrigan placed sixth in the 100-meter hurdles with a time of 15.51 seconds — coincidentally the same exact time as in prelims — and the 300-meter hurdles, while senior Mika Tipper qualified for the shot put and discus. Senior Isha Goswami qualified for the 400-meter run and the 4x100. Sophomore Natalie Zaragoza and Clara Zhao also qualified for the 4x100.

Despite being extraordinary athletes, they still feel that they have room for im-

provement, especially for Tippets, who plans to continue participating in track and field at De Anza College.

"For throwing, I think my technique is good, but the power behind my throws needs work. I feel like I have an insufficient amount of strength [when I throw]," Tipper said.

Unlike Tippets, Harrigan will not do competitive college track. Regardless of future plans, both athletes' main goal for the season was to have fun with track and field before leaving for college. Harrigan felt that by possessing the passion to aim higher every time she competed, the hard work she put in during practices paid off.

"I gained confidence from track," Harrigan said. "Everyone feels empowered after they finish their race, especially if it's a longer distance. Everyone feels good about what they've achieved." ♦

BADMINTON

Girls' doubles make States

by Sunny Cao & Saachi Jain

a 22-8 win against Monta Vista on May 2.

As Sanndhi reflects on the season, she attributes the majority of the team's losses to a lack of reliability among players.

"Many of the team members have been inconsistent, both in performance and attendance," she said. "It made it difficult to pinpoint who will play which matches."

While the team didn't emerge as champions, the doubles team of sisters junior Sanndhi Boppana and sophomore Samanvi Boppana had a strong postseason run.

The pair placed second in girls' doubles at CCS, qualifying them to the NorCal championship on May 20. At NorCal, Sanndhi and Samanvi attended leagues, and all advanced to CCS after placing in the top four in their events. The first round was on May 6, and the second round was on May 6, with CCS following a week later on May 13.

With Guo, Liu and Oaklander graduating, the team is looking for strong players like junior Avik Belenje and freshman Ishir Gupta to carry the torch next year.

"Throughout the season, we had a lot of close individual games that led to a collective team win, and I'm really proud of how hard everyone fought this season," Guo said. ♦

BOYS' GOLF

Team sends two to CCS

by Saachi Jain, Amy Luo & Sarah Zhou

After placing top three in the De Anza League for the past four years, the boys' golf team had a subpar 2023 season, dropping to sixth place out of seven teams. The Falcons finished with a 3-8-1 league record and failed to qualify for CCS.

The team maintained almost the same roster as last year — when they ended the season with a 5-6-1 record and qualified for CCS as a team.

"On paper, we were supposed to be better with one more year of practice, but that didn't happen," senior No. 4 player Howard Shu said. "There weren't any major setbacks; most of us couldn't find the same level of consistency that we had last year."

Only two individuals, sophomore No. 2 player Oliver Pott and Shu, qualified for CCS on May 3 after shooting 77 and 75 respectively on the Santa Teresa Golf Course. During CCS on May 9 at Laguna Seca Golf Ranch, both Pott and Shu shot 78, just three shots shy of qualifying for finals.

"Much of the team, including myself, was not really prepared for the season this year," Shu said. "If the team is able to start off strong it makes it much easier to carry momentum and confidence through the season, which I think is how we did well last year." ♦



snapshots: A look back at senior year



Photo by WILLIAM NORWOOD



Photo by ALLISON TAN



Photo by ATREY DESAI



Courtesy of LORI TIMMONS



Photo by ATREY DESAI

Seniors Kiana Compeau, Dylan Sinton, Nadine Cobourn and Anand Agrawal dance in celebration of their final year of high school while wearing senior jerseys in the 2022-2023 Homecoming dance in September.

Seniors cheering in student section during Homecoming football game.

Seniors Kiana Compeau, Shaan Sridhar, Isha Jagadish, Maithili Kulkarni dance wearing traditional Indian clothing during the partner dance of the 2023 annual Bombay in the Bay performance held in February.

Seniors strategizing with their coach, varsity team member Max Timmons, in a huddle during seniors vs. sophomores Powderpuff game.

Seniors celebrating the end of high school during the final school rally.

Dear Seniors, you taught us well; we're going to miss you!

Saying Good-Bai



Sam Bai

With seniors graduating in the next few days, it will once again be that time of the year when juniors and underclassmen have to say their final goodbyes. Although graduation should be a happy time for us to celebrate the seniors on finishing four grueling years of high school, it will still be sad to see them go.

My senior friends have been my greatest advisors — it's crazy to realize that next year I'll be like them, taking all the younger underclassmen under my wing and tutoring them on the ins and outs of high school.

When choosing classes for next year, seniors are always the best people to ask. For example, as I struggled between choosing

AP Lit or AP Lang for my English class next year, the seniors described the workload I would face and the hours of work ahead of me.

Thanks to their advice, I chose AP Lang because I realized I might not get the chance to study philosophy in the future: According to my senior friends, engaging in deep discussion during Socratic seminars taught them the importance of being decisive, a skill that can be applied to everyday life.

When I struggled with learning U-substitution in Calculus, I was able to count on my senior friends to clarify the concept, taking me through example problems during tutorial and testing me on conceptual questions. Even when I was hard stuck in the silver level in League of Legends, I could always call my senior friends for help to win games and climb rankings.

They never fail to give life-changing advice in personal situations, too.

For example, there used to be someone that I liked, but I was not confident enough to do anything about it. Thankfully, my fel-

low seniors pushed me out of my comfort zone and offered me steps on how to proceed with asking her to prom. If it wasn't for their constant meddling, you would have found me slow dancing with my own shadow at prom.

Beyond their valuable advice, my senior friends have also become some of my closest friends.

During the first semester, it was hilarious to see the seniors rant about their failed relationships while simultaneously scrambling to finish their college applications.

I can even say that senior friends have inspired lifestyle changes for me: One of them was able to get me into working out. They even went so far as to help me sneak into a gym without a membership and take me golfing at the country club as a guest, pushing me to explore new experiences that I wouldn't have otherwise wanted to try.

The sad reality is that graduation will probably be the last time that I talk to many of the seniors, as I cheer them on and snap photos as they walk down the football field



Graphic by LEYNACHAN

for the last time. They will move on, making new friends and living new experiences.

I have known most of these seniors for years and sadly, our time together has passed in a blink of an eye. I wish all the seniors happiness in their new lives. Congratulations to class of 2023, we're going to miss you. ♦

The Junioritis virus is plaguing the Class of '24

Flailing Falcons



Neal Malhotra and Mitchell Chen

We don't know whether it's because of school or the warm weather, but every day more and more juniors (including us) struggle to climb out of bed to go to school on time.

We cram whatever is left on our desks from last night into our bags, eyes half closed, perhaps vibing to Katy Perry or Taylor Swift. We drive to school sleepily with our newly obtained licenses, trying not to crash into the slow-moving Saratoga parents. As we slowly ease into the parking lot, we see seniors seem to have caught the same condition: They too sluggishly stumble through the quad on the way to class.

At 8:30 a.m. or later, we finally make it to our first-period or second-period classes and soon find ourselves battling to stay awake (and hoping that this tardy doesn't result in yet another Treasure Toga after-school work punishment).

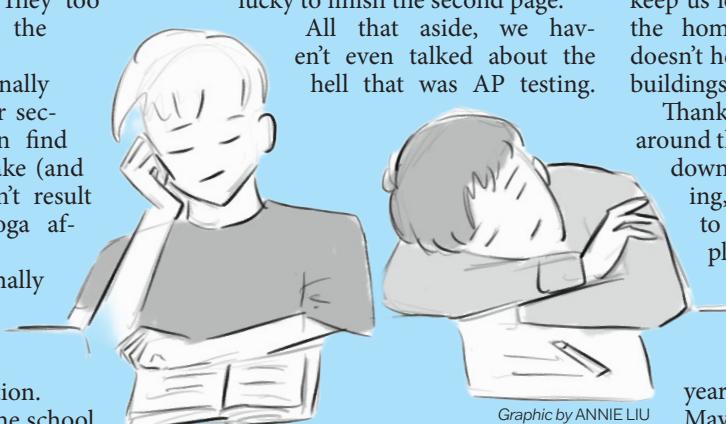
AP testing season is finally over (thank god!), our finals are finished, and we know which teachers we need to ask for letters of recommendation. For all intents and purposes the school

year is over and we are now not-so-patiently waiting for the first day of summer vacation.

AP classes are usually the toughest courses and take the most time out of our schedules, so it would be logical to assume that we don't have much to do now that exams are over and would be able to sleep at 9 p.m. every night. Sadly, we still see ourselves sleeping at 2 a.m., watching trashy shows on Netflix, not doing the 15 minutes of homework assigned until morning and requesting our parents to please call us out sick.

Now, the most difficult part of school is motivating ourselves to complete the end-of-the-year assignments that non-AP courses have. Most of us juniors are barely able to find the brain cells to function, let alone do homework — if our English teachers assign 30 pages of sleep-inducing reading to complete by next class, we'd be lucky to finish the second page.

All that aside, we haven't even talked about the hell that was AP testing.



Graphic by ANNIE LIU

Many of us had to wake up at 6:30 a.m. (goodbye, two hours of sleep) to get ready for an APUSH exam, get to the school by 7:30 a.m., realize that none of the administrators were there, and stand in the cold until the doors finally opened at 8:30 a.m.

And let's not forget about the tests themselves, either. We're supposed to remember so much irrelevant information from the very beginning of the year that we forgot the minute we stepped out of class. Oops.

The worst part is the beautiful, tempting weather that shines in through our windows as we sit down to read "The Things they Carried," which, we may add, is probably the most confusing and stress-inducing book of the year (take that, "Beloved!"). The scorching heat makes us just want to jump into a lake and swim for hours on end, only coming home when the sun sets. It should be a crime to keep us locked up in our rooms finishing the homework we were assigned, and it doesn't help that the school's cinder block buildings make it feel like a prison.

Thankfully, summer break is just around the corner, which means doubling down on doing internships, volunteering, and taking outside classes (not to mention starting our college applications). Many of us have a very busy schedule this summer, but let's make sure we get some much-needed rest to

help us push through our senior year, even if that rest started in mid-May. ♦

top ten

WORST PAINS

- 10 Papercut pain.** When you use hand sanitizer, you especially feel the sting of cuts you didn't even know existed.
- 9 Back pain.** You're simply gaining a valuable perspective on how old people feel.
- 8 Head pain.** Teenagers shouldn't have migraines, but taking 7 APs while doing six extracurricular activities can have that effect.
- 7 AP testing pain.** It's that time of year again when you get to spend 3 hours tirelessly writing for your AP US History exam only to realize that Abraham Lincoln was in fact, not from the 1900s.
- 6 Test grade pain.** There's nothing like that feeling of impending dread when you collect your test after your teacher writes that the test average is 48%.
- 5 Toe-stubbing pain.** Almost as bad as stepping on a Lego in your bare feet.
- 4 Deadline pain.** Everyone knows the best time to start big projects is the night before.
- 3 Covid pain.** There are few experiences less rewarding than lying in bed all day and doing nothing.
- 2 Knee pain.** My knees sound like I have a painful argument everytime I take the lightest step.
- 1 Rejection pain.** When the recipient of a promposal says no after you spend two months gathering up your courage to ask.

>> Victoria Lin and Aiden Ye