

**ENTERTAINMENT | 10**  
  
**SOUNDCLOUD**

Senior duo creates SoundCloud music.

**IN-DEPTH | 18**  
  
**McDonald's**

Fewer students work in fast food jobs.

**SPORTS | 21**  


Basketball team looks to bounce back tonight.

  
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# THE saratogafalcon



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## SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE WEEK

### SCHOOL BRINGS FOCUS TO SERIOUS TOPICS

BY MeganChen & KrithiSankar

In 2013, then ASB president Sasan Sabat helped lead a team that created the school's first Speak Up for Change (SUFC) week, with an assembly on Tuesday and Friday including inspirational stories from teachers and alumni. After the tremendous success the event had that year, the Leadership class has continued to hold SUFC in order to emphasize strength in community.

This year's event was held during

the week of Jan. 22 and emphasized the theme "Escaping the Mask We Live In."

On Tuesday, student speakers juniors Connor Oaklander and Surbhi Bhat, seniors Leena Elzeiny and Enzo Coglitore and teachers Cathy Head, Janny Cahatol and Susanna Ryan spoke to the school community about their personal experiences dealing with a range of challenges. A video from Breaking Down the Walls speaker Dean Whellams played at the start of the

>> **SUFC** on pg. 6

### Read more about the speakers:



**Junior Connor Oaklander** on his life after severe concussions.  
pg. 16



**Senior Leena Elzeiny** on having a father with mental illness.  
pg. 17

**Junior Surbhi Bhat** talks about academic stress on Jan. 22 during a schoolwide assembly held in the Large Gym.

## School fee policy changed to comply with state law

BY ShamaGupta & AnanyaVadlakonda

Following statewide legislative changes for fees and donations in public schools three years ago, the school board has prohibited mandatory fees related to educational activities on campus since the beginning of this year.

These legislative changes have made raising money for school activities significantly different — and sometimes more difficult — from in previous years. In the past, families paid a set individual amount for competitions, buses or activities, but now paying money is no longer mandatory.

Rather, any money used for a learning purpose has to be either raised by the group or be donated.

### New policies

Spelled out in Board Policies 3290 and 6145, the new regulations prohibit students from being charged for anything mandated by the curriculum for any class.

As a result, several issues have arisen. The fees and donations issue, along with legal volunteering restrictions, has affected the athletics department.

According to assistant principal Brian

>> **FEES** on pg. 2

## Some freshmen face discipline for Driver's Ed cheating incident

BY JessicaWang, CalliaYuan & ChristineZhang

A crowd of freshmen gathered at school at 5:30 p.m. on Jan. 11, waiting to enter health and driver's education teacher Amy Obenour's classroom and retake a driver's education test. The new test, consisting of two paper multiple-choice tests of 100 questions each, could be taken that day or the next day.

Late last semester, scores for the original online version of the test were canceled when several students were discovered to have cheated on it. Obenour said that some of her students opened up windows on their Chromebooks to look up answers on Quizlet while they were taking the driver's education assessments on Canvas, the school's learning management system.

Throughout the driver's education unit, there were eight total driver's education tests, and Obenour thinks that cheating occurred in all eight of them.

According to assistant principal Brian Thompson, academic integrity violations are the school's most common disciplinary

issue. In the fall semester, there were 74 reported incidents of cheating. That number is up from the 37 incidents reporting in the 2017 fall semester. Thompson thinks the increase can be attributed to the influx of electronic violations due to the incorporation of technology in classrooms and especially in exams.

Obenour compiled a spreadsheet of all her students' test grades in the driver's education unit to help figure out which students had questionable scores.

"I know (some students) were involved because there were either witness statements or irregularities in all eight of their grades," Obenour said. "There were maybe six people who came and confessed to me."

She also allowed students to come forward through a Canvas assignment, which prompted additional students to turn themselves or other classmates in.

Referrals were handed to students who confessed to the transgression, while students in the classes said that many who did cheat were never accused and faced no

>> **INTEGRITY** on pg. 6

>> **what'sinside**

**OPINION**

**SHS Confessions**

Does the new confession page really benefit the school community? **pg. 8**

**SPORTS**

**Super Bowl preview**

Reporters explain why each team will win the championship game. **pg. 23**

news >> **briefs**

**Biology students visit Catalina Island on Field Trip**

Students from AP Biology and Marine Biology classes took a trip to Catalina Island from Jan. 18-20 with AP Biology teacher Cheryl Lenz, Marine Biology teacher Jill McCrystal, assistant principal Brian Safine and math teacher Andrew Shoemaker.

A total of forty students went on the trip. During the three-day trip, the students stayed at Catalina Island Marine Institute (CIMI) at Toyon Bay and participated in activities led by camp counselors.

On their first day on the island, students climbed two-story rock climbing walls and took part in a nighttime astronomy hike.

This is where they learned about constellations and the stories behind them.

On the second day, students went snorkeling twice, once in the daytime.

Their second time was at night with wetsuits and flashlights.

On the last day, students participated in numerous hands-on labs.

In these, they learned about topics including oceanography, plankton, sharks and invertebrate.

"In general, the Catalina trip was a great experience," junior Prisha Samdarshi said. "The amazing activities and labs made up for the lack of Wi-Fi and cell service. I would recommend it to anyone who loves the water and learning new things."

— Shreya Katkere

**Library printing is now free of charge for students**

The library, which had been charging 25 cents per page for printing, is now offering this service free of charge.

This policy change has been in the works since the beginning of the year.

"During this school year, the district office re-evaluated what and how much students were charged for a variety of items," librarian Kevin Heyman said. "During this re-evaluation, it was decided to stop charging students for printing."

The library printing costs are covered by the school's budget.

This is the first time the printing policy has changed since Heyman started working at the school in 2008.

The printer, which used to be behind the main desk, is now located in an accessible spot next to the desk.

Other schools in the area, like Palo Alto High School, also offer their students free black-and-white printing.

Lynbrook High School charges 10 cents a page, less than the previous fee at SHS.

Prior to the change, many students would frequent the journalism room for free printing.

However, after the library began offering free printing, journalism adviser Michael Tyler said he has noticed a decrease in students using journalism printers.

While most students are still unaware of the change, those who frequently use the library's printers like sophomore Wilson Fung appreciate the policy change.

"I'd usually have to pay up to a dollar to print my assignment but now I don't," Fung said.

— Callia Yuan

>> **falcononline**



**Top Story**

Garden project to translate classroom learning to hands-on experience.



**Top Photo**

Senior Akshat Patwardhan stretches for the ball during a recent soccer game against Homestead.



To use: cover the QR codes except for the one you would like to scan, then use a QR scanning app (i.e., Snapchat by long press).

>> **picturethis**



FALCON // ALAN ZU

**Final Details >> Construction on the new student center continues. The center is estimated to be completed in late February and will open soon afterward.**

# Students participate in the annual F=ma physics contest

By Christine Zhang

As the bell rang to dismiss students from their sixth periods on Jan. 23, 34 students headed to physics teacher Kirk Davis's Room 1014 to take the annual F=ma physics contest, consisting of 25 multiple choice questions to be completed in 75 minutes.

The F=ma is sponsored by the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT), which Davis is a part of. Science club vice president Jeffrey Xu coordinated the event with Davis.

After the test, Davis made and kept a copy of all the scantrons, and he sent the official ones back to AAPT for grading.

In approximately one month's time, AAPT will release the cutoff score for the F=ma exam to determine the students who qualify for the USA Physics Olympiad,

the semifinal round of the contest. Davis said that Saratoga High typically has around 10 qualifiers per year.

In an effort to prevent cheating, Davis said that the AAPT has made the testing window narrower. In the past, the test could be administered any time during a certain two-week period, but the test dates are now restricted to two days. The exam at Saratoga High took place on the earlier date.

Xu also faced a new challenge organizing this year's F=ma contest. Due to a state-mandated school policy prohibiting mandatory fees for activities, he had to ask for donations instead of requiring payments from students for the test.

"One of our main issues was that we're not allowed to collect money anymore," Xu said. "So it was really difficult to get all the

money in, but we were finally able to raise the right amount of money to get the tests."

Davis said that he has administered the F=ma exam since he first began teaching AP Physics at the school, which was in 2008. He encourages his students to participate in the contest.

"We open it up to anybody who wants to take it," Davis said. "I encourage kids to do it because I think it's good fun. It gives them a chance to test themselves and get some recognition for being able to do well on physics tests."

Xu also said that the F=ma is a good opportunity for students to apply their knowledge in physics.

"I think it's just a good chance for kids who have been studying a lot of physics to compete in a national level contest and receive national recognition if they deserve it," Xu said. ♦

**FEES**

*continued from pg. 1*

Thompson, enforcing the new laws has made it harder to fund transportation for sports teams, requiring more time to fundraise for them. In addition, the administration has demanded volunteers have a tuberculosis test and fingerprinting done in order for the school to be able to rely on transportation using parents' vehicles.

Thompson said that as a result, "we have significantly more volunteers registered at Saratoga than we've had in years past."

While carpooling is a solution some have opted for, others chose to fundraise more through families and friends — both of which have worked.

In addition, several clubs on campus have had to rely on donations to fund activities that require monetary support to happen.

Science club vice president junior Jeffrey Xu said that the total cost of hosting the F=ma physics contest was \$315. The only way to fund this was to request donations, which worked out in the end.

"Because of the new school policy, we had to request \$10 donations," Xu said. "We said that if we weren't able to raise the money

needed, we would not be able to host the competition. I think that motivated the students to pay."

However, due to the many intricacies to the new policies, there are several gray areas to the rules. For instance, in PE classes, uniforms which are \$20, are required. This year, though, students have an opportunity to wear clothes not provided by the school as long as they're in school colors.

"We can't charge [students] the money [for uniforms] unless they voluntarily want that, but we have to give them the opportunity to wear something," Thompson said.

However, with the recreational parts, the school is allowed to charge an attendance fee because it isn't directly related to education.

Deeming activities unnecessary also is a gray area. Although school dances are considered recreational, school trips fall into the educationally necessary category.

However, with the school's increased dependence on donations rather than mandatory fees asked of parents, the policies leave little room for underfunded trips, and there is a higher possibility for activities to be canceled.

"As a school organization, if we know we have a trip and it's in two months, we have to have a financial plan to raise money for that

trip," Thompson said. "If we don't raise enough money, then we have to cancel the trip."

**SHS's transition period**

In order for the changes to be effective, this school year is supposed to be a transition year.

"The year is an opportunity for us to educate everybody," Thompson said. "The hope is that as we start the next school year, everybody's been fully educated and we've been able to change our internal processes to make it work in compliance with the law."

To put the policies into effect, programs like Speech and Debate, Music Boosters, Athletic Boosters and Robotics are being guided by the administration to change their policies, forms and methods.

Teachers have also been educated about the changes. For classrooms, the biggest change comes with field trips. Forms given out to students are worded to present the total cost needed rather than having a mandatory payment section.

Little changes like these are affecting many groups on campus.

"We've done trainings with all the administrative group, teachers, athletic coaches, parent groups, ASB office and leadership teachers," Thompson said. "Basically everybody who is involved." ♦

# SEL advocates for campus connectedness and compassion through various social activities

By Allison Hartley & Alekha Vadlakonda

In schools across the country, a growing movement is recognizing that the social and emotional well-being of students has a major impact on their ability to succeed in the classroom.

At Saratoga High, the Social Emotional Learning Team (SEL), a group made up of four staff members and 15 students, has been seeking to create a safe environment and foster connections.

SEL functions "to create a more sensitive, courageous and connected learning community empowered with the tools to promote awareness and address interactions, issues, policies and procedures that undermine individual potential and achievement," according to its mission statement. SEL meets about twice a month, and students and teachers may contact assistant principal Kerry Mohnike for the team's schedule if they wish to join meetings.

"Giving teachers and students the opportunity to focus on social and emotional wellness helps establish that those things are just as important as academic success and that you can't be successful without social and emotional care," English 9 teacher Susanna Ryan, one of four staff members on the SEL team, said.

The group began almost seven years ago after some staff members, including health teacher Amy Obenour, attended a workshop called Passageworks about enhancing academic performance through social and

emotional skills.

Originally, SEL was formed to create an interdepartmental connectivity network for staff members and eventually, its goal transformed to create devices and techniques for teachers to increase a sense of belonging in the classroom. Three years ago, the District Wellness Committee for staff members and the SEL team for classroom work and students formed.

**"You never think that your teachers are actual people. You think they're people that have everything figured out, but that's so not true."**

SENIOR Iman Laique

SEL contains subcommittees for various projects, including this past October's Breaking Down the Walls week and Humans of Saratoga High (HoSH), a Facebook page that profiles people in the school community, and they analyze the social impact of activities during the month. Some of these subcommittees work with other groups on campus such as Outreach Commission on their assigned projects.

Along with focusing on social and emotional skills, the team also works on promoting equity throughout school. They worked

with the Epoch organization last year, a team that aims to challenge inequity by changing the way people engage with others on a daily basis.

"Equity work is part of an umbrella which is social emotional learning," Mohnike said. "Going to a school that you feel connected to because that school understands your culture and your background and that school respects that and includes it in the curriculum and activities is also a part of what the SEL team wanted to be connected to."

The equity and connectedness that SEL promote are evident even within meetings. Senior Iman Laique, the student liaison for the Leadership class, said that meetings help staff and students see each other as people.

"It's a very safe environment, and I've had a good experience with it," Laique said. "You never think that your teachers are actual people. You think that they're people that have everything figured out, but that's so not true."

Although connectedness is not quantitatively measurable, SEL analyzes the results of their activities through surveys and observation.

Crediting a staff activity created by SEL at the beginning of the school year that was similar to Breaking Down the Walls, Mohnike said that "[staff] were happier in the halls, and they were meeting and talking to people in ways they had never done before."

Mohnike said in the past seven years

she has seen the team make Saratoga High a "kinder, more connected place."

Mohnike wants students to develop emotional skills that are transferable to the world and help them be successful in every environment.

"We are trying to help students develop these soft skills and that is understanding the importance of connection, the importance of respect," Mohnike said.

"Though the team is seven years old, it remains relatively unknown on campus. Laique hopes to change that through more student involvement and outreach through activities.

Although she considers Breaking Down the Walls and the weeks following to be significant steps toward more compassion on campus, Mohnike said most students come to school with a strong social and emotional skills.

"There's a goodness about students anyway, so I'm hoping we don't need to have an opportunity to make it shine," Mohnike said. "I just want continual growth."

The members of SEL are seniors Anuj Changavi, Usman Khan, Hannah Chang, Iman Laique, Jenna El-Ashmawi and Samyu Iyer; juniors Krithi Sankar, Siyona Suresh, Connor Liang, Sarah Hess, Connor Oaklander and Emma Hsu; sophomores Allison Hartley and Lauren Tan; freshman Nicole Lu, and staff members Kristofer Orre, Marina Barnes, Brittany Duffy and Susanna Ryan. ♦



**Laique**  
Leadership student liaison

# Quiz Bowl excels at Cal Cup 2 with new team strategy

TWO TEAMS QUALIFY FOR THE NATIONAL COMPETITION THROUGH THEIR SUCCESS AT RECENT TOURNAMENT

By Jeffrey Xu

At the Cal Cup 2 Quiz Bowl tournament held on Jan. 19 at Bellarmine College Preparatory, the school's A and B teams placed second and third respectively, a highly impressive feat for one public school. The Escobar A Team won the competition.



**Ma**  
Quiz Bowl member

Since the top 11 teams from Cal Cup 2 qualify for the High School National Cham-

pionship Tournament (HSNCT), held in Atlanta from May 24 to 26, both teams qualified for the national tournament.

However, unbeknownst to most at the competition, the teams had been altered before the event. According to Ma, one team member, junior Satvik Kaliyur, had called in sick, so the team had to make some last-minute adjustments

to rebalance the two teams. The original A team members

split into two subteams, one consisting of junior Jason Hong and senior Kiran Rachamalla, the other consisting of juniors Jeffrey Ma and Brandon Wang.

Hong and Rachamalla were joined by junior Alvin Liu and senior Sarah Meng to complete the A Team for the competition, while Ma and Wang were accompanied by senior Anuj Changavi to complete the B Team for the competition.

"Despite this, A and B teams placed second and third respectively, which we thought was a

very good result," Ma said. "Both qualified for HSNCT, which is a plus."

Liu, Meng and Changavi had all been part of the original Quiz Bowl B Team.

Wang said that the team decided to organize their competitive teams in this fashion to qualify as many teams as possible to the HSNCT.

Wang believes that this year, by qualifying two teams to nationals, they will have a much better chance to advance far at the HSNCT competition, a feat that

the team was unable to accomplish last year.

The team also qualified for another national-level tournament, the Partnership for Academic Competition Excellence National Scholastic Championship (PACE NSC) through their top placings in previous tournaments. This one will be held in Washington, D.C., from June 8 to 9.

"With major improvements to both lineup and knowledge, we're just looking to improve on last year's finish and make a really deep run at both nationals," Ma said. ♦

# Voorhees uses candles to promote speaking Spanish

By Christine Zhang

As sophomore Aindri Patra walked into Spanish teacher Sarah Voorhees's room on the first day of second semester, she saw four candles at the front of the classroom, each labeled with a class period, that hadn't been there the previous semester.

Voorhees has a system of using candles to encourage her students to speak more Spanish in class. Each class has its own candle, and at the beginning of the period, Voorhees lights the corresponding candle for the class.

When she hears English in the classroom, she blows out the candle, and whenever a class gets through a candle, Voorhees rewards them with a movie during one of their class periods. It provides the students with an incentive to practice their spoken Spanish.

Voorhees said that the idea of using the candles in class came

from PE teacher Yuko Aoki, who used to teach Japanese at the school until it faded away more than a decade ago because of enrollment issues.

Voorhees only uses the candles during second semester, because in the first half of the school year, she said that students are still transitioning to speaking only Spanish in class.

The candle system goes on for the entire spring semester — if a class finishes a candle sometime in the middle of the semester, then a new one is started and the process is repeated.

Currently, there are no other teachers who use the candle system like Voorhees does. She said that other teachers have their own ways of getting students to speak the language in class, such as taking participation points away if they hear English.

Voorhees has noticed that her students like the candle system. Patra, who has been in Voorhees's



FALCON // ALAN ZU

**Four candles, one each for periods 1, 2, 4 and 5, stand at the front of Spanish teacher Sarah Voorhees's Room 601 on Jan. 29.**

class for two years, verified this notion.

"I like it because it gives you opportunities to learn more Spanish and watch movies," Patra said. "It's a good idea because it's an incentive for us to stop speaking English in class."

Patra said that her class last year went through two candles, meaning that they received two movie days in the spring semester.

During their in-class break, students are still encouraged to speak Spanish. In the fall semester, Patra said that students freely talked in English, but with the candles, they have to converse in Spanish, even during break.

Although some people do follow the rules of the candle system, Patra said that it is more of an "integrity thing."

"It's not hard to avoid the rules by whispering," she said. "A lot of the time students end up speaking English and [Voorhees] doesn't hear. It's based on an honor sys-

tem."

Voorhees said that the overarching goal of all the world language classes is the same, regardless of whether or not they use the candles.

"Our goal, especially in levels 3 and higher, is to have people speak 100 percent in the language," she said. ♦

## Astronomy club looks to expand members

by Ava Hooman & Esha Lakhotia

Over the summer, sophomore Karen Lei thought of the idea of creating a club that allowed her and others to explore their passion for astronomy.

After asking around to see if anyone would be interested, she decided to give it a shot after receiving positive feedback from classmates.

Lei, with the help of her sophomore officers Niyanth Rao, Aanya Rustogi and Tia Jain, applied for the club in September, but they were not approved the first time.



Lei  
Club President

“The first time we applied, we were a bit unprepared, because none of us had any experience founding a club and didn’t know what to expect,” Lei said.

Still determined, Lei, Rao, Rustogi and Jain did more research for their re-application and were finally approved as an official club in October.

“Throughout the entire process both [senior club commissioners] Samyu and Cameron were really supportive and helpful in answering our questions which really helped us,” Lei said. “Looking back, I feel that this entire process, although challenging, was extremely rewarding because we successfully formed the club we want-

ed and learned how to organize and plan events along the way.”

Currently, the club’s top priority is expanding member base and reaching out to new people.

Their club adviser is Jill McCrystal, the astronomy teacher.

In meetings, which are held every other Thursday at lunch in Room 1013, the officers cover some basic information about astronomy. They also follow up with current events that are occurring in the world today.

A large portion of their meeting is dedicated to watching videos to keep members informed about recent developments in the field.

Occasionally, the club will also meet on Friday nights to attend star parties where the members discuss constellations.

“Astronomy is really interesting to me. The meetings vary; so far, we have been using a lecture format where the officers lecture about interesting topics in astronomy,” Rao said.

According to Lei, being in a club holds many benefits because the members can learn from each other.

“I wanted to form a club where people could explore astronomy at their own pace without worrying about competitions or grades,” Lei said. “To me, the most important things for members to have are interest and enjoyment.” ♦

## Japanese club thrives despite inexperience

by Alex Wang & Jeffrey Xu

“Konnichiwa!” Japanese Culture Club president junior Ashley Jeong said during a recent meeting as around 15 members of her club walked into the lunch meeting, ready for another episode of anime and discussion about Japanese Pop.

Students meet every Friday in science teacher Kathryn Nakamatsu’s room to celebrate Japanese culture. They also speak Japanese in the newly formed Japanese Culture Club.

Jeong said she had been learning Japanese for a couple of years and wanted to start a club to educate students about Japan and its language as well as expose them to Japanese culture.

During club meetings, the officers — Jeong, vice president sophomore Cindy Hsu, treasurer senior Christopher Lee and secretary freshman Miwa Okumura — try to teach some Japanese by infusing it with culture and anime that appeals to club members, Jeong said.

Some of the most popular topics include Japanese food and music.

The officers usually plan the meetings over Messenger, Okumura said.

They get their ideas from Japanese traditions and cultural events like the Japanese New Year.

The club also focuses on teaching the basics of the Japanese language, since Jeong

believes that understanding the language is integral to learning the culture.

Each member brings their own perspective of the culture so the meetings are diverse.

For example, during their second meeting, the officers showed how the Japanese letter system works.

“I think the meetings are an interesting way to show the difference between the culture here and the culture in Japan,” Okumura said.

For Jeong, learning Japanese stemmed from her interest in anime and Japanese food, but she also thought it would be fun to learn another Asian language — she already knew Korean and was learning Chinese at school. Starting her freshman year, she learns Japanese for an hour a week with a tutor.

Okumura was invited to be an officer of the club by Lee.

They were in the Military History Club together and he thought she would be a good addition because of her fluency in Japanese.

However, Jeong admits that since none of the officers have run any other clubs in the past before, they are relatively inexperienced in running clubs.

However, she does emphasize that the club is still a success and serves its purpose.

“We don’t know exactly how to run it, but we’re just having fun with our members,” Jeong said. ♦

## Seniors react to early admissions

by Elaine Toh & Jeffrey Xu

As senior Rohan Kanekar discreetly checked his email during his sixth period class, AP Spanish, on Dec. 13, he could hardly contain his excitement: He had just been accepted to New York University’s Leonard N. Stern School of Business through Early Decision.

“I found out in class, so I had to contain my happiness to not disturb everybody else,” Kanekar said. “But I was pretty happy, and I felt a lot of relief because there was no more stress of applications.”

While Kanekar’s early acceptance was certainly a fortuitous result, it is a fairly rare occurrence for seniors to get into their top-choice early action or decision colleges.

According to guidance secretary Sarah Christeson, the class of 2019 submitted a total of roughly 164 early application packets for college.

Although the actual numbers for acceptances at the school were not reported to the administration, the number of acceptances is usually low, and for every senior who shouts with joy at their acceptance to a dream school, many others are rejected or deferred, having to wait a few more months and see their regular admission results.

According to NYU News, the early acceptance rate was approximately 38 percent for the class of 2021, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

However, at a competitive school like Saratoga High, the rates are often lower.

Since early decisions are binding, Kanekar withdrew his applications to other schools and now plans on being part of NYU’s class of 2023.

Another uncommon success story was

senior Ethan Ko, who was accepted on an early action decision to Stanford University, which had a 9 percent acceptance rate for the class of 2021.

Since the decision was early action, he still has the option to apply to and attend other universities.

However, since Stanford was his first choice, Ko has already decided to commit to it.

According to Ko, the process of finding out he had gotten in was an emotional roller coaster.

After his seventh period, AP Physics, which ended at 3:45 on Dec. 7, Ko took his time biking home, trying to delay looking at his results.

“I wasn’t really that all excited for the 4 p.m. release since I’d internalized rejection,” Ko said.

When he arrived home, his parents and sister, freshman Ashley Ko, greeted him with a grin.

However, Ko was much more nervous. At around 3:57, Ko pulled out his laptop and began refreshing the window of his application portal. He said that his mind was “pretty blank at this point.”

“When the link came to view updates to my application, I instantly clicked and was shocked to see ‘Congratulations,’” Ko said. “My sister and dad began screaming, and I think my mom began crying. But I was dumbfounded.”

Since he had his piano class right after, Ko said that he did not have time to fully internalize or celebrate the decision until afterwards.

“I was shocked and at a loss for words. I thought, ‘Could this really be happening?’” he said. “After three minutes I realized what had just happened, but as of now, it still hasn’t completely sunk in.”

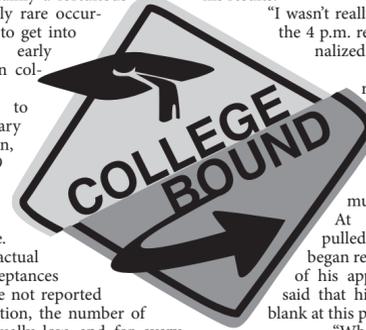
Although Ko did consider applying to some of the other options he had, like Duke

and Johns Hopkins University, in the end, he decided to stick with going to Stanford as a biology major.

“I was considering 8-year BS/MD programs but decided that it would not be worth it to take them over Stanford,” Ko said. “I’d rather have freedom to explore many subjects and have freedom to choose different med schools.”

**“I found out in class, so I had to contain my happiness to not disturb everybody else. But I was pretty happy.”**

SENIOR Rohan Kanekar



## NEWS >> 5

## Language teachers recognize engaged students

by Isaac Le & Andrew Li

Twice a year, the foreign language department recognizes students who demonstrate the “triple Es” (effort, engagement and enthusiasm) within their classrooms. This fall, 32 students were awarded the Triple E award by eight different language teachers.

One of these students was sophomore Feranno Liu, who received an award presented by Chinese teacher Mariam Fan.

“It felt really good because I worked hard in Chinese class, and I feel like hard work is to be rewarded,” Liu said.

The winners were recognized at a ceremony held in December.

The winners were:

Spanish: Geoffrey Jing, Gabby Jandu, KJ Jasti, Manasi Garg, Sammy Silliman, Connie Liang, Anouk Yeh, Daniel Izrailevsky, Rima Christie, Aarya Pandit, Sirisha Munukutla, Joshua Lee, Morgan Bruun-Jensen, Sadaf Sobhani, Mira Bugata, Dennis Pham, Stephen Ludwig, Shiv Gupta, Sonali Shanbhag, Satvikh Kaliyur

Chinese: Saeyeon Kim, Nirmik Tambe, Feranno Liu, Dana Steinke, Ashley Jeong, Ashley Ko, Caroline Keogh, Ryan Wong

French: Emily Eckerman, Nikhil Kapasi, Alejandra Cordova Rubio, Liam Visser, Kole Tippetts and Caroline Okuno. ♦

## Neuroscience club fosters discussions in field topics

by Jeffrey Ma & Christine Zhang

In mid-November, sophomore Ritika Garg founded the Neuroscience Club as a means both to spread awareness about and expand on her personal interest in the field of neuroscience.

The club had one introductory meeting in the fall semester and plans to hold more activities this semester.

Garg became interested in neuroscience over the summer.

She took a two-week molecular neuroscience course at UC Berkeley, followed by four weeks of lab research at University of Colorado at Boulder. Now, Garg works in an official neuroscience lab and participates in the Society of Neuroscience Youth, a worldwide group of high school students who meet every month to promote neuroscience

awareness.

“I want to go into neuroscience, but there was no way to pursue neuroscience on our campus,” Garg said. “I decided to pursue my passion by starting the club.”

Garg said that, at first, recruiting officers for the club was difficult.

“I wasn’t originally aware of people on campus who were into neuroscience, but the more I looked, the more people I found who were interested in it,” she said.

Sophomore Isaac Sun is the vice president of the club; junior Ananya Vadlakonda is the secretary and sophomore Amanda Zhu is the treasurer.

The club commissioners initially rejected the club after their first interview, asking for more specificity in the club’s goals.

After reworking the club’s agenda, the officers were able to get approval on their second attempt in November of last semester.

Since then, the club has attracted other originally uninterested students to joining the club.

Sophomore club member Josephine Chou described herself as “not knowing what to expect” but says that she has “already learned so much from just the second meeting.”

The club meets every other Wednesday in their adviser biology teacher Jennifer

Lee’s Room 1011. Garg said these regular meetings aim to provide a welcoming forum for discussions in neuroscience and to spread the presence of neuroscience on campus.

During meetings, the club plans to have scientific journal discussions, play games related to topics they cover and tackle pressing matters in the field, such as Alzheimer’s disease.

Additionally, one in four meetings will be on a topic within the wider scope of medicine, like last month’s meeting topic of pediatrics, in order to bring a more diverse aspect to club discussions.

Aside from these biweekly meetings, the club also hopes to bring in guest speakers. They also hope to host a neuroscience fair to put spotlight on school-related neuroscience topics like stress and anxiety later on in the semester. ♦



GRAPHIC BY ELAINE SUN

## Newly restarted UNICEF hopes to raise awareness

by Manasi Garg

Every other Wednesday, the newly restarted UNICEF club meets in English teacher Susanna Ryan’s Room 003. Members crowd around tables and unpack their lunches, waiting for the presentation to start.

At the beginning of every meeting, one of the club’s officers — president sophomore Aileen Liao, vice president sophomore Danielle Moon, secretary sophomore Kaushik Jasti, treasurer sophomore Katie Chen and VP of Programs sophomore Anthony Qin — or one of the club members gives a presentation on current events or issues affecting children worldwide such as malnutrition, water sanitation or health care. Then, the club discusses what they specifically can do to help combat such issues.

“I thought the club would be meaningful, especially because as students, it’s a good connection to have in this community,” Liao said. “Since our community is very privileged, it’s harder to see different points of

view and ways of living.”

Through UNICEF, Liao hopes to spread awareness in the school about and fundraise for issues children face in underprivileged and underserved communities.

Last semester, UNICEF hosted two fundraisers. In October, the club went “trick-or-treating,” going from door to door to ask the neighborhood to support the UNICEF organization by giving any extra change they could spare and to spread awareness about UNICEF does and ongoing issues.

Liao said they chose trick-or-treating as a method of fundraising to show that “you can raise money while still having fun and hanging out with friends.”

Chen said that overall, the experience was good and allowed club members to bond. Organizing the effort was low cost, but high reward, as the UNICEF organization sent them posters, trick-or-treat boxes and other supplies necessary.

UNICEF also held a holiday sale last semester on Dec. 6 as a way to increase their

budget.

The club received discontinued products such as iPad and iPhone cases from Amazon sellers and sold them for a discount to Saratoga High students.

UNICEF has begun planning for this semester as well. Sophomore Philbert Fan, a member of the club, voiced his own hopes for the club’s projects this semester.

“We’ve done some fundraisers already, so

**“I thought the club would be meaningful, especially as students, it’s a good connection to have in this community.”**

SOPHOMORE Aileen Liao

this semester I hope we can focus more on community service,” he said.

This semester, the club plans to go to a local pediatric hospital in early March and put on a talent show or performance, where

people can showcase their musical abilities, dancing, art and more. According to Qin, the event coordinator, they are still working to make these events reality.

In addition to the talent show, UNICEF has tentative plans to host fundraisers with the LEO club, which is also a newly founded community service club.

“We have overlapping areas of interests, since we both care for emergency relief,” Liao said. “[The club] asked if we wanted to partner up and just be stronger together and I was glad to help.”

Although it is only the beginning of the semester, UNICEF is already planning far ahead into the future.

They hope to expand their membership and impact on the community around them, but their most important goal is still to continue raising awareness and encourage donations.

“I hope we help the students at Saratoga High realize how privileged most of us are in that many people here don’t have to worry about food or shelter,” Chen said. “We just want to create awareness about the struggles of children around the world.” ♦

## Student Center construction approaches completion

by Elaine Toh & Ananya Vadlakonda

The opening of the new student center in the 800 wing was supposed to be done when students returned to school in early January. But because of rain and other delays, the center is now more likely to open in late February.

Though principal Paul Robinson had hoped for the building to open on Jan. 21, he said that the best course of action is to finish the final parts of construction and move in ASB materials and CASSY counselors during the weeklong break that starts on Feb. 18.

“There are no students [at school during the break],” Robinson said. “We can just take that week so we don’t have to worry about disturbing all the classrooms around us with all the noise of moving.”

**“We want to make sure that those are the projects that people feel the school needs before money runs out.”**

PRINCIPAL Paul Robinson

With the focus shifting away from the new student center as the construction comes to a close, the administration is looking ahead to other remodeling projects that will be funded by the Measure E bond that voters approved in 2014.

For instance, reconfiguring the 900 wing has been high on the list of priorities.

By revamping the building, which currently houses the robotics work space and other storage areas, the school hopes to create two more science classrooms.

The administration also anticipates moving the robotics room to another area in the 900 building.

The new location would allow for better outdoor access to the back parking lot, ideally helping with the transportation of robots and the materials used to build them.

“Any renovation, I’d say, the club would be grateful for,” said senior Graham Kingston, the team’s design lead. “We’re excited to see the club get a little more formal. It would be nice to see it more incorporated.”

In addition to a revamped 900 wing, the ceramics room is still being repaired from the kiln that occurred during the last school year.

However, since the plans aren’t part of the Measure E budget, the school is yet to decide when the all renovations will be finished.

The school also plans to remodel some of the bathrooms on campus.

One of the biggest projects on the docket is the remodeling of the administration building, which has not been modernized since its construction in 1960. \$2 million has been set aside to redo the lights and reconfigure office space for students to have easier access to the health and guidance counselors’ offices, among other upgrades. At this point, it’s not clear when this project would start.

In the years since the bond was improved, some projects have been added to the remodeling list, while others have been dropped.

The administration, along with a Measure

E planning group from 2014 and some of its newer members, have had “reprioritized meetings.”

“We want to make sure that those are the projects that people really feel the school needs before we run out of money completely,” Robinson said.

One project that didn’t work out was the construction of a third gym/multipurpose room in the area where the team room training room now sits.

Experts told the administration a larger footprint was needed to build a structure of that scale; however, since a new addition to the gym would have gone 15 feet over

into the swimming pool region, Robinson decided to opt out of building another gym because of its costly alternative — building a gym on stilts.

With this large building cut out of the plans, Robinson estimates roughly \$16 million to \$17 million remain of the original \$44 million Measure E funds for the work ahead.

“I think we’ve had a really good reassessment of where we’re at,” Robinson said. “Now in this next phase we’re just waiting for the (school) board to give us the go-ahead so we can hammer out the projects we really want to do.” ♦

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# Culture fair showcases individuality and bonds

By Allison Hartley & Alekhya Vadlakonda

French teacher Elaine Haggerty's sweetly scented room was packed with students waiting to make crepes during lunch for the cultural fair held last Friday as the final event in Speak Up for Change week.

Various clubs and teachers showcased cultures or hobbies during the 85-minute fair, which replaced tutorial and took time from each class. Other examples included calligraphy organized by the Chinese Club, basketball in the gym and crocheting in English teacher Amy Keys' room.

The fair served as a time for students to relieve stress from the week and as a chance for "many clubs and teachers are doing different events to showcase their culture and individuality," sophomore outreach commissioner Aliza Zaman said.

Zaman said that the ASB especially wanted teachers to participate in the fair to show students that they, too, have elements that aren't widely known such as their hobbies, background or culture.

French club president Trina Chatterjee said that she hoped students who attended learned about French culture and will even attend future club meetings.

Guidance counselor Alinna Satake hosted a cooking event in the main office. Cooking is a large part of Satake's life, and she wanted to share it with the students.

"I'd like students to see that there is value in knowing what you put in your body, a real satisfaction in eating something that you've prepared yourself," Satake said.

Other students gathered in the library to hear Class of 2014 alum Nikhil Goel speak about his experiences at Stanford University and successfully navigating the high expectations for college that current students face. He recently co-wrote a book titled "Dreaming of Stanford."

"I don't really have an idea for what I want to do in the future," sophomore Carolyn Ding said. "His speech helped me realize that not everyone knows what they want to do at this age, and that it's fine to try a lot of things to figure it out."

Zaman said the fair turned out as well as the outreach commission had hoped.

"During the fair, many students went out of their comfort zone to try new things," she said. "It was kind of a way for students to understand that many teachers at our school have their own hobbies, interests and individuality that many people don't know about." ♦

## SUFC

continued from pg. 1

assembly as a continuation from last semester's event.

On Wednesday, fourth-period classes showed a microaggressions film, made by Class of 2018 alumni Kelly Long, Jane Lee and Sahana Sripadanna, and conducted in-class discussions regarding the film.

On Friday, Leadership held a Cultural Fair, in which various classrooms held activities such as movie screenings, a College Expectations talk by Class of 2014 alumnus Nikhil Goel, basketball in the Large Gym and other activities.

The administration said the week helps the school to develop a better sense of community and tear up misconceptions.

**"It would be a lot more beneficial if all the topics were more specific."**



JUNIOR Lucy Liang

"When we walk around campus and we look around, there's not one perfect per-

son; we all have our issues that we have to deal with and we shouldn't be ashamed about anything we're facing," assistant principal Kerry Mohnike said. "We should be able to speak openly about things and not feel judged, since it's especially hard for young people to speak out without comparing themselves to others."

Junior Nikita Pawar said she enjoyed Tuesday's assembly, stating that it was important for students to see that they weren't alone with their issues.

"It was inspirational to see these people stand up in front of the school and speak about their problems because it's motivating for people who have problems they're conscious of," Pawar said.

On the other hand, Pawar noted that Friday's cultural fair was not as useful as the assembly because though "the cultural fair was fun, it wasn't exactly a connecting or bonding experience."

Junior Lucy Liang thinks that the event overall could improve in the following years.

"Although the assembly was pretty effective, I think it would be a lot more beneficial to the students if all the topics were more specific," Liang said. "The cultural fair was pretty fun, so I hope they include something like that next year as well." ♦



GRAPHIC BY VIKRITA SHARMA

## INTEGRITY

continued from pg. 1

individual repercussions. Since there was little evidence to show whether someone had actually cheated or not, these students said some got away without being caught.

However, Obenour does not think any student has been falsely accused.

"Given the data, I'm assuming that even if you did one question, 10 questions, or looked up all the answers, that there was some sort of tampering," she said.

As a result of the cheating incident, Obenour is not giving any of her first-semester students credit for completing the driver's education portion of the course. She redistributed the 20 percent weight for driver's education tests in Canvas to other categories. The two days of makeup tests she of-

ferred were only for the students to earn their driver's education completion certificates; the freshmen were not able to improve their grades through these additional assessments.

In the future, Obenour said that the school will buy mechanisms for the Chromebooks to keep her students on the proper window and unable to cheat in the way these students had done.

According to principal Paul Robinson, the administration treats each cheating incident individually and confidentially in order to make a just decision for each student. He said the process takes a fair amount of time to avoid quick judgments and hear both the student's and the teacher's perspective.

Additionally, when a teacher turns in a cheating referral for a student, he said the student usually confesses and acknowledges

that their actions were wrong. From Robinson's experience, most students who cheat are simply looking for a shortcut to receive the grade they want. He said that their confessions are generally similar in nature.

**According to Robinson, the administration treats each cheating incident individually to make a just decision.**

"It was more or less the individual saying, 'I just really wanted this grade, and I didn't think I could do it on my own,'" Robinson said. "It might be because they were so swamped with other things that they didn't

feel like they had the time to devote to this assignment to make it happen."

Over the past 10 years, about 15 percent of students with an academic integrity violation have more than one offense. Robinson said that the administration sees relatively few repeat offenders, which he views as a good sign of student growth. He added that colleges do not automatically reject students who have cheated once and learned from their wrongdoing.

"I think colleges know that we are trying to teach young men and women that making good choices is really important, even if you don't achieve what you had hoped," Robinson said. "If a student cheated once in the past but has not violated academic integrity since, colleges appreciate the growth that the student has gone through and don't close the doors on that student at all." ♦

# Global Health Club creates website from student contributions

By Andrew Lee & Jeffrey Xu

On the front page of the Global Health Club's website, bright blue helices of DNA stretch across the screen. Scrolling down, users can find a few student-written articles on recent international health issues such as the separation of Craniopagus Conjoined twins and Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The website, created by sophomore club secretary Adithya Nair, was launched on Jan. 3 and features content about the medical field written by club members and other students. Article topics range from new technological advancements to safety tips and even healthy recipes.

Junior president Jewoo Im said that they created a website to inform members about what happens at meetings when they are unable to attend. Many members opt to go to the more popular Science Club, which takes place at the same time.

Additionally, with the arrival of second semester, clubs in general have begun to see significantly less participation at meetings and events, especially with the hype of clubs dying down and students wanting to relax during lunch. As a result, Global Health Club is now putting effort into creating an

interactive website to galvanize its members.

According to Nair, the website gives students the chance to contribute to something bigger than normal school assignments.

"We felt that if we introduced a concept that people could contribute to, they will actually participate more," Nair said.

For example, club member sophomore Anthony Liu recently published an article on the website about the issue of sexuality in Ecuador, more specifically, that teenage pregnancy is abnormally common. In his article, he outlines the problem, citing that over 20 million girls in Ecuador between ages 15 and 19 are pregnant. He then discusses the government's response to the issue and gives his own opinion on what should be done.

Another article, written by junior Sathvik Kaliyur, president of HOSA club, outlines the effects and propagation of the Marburg virus, which initially claimed several victims in Uganda. While it is less prominent than viruses like Ebola or Zika, Kaliyur writes that its deadly effects need to be taken seriously. He also touches on the recent scientific advances that have been made to research possible vaccines for the virus.

By having club members explore their

own interests in the medical field and offer their ideas to club discussion, Nair hopes that students will benefit from being recognized for the articles that they write. All students, not just those who are active members of the club, are given the opportunity to contribute to the site and join meetings and activities if interested.

"This website allows students to be proud of their work and allows other people to see it, not just the teacher," Nair said.

The students can also add their opinions on various possibilities for meeting ideas

and add more "genuine brain power" to the club. The website will be entirely based on student work and opportunities for submission will be made available on the website.

Through these efforts, the club hopes to build a foundational community surrounding medical interest on campus. In the future, they hope that the website will expand beyond the scope of students at the school.

"Our ultimate goal for this project is to allow people to access the website for everything medical related," Nair said. ♦

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

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# Speak Up Week is laudable, but masks real change with disjointed activities

"This year, as a school, we try to Escape the Mask that we Live in. Often times it feels like we put on 'masks' to conform to societal norms, whether it be in our friend circles, academics, or future goals."

Despite these noble goals posted on Facebook, this year's Speak Up for Change Week faced the same pitfalls as its predecessors: People speak up year after year, yet student behavior and attitudes remain largely the same as soon as the week is over.

Sadly, Speak Up for Change Week, which aims to engender mutual understanding among students, has only a muted impact. Most students can barely even recall who the previous year's student speakers were, let alone their stories or even the generic, slogan-like themes like "Breaking Down the Barriers." Without long-term impacts, the event has limited power and cannot effectively accomplish its goals of fostering long-term positivity.

**People speak up year after year, yet student behavior remains the same.**

The purpose of Speak Up for Change Week shouldn't be limited to just its "speak up" part; instead, there should be a larger emphasis placed on "change." Given that the latter part is what actually improves the community, the weighing mechanism for the efficacy of the week also needs to focus on that "change" aspect.

Even if the week's goal is to lay a foundational base for actual change to happen, there's a problem when few to no tangible changes actually occur, despite years of Speak Up for Change

Weeks. This lack of real progress stems from the very basis of the week: the theme. Each year's theme is empty and interchangeable, existing more as buzzwords than as actual messages. It's a one-size-fits-all situation: This year's theme worked just as well as the last year's theme or the year before did, which is to say they're all ineffective.

In the most effective and relevant of the week, the Tuesday assembly, there is often a disconnect between the theme and the speeches. There's no doubt merit in the messages of the student speakers — it's valuable to hear the experiences of others in the face of adversity and to empathize with them — and most student reactions have been positive. In spite of this positive reaction, the speeches are sometimes undercut by a lack of continuity. Some speeches have little connection the larger theme, whereas those that did have their message tempered to conform to an undefined catchphrase.

Beyond the assembly, the short film on microaggression screened in classes on Wednesday seemed to better fulfill a generic "political correctness" event than to be the awareness, mental health and community building event the week was billed as. Although the film did offer a message of "recognize, interrupt, repair" and implied a solution along the lines of "don't label others," it was again too vague and left no way of quantifying what future change looks like.

Finally, Friday's cultural fair contributed little to the overall theme: Activities like playing bocce ball, making friendship bracelets and learning photography had connections to neither the culture aspect of the fair nor breaking down masks, whereas movie screenings like that of "Mulan" and "Black Panther" flimsily met the criteria for cul-

tural content.

Perhaps it's telling when the announcements of a re-opened campus for lunch was a greater spectacle than the actual fair itself. Even after the confusion was cleared up, office staff had to make an announcement asking students to participate in activities instead of just enjoying an extended lunch with friends.

Most aspects of the week were flawed and failed to present a unified message. Taken together, these flaws drive a week in which, despite the discussion on important campus-related issues, little tangible or lasting action is taken to actually remedy those issues.

To have a longer-lasting impact, the week should be more focused and well defined. In place of a broad, loose slogan should be a specific topic, whether that be increasing mental health awareness or fostering peer relationships. Likewise, messages from the assembly and activities like the fair should be interconnected and mutually supported with the defined theme as the nucleus. Only when the week's theme and

events are unified can there be a guarantee that after we speak up, there will be lasting change. ♦

## Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

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The Falcon staff voted 32-1 in support of this article.

# YOUR OPINIONS ON THE FALCON

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**Nirmik Tambe, Sophomore**



"No offense to the staff of the newspaper, but I feel like nobody really reads it when it comes out. And I think part of this problem is caused by the fact that there are only physical copies of the newspaper

that are delivered to our classrooms every couple of weeks. If we want to read the stories online, we have to go out of our own way to see them. I think in general, people don't really feel like picking up the newspapers when they're given to our classrooms because they're big, clumsy and take up too much space in our backpacks. If there were some method of digital distribution instead of just a physical one, then these barriers to entry would basically be gone and way more people would be willing to read."

**Ethan Ko, Senior**



"I'm pretty easily satisfied for newspapers, so I'm not sure what I would say can be improved. I just generally like the entertainment section because it's relatable. Opinion is too. News doesn't have to be relatable, so I like it too, but

like I'm not as interested, so I just skim that. After all, I mean, it's just news. I usually already know the general gist of what's going on like I especially like reading the light stories like about food around the Bay; actually, that's my go to. I always flip through and look for stories about local food, drink, etc. As a second semester senior, I want to live a more diverse lifestyle. I especially like the food review/discussion stories of Life-styles and Entertainment sections because the student reporters do a great job at writing relatable stories."

**Sanmati Nakil, Junior**



"I really like how y'all incorporate both school news and current events. I think there should be more of those little sections where you ask people questions and they respond because those are fun to read even if that's not real journalism. My favorite section is backpage, particularly Buzzworthy, because I think the topics there are things people would actually care about and also maybe not already know about. A lot of the other sections tend to contain information that we already know about. For example, a lot of articles talk about what the school play is and how the various sports teams are doing. We had Breaking Down the Walls and Speak Up for Change, and we already know that stuff. I guess Buzzworthy is appealing because it just has 'shutfu' that's pretty neat."

# To the admins of new confessions page: Improve your standards or risk damage

By Jeffrey Ma  
& Alex Wang

Headlining the Facebook page, saratoga hs confessions, is a Google form with the enticing caption “spill your darkest secrets.” The anonymous form is the way in which more than 1,640 posts have been put on the page as of Jan. 29.

The page started in early January, and more than 100 posts are coming in daily, ranging from fairly innocuous posts like “P Rob is an amazing person” to objectifying posts like “hot lists” and those about others’ relationships to serious posts regarding topics like depression, suicide and sexual assault.

With the sudden buzz around such a novelty arises questions of the page’s potential harms — perhaps the page is more unhealthy and damaging than its innocuous first impression. While the page offers a safe space to anonymously comment about school issues, it has severe potential downsides. The biggest of these is its seeming lack of moderation; some posts are simply inappropriate, whereas others can’t be contained by just an anonymous submission page, demanding greater actions outside of a mere Facebook post.

Due to the anonymity of the confessions,

more students are willing to air secrets that they would otherwise keep to themselves. Although posts regarding depression, suicide and sexual assault may be cathartic for their authors, helping them get something off their chest and release pent-up anxieties and emotions, their audiences should be specialists like those in CASSY and not high schoolers whose

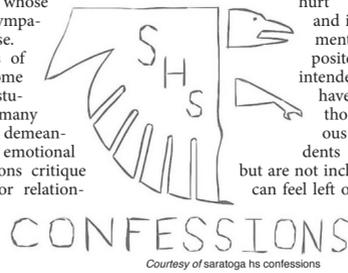
relationships will undoubtedly hurt people’s feelings and is harmful to their mental health, the opposite of what the page’s intended purpose may have been. Similarly, those who see numerous lists of other students deemed attractive but are not included in these lists can feel left out and look negatively on themselves, leading to a decrease in self-esteem. In the most extreme sense, some of the especially targeted posts can be considered a form of cyberbullying, defined by the school as “unwanted conduct that takes place over time and that comprises a series of incidents that are severe, pervasive and involve negative actions.” This behavior is unacceptable.

Among all of these potentially damaging posts, the common moderation issue involves the usage of initials. The process is counterproductive in protecting the identi-

ties of the subjects of these posts. Not only are the identities easily guessed at through initials, they also draw more attention to the person in question as people flurry to figure them out, sometimes implicating a wrong person in the process.

Moreover, negatively calling out people’s relationships will undoubtedly hurt people’s feelings and is harmful to their mental health, the opposite of what the page’s intended purpose may have been. Similarly, those who see numerous lists of other students deemed attractive but are not included in these lists can feel left out and look negatively on themselves, leading to a decrease in self-esteem. In the most extreme sense, some of the especially targeted posts can be considered a form of cyberbullying, defined by the school as “unwanted conduct that takes place over time and that comprises a series of incidents that are severe, pervasive and involve negative actions.” This behavior is unacceptable.

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Courtesy of saratoga hs confessions

## Computer testing faulty

By Andrew Li  
& Alan Zu

After several freshmen were caught cheating on an online drivers’ education test last fall, largely because they were able to do so through scouring the internet for answers while taking the test, the effectiveness and integrity of such internet tests have undoubtedly come into question. Because teachers were unable to pinpoint the exact number of cheater, all of the freshmen were assumed to have cheated, which resulted in the entire grade retaking the exam.

This incident demonstrated that even though some people can be trusted to take online tests, as long as there are dishonest people who will attempt to cheat on tests, on-line testing may not be the best idea for tests that result in actual class credit. (Needless to say, the students who cheated are far from blameless and deserve punishment for their actions and poor judgment.)

Clearly, using computers in class does benefit teachers and students, allowing for more streamlined communications among classmates and more organization in terms of class assignments among other advantages. For example, quizzes on Canvas are automatically graded and inputted, but Scantron and free-response tests require teachers to manually evaluate each answer, which not only can lead to human errors but also take days to grade and return to students.

**Needless to say, the students who cheated are far from blameless and should be punished for their actions.**

The school’s acceptance of a paperless approach to teaching is not the problem at all. In fact, the school should pride itself on using Canvas and other online tools effectively in aiding student learning. However, the problem with this transi-

tion to everything virtual in the classroom lies with the simplicity of cheating on a computer test. Simply put, computer-given tests are generally too easy to cheat on.

Students can easily search for answers, and to avoid being caught, they can use keyboard shortcuts that navigate between tabs much faster; commands such as pressing the “control” and “tab” buttons at the same time switch between tabs, and students can hide the answers they find online behind other pages by using the “four-finger swipe.”

To put it simply, there is no easy way for teachers to effectively monitor students in these situations. Even after last semester’s incident, those cheaters were only reprimanded for their actions after other students came forward with accusations and confessions.

Students here are already pressured to perform well on tests, and this pressure inevitably causes some to become more desperate for high scores, resulting in cheating.

But, as all moral people already know too well, cheating completely defeats the purpose of learning in the first place. A student’s exam grade is supposed to reflect how much they understood in class when they are prompted to answer questions without any external references during a test; however, when all of the test’s answers are just a Google search away, the temptation to cheat is too great for a certain percentage of students.

Traditional test-taking on paper benefits both teachers and students. Teachers might complain about having to scan each individual test for a class if students don’t take tests online. However, the teacher won’t need to enforce certain rules in order to prevent students from cheating on tests online, such as standing behind in a classroom and constantly stare at different students’ screens. And, when online cheating methods are no longer available, students will need to study and perform well by themselves in order to achieve their desired grade.

Sure, this paper and pencil approach may seem a little old-fashioned given our current technology, but it has lingered around for so long because it works. ♦



## One-voice board policy serves to stifle debate

By Shreya Katkere

Last October, Falcon reporters tried to write a story to raise awareness about what the Los Gatos-Saratoga Union High School District school board does.

Unfortunately, that story was never published, and not by reporters’ choice.

The reporters did not finish writing the story, and a large reason was that they only had one contact to source for all their quotes and any other relevant information — the president of the school board at the time, Robin Mano. In essence, the board’s one-voice policy contributed to The Falcon not covering the story.

The school board’s reasoning for this policy is to present a unified front to the public, as opposed to allowing each board member to offer their own opinions about issues, no matter how different those opinions may be.

This policy was instituted after the highly contentious debate over the current bell schedule a few years ago. During that debate, members of the board spoke individually and sometimes contradicted each other. Soon after, the board decided that it was better to minimize this disagreement and only speak with one voice to the media.

But this policy of only letting the presidents speak to reporters has the effect of stifling the free flow of information and opinions.

After all, nothing is wrong with two members of the school board disagreeing on an issue; indeed, this disagreement among board members is necessary to create better policies and reach better decisions — and each board member ought to

To address these issues, moderation over prospective submissions need to be both stricter and more transparent. Guidelines need to be set and promulgated to ensure that moderators are not deciding subjectively.

Despite these problematic aspects, the confessions page does have some positives. In response to posts about poor mental health and personal struggles, the student community has been overwhelmingly encouraging with support and advice. Many of these confessions may also create a sense of reliability and prompt students to seek help for their problems.

Wholesome posts are no small minority on the page, complementing the successes and positivity of students on campus. These posts foster an environment of positivity, but it’s important to remember that these compliments can be made in real life, too.

So what should be done? Moderators and students alike should turn to addressing issues plaguing the page: Those with serious personal struggles should instead turn to professional help like CASSY; hurtful posts should be eliminated by the moderators; and, above all, the moderators should enact guidelines for the posting of confessions that are clear and focus on the positive usages of the page. ♦

be able to talk to the press and express the nuances of their opinions.

By only allowing only the president to speak for all five members, the opinions and ideas of some members of the board might never reach the public. In other words, some members might have an important view which is not common among other members and they will not be able to convey it to the broader a community.

This problem is more than just an issue about presenting a unified opinion to reporters and other members of the public. When all communications to the school board run into a bottleneck because they can only go through one person, that prevents vital news from being shared with those who deserve to know that information the most: the students and parents who are served by that school board. To this day, many students are have no idea what the board exactly does. The story The Falcon was writing was meant to clarify the gray areas that students did not understand and would have been a public service.

Furthermore, this policy is particularly questionable during election season when board members running to retain their seat refuse to speak about their views.

The school board should change this ill-advised policy. Having disagreement among members of the board does not hinder its progress or endanger its mission; in fact, hearing out all opinions from all elected public officials is a crucial part of making school-related decisions. But when the school board decides to filter all media-related communications through one person, they are doing everyone, especially the students of the district, a disservice. ♦

# ‘Optional’ or not: College requirements unclear

By Alex Wang

During college application season, seniors already stress enough about essays, deadlines and decisions. On top of that, many colleges have additional supplemental essays or interviews that they advertise as being purely optional.

However, for seniors, these “optional” components can result in further stress that they did not anticipate. Despite colleges saying that those who do not complete the optional components of the application will not be disadvantaged whatsoever, students still feel the compulsion to complete them, fearing that they’re needed to get ahead in the ever-competitive college application process.

As a result, these “optional” components are not really “optional” at all, but rather, they are implicit necessities that additionally burden already-stressed applicants. If this is the case for these colleges, they should rebrand these additional components as “required,” or get rid of them altogether.

For example, Duke University asks applicants questions about their backgrounds and how they have been shaped by their culture or community in a way that makes them unique. However, on the Common App, this essay is completely optional.

Students applying to Duke may be confused by this labeling. Duke desires to have “a talented, engaged student body

that embodies the wide range of human experience” and their belief that “the diversity of our students makes [their] community stronger,” but on paper, they seem to not care whether prospective students show their uniqueness or not when they call their essay “optional.”

Furthermore, the essay prompt says, “Real people are reading your application, and we want to do our best to understand and appreciate the real people applying to Duke.” Therefore, those who do not write this essay may appear impersonal or ingenuine, decreasing their chances for admission.

College interviews are another aspect of the application process that also add unnecessary stress for students. Unfortunately for students, part of the interviewing process comes down to luck. Because a lot of schools’ interviewers are alumni without much formal, standardized training, each interview can yield drastically different results. Some interviewers may try to help all students get in to the school, writing glowing recommendations for all interviewees, while other interviewers may selectively write positive recommendations for applicants they feel are standouts.

Many colleges recognize this problem and therefore do not weigh interviews as

strongly as other components of a student’s application. Still, in extreme cases, some students may run into interviewers who are exceptionally unfriendly and egotistical. This may lead to a highly critical report of the student, essentially destroying all chances they had at being accepted to that particular college.

So, this begs the question: Are interviews, especially optional ones, really worth doing?

Although students who do not complete optional components of the application will most likely not be penalized just as the colleges promise, they will lose out on a valuable opportunity to showcase another dimension of themselves in their applications. And when every other applicant writes another essay about their experiences in diversity and passes an interview with flying colors, that likely leaves those who don’t disadvantaged.

Similarly, a quick internet search reveals that almost all counselors and professionals believe that students should always complete the optional components of their application; some speculate that opting to forgo the optional interview may lead colleges to guess at what led a student to do so, whether it be a low effort or lack

of confidence in personal skills. If this is the case, then why do colleges make these components optional in the first place when it appears as if not completing them essentially guarantees a rejection?

One reason could be that colleges use these optional components to single out applicants who are lazy or unqualified. However, much of this process can already be done by comparing test scores and GPA. In addition, most serious applicants do complete the optional components, so it is difficult to tell which are actually lazy or unqualified. On the other hand, other serious applicants may simply have not enough time to write an extra essay or do another interview.

Instead of promising students that essays, interviews and other components of their application are “optional” when it appears to many that they really aren’t, perhaps colleges should say that they are “strongly recommended” or at the very least, “suggested.” By changing this wording, the colleges would also benefit too, as they would easily be able to filter out applicants who aren’t interested in the school at all, but just applied for the sake of doing so.

Thus, the “optional” components of college applications serve no direct purpose other than causing additional confusion and stress. Colleges need to consider making them required which will make the application process more transparent, or remove them altogether. ♦



GRAPHIC BY CALLIA YUAN

# Vaguely defined rescission standards create unnecessary stress for already accepted seniors

By David Koh  
& Victor Liu

The second semester of senior year is a time when all the buzz of college apps, standardized testing and academic rigor slow down as many seniors anticipate upcoming college admissions decisions, revel in acceptances and anticipate living a life outside of the parents’ home. Despite the seemingly carefree nature of this time, some seniors worry they will be rescinded from the colleges they’ve been accepted to if they relax too much or otherwise mess up.

Colleges reserve the right to rescind accepted students later in the spring for a couple of reasons: if they discover that the student lied on their application to the college, if the student runs into trouble with the law or if they feel that the student has not maintained their academic performances after first semester.

## Self-help books enrich authors; readers benefit little

By Leo Cao  
& Andrew Lee

Some of the best-selling books of our time are self-help books, whether it be to help improve our professional or personal lives. Hits have included Stephen R. Covey’s “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change,” Randy Pausch’s “The Last Lecture” and Eckhart Tolle’s “The Power of Now,” covering topics ranging from being more productive to prioritizing to staying true to one’s values.

More recently, books like “Self-Help” by YouTuber Miranda Sings and “10% Happier” by Dan Harris have become bestsellers, especially among young audiences.

In spite of the category’s title, these bestsellers may not necessarily be as life-changing as they are marketed to be. And even though they purport to motivate and inspire readers, often times they fail to do so, instead only giving short-term tidbits of advice that readers will nod along to but then forget later.

All three reasons colleges might have for rescission are valid — most colleges probably wouldn’t want compulsive liars or convicted felons walking on campus — but while the first two reasons are pretty self-explanatory, that third criteria for rescission isn’t so clear. And to make matters worse, what constitutes as a dip in academic performance that warrants a rescission differs from school to school.

Although some colleges explicitly tell students the specific criteria for rescission — for example, they may say that admitted students must maintain a GPA above a certain baseline — students are more or less left in the dark on rescission policies for the vast majority of colleges.

Most colleges just tell students that they cannot have a “serious deterioration” in grades, which is still very vague.

Schools such as MIT and Columbia University have allegedly already sent out warn-

ing letters to those with just one or two B’s in their second semester, and Columbia is one of those schools with a vaguely defined criteria for rescission. They write on their website that “Columbia reserves the right to withdraw that offer of admission if ... the candidate shows a significant drop in academic performance,” but what a “significant drop” entails isn’t clarified.

This lack of communication coupled with senioritis translates to passive aggressive warning emails and threats of rescission while students don’t know how to prevent them from being sent to their inboxes.

For students who get into top colleges through Early Decision, which means they have to attend the school come fall, a rescission is much more devastating. Because they’re locked into just one school, they have no options left if their only choice decides to revoke an acceptance letter.

And schools have been guilty of crushing

student dreams with rescissions, for reasons that are arbitrary. In 2017, the University of California, Irvine, notified some students that they were rescinded in July, two months before the school year formally started. Although the school cited poor grades and incomplete forms as grounds for rescission, many quickly accused the school of using rescission as a tool to free up space in an overenrolled incoming class.

Of course, students can always strive to get all A’s in their last high school semester, but this time should be spent connecting with friends, learning to cook, drive and other valuable skills that students will inevitably need once they leave their homes for college. A senior who ends second semester with a sub-2.0 GPA and failing grades in their classes can’t defend themselves when they receive their rescission notice, but someone who gets one or two B’s shouldn’t be put into the same predicament. ♦

For example, in Covey’s “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” he says, “At the very heart of our Circle of Influence is our ability to make and keep commitments and promises. The commitments we make to ourselves and to others, and our integrity to those commitments, is the essence and clearest manifestation of our proactivity.”

While this is a pretty heartfelt message, it does nothing to drive actual change in the reader’s lifestyle or actually create productivity.

Rather, it is up to the reader to try to help themselves with common-sense knowledge they already have, while the books provide a false sense of productivity and change. Because of this, “self-help” books do not actually contain the materials necessary to make desired, impactful change, but serve as a distraction that hinders real progress.

The best of these books give readers the blueprint for how to achieve their goals and become a better person, but the execution of ideas expressed in them is the most important aspect and many readers fail to

turn their thoughts into actions. For example, reading a question like, “what makes your heart sing the most?” and not doing any soul searching to answer the question leaves little lasting change.

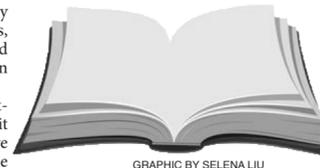
From our experience, these books simply recommend common sense and common knowledge. The authors include examples that are very idealistic and oversimplify major changes that people need to make. Moreover, we have noticed that some of these books, including “Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy” by David D. Burns, often include very long introductions and many sections dedicated to

explaining why everyone needs a self-help books. The most important ideas often get lost in a sea of self-promotion and anecdotes.

Additionally, some self-help books are written in a one-sided perspective. These books are nothing more than a waste of time, doing nothing to help readers change their assumptions and look at challenging situations through different perspectives.

Much of the information explained in self-help books can be found with a simple Google search. Not only does this method save money, but the advice is also more up to date, unlike the tips from books because of the large time gap between when the book is written and when it is published.

Continued growth is essential to living a happy and fulfilled life and reading self-help books with a strong desire to improve can help you learn something new. However, simply reading about possible solutions is not enough; instead, readers need to apply what they already know and lead the lives they want to lead. ♦



GRAPHIC BY SELENA LIU

# Senior duo creates and expresses through SoundCloud rap

By Ava Hooman & Esha Lakhotia

A new platform has taken over the pop culture: SoundCloud.

Through this platform, the average American can test his or her musical abilities and create innovative music.

These so-called "SoundCloud rappers" have gained traction in the last five years with their revolutionary sound.

Joining this trend are seniors Rohan Pandey and David Koh, a duo known as "Anime Samurai" on SoundCloud.

"We started out with Japanese themed hip-hop, but we're branching out now because it's hard to stay in one lyrical area like that," Pandey said.

"Initially, it was a joke. However, after we somehow ended up making an actual Soundcloud account, recording the track, editing it and uploading it, we realized we're real rappers now."

The pair spontaneously came up with the idea of creating music while bored during Thanksgiving break.

Each song's lyrics take about 30 minutes to write, and after they write the bars, they find a free beat on SoundCloud that fits the tone.

They currently have 23 followers and 338 total plays.

Pandey uses the knowledge he has gained from being a part of the school's Media Arts Program (MAP).

The group records the raw files on Pandey's laptop, aligns them with the beat in an application called Audacity, adjusts the volumes, exports the song as an MP3 file and finally uploads it to SoundCloud.

"We've written lyrics for about six songs so far and have beats ready, but we haven't gotten around to recording them yet," Pandey said.

"If we get enough clout, I think we can probably expand our career and make something out of it."

Koh wasn't passionate at first, but was finally persuaded by Pandey to join the project.

"I didn't really think we were going to record, but one day Rohan picked me up and said we were getting Taco Bell, but then made me get out of the car at school.

At around 10 p.m., we were in front of the teachers lounge in the dark yelling at each other, and he wouldn't let me get my jacket from the car until I recorded with him.

That's how [the group's first song] 'Anime Haven' was created," Koh said.

They co-write the verses, while Pandey manages the beats and publishes the music onto their account.

They used \$7 headphones with a built in mic to record their vocals.

So far, they have released two songs called "Anime Haven" and "Left On Read," but the account hasn't been progressing as the two seniors initially

intended. Many of the Pandey and Koh's friends are enjoying their music.

"I think that the account lost a lot of traction mainly because our planned Christmas album didn't work out well, and we were both busy with [college] applications over break so we didn't do too much with it," Koh said. "Now that it's second semester I think we might do some more content."

According to Pandey, their main musical inspirations include rappers Lil Pump, 6ix-9ine and XXXTentacion, but they pull ideas from all over the SoundCloud community. Pandey hopes that he can continue his music career in college, too.

However, he will likely find a new partner because of Koh's lack of interest in the duo's music career.

"I'll certainly continue rapping in college," Pandey said. "Although Lil Pump dropped out of Harvard to save the rap game, my opinion is that Harvard [college] and the rap game can coexist."

Unlike Pandey, Koh said that he has no interest in continuing his music in college and hopes the account will stay a fond high school memory. Pandey, hopes their music will be part of their friendship forever.

"Samurai gang never forget nothing," Pandey said. ♦



Seniors David Koh and Rohan Pandey

# New age of kids' cartoon series creates 'hipster adult fandoms'

By Anissa Mu

YouTuber Geoff Thew, who's in his mid-30s and whose channel is named Mother's Basement, once said: "What excites me about the cartoon boom isn't the reinvigoration of big franchises. It's the new wave of high quality, original story driven shows for all ages."

All the series he references such as "Avatar: The Last Airbender" and "Adventure Time" are streamed on networks that are oriented toward younger, pre-teen audiences.

Despite their seemingly childish origins and premise, such animated works have proven to be surprisingly popular among adults.

But exactly what about these shows is so appealing to mature audiences and causes a fully grown man to claim they are enjoyable "for all ages?"

One example that can answer this question is the well-received show "Avatar: The Last Airbender," which premiered February 2005. Many people love this show, which is about a young boy who's chosen to end a decades long war, as the pioneer of the current age of modern serialized cartoons.

As proof of its large adult fan-base, the production staff intentionally made its sequel, "The Legend of Korra," more dark and mature, arguably to appeal to the older fans.

The popular and respected YouTuber film critic Doug Walker, widely known as the "Nostalgia Critic," gives "Avatar: The Last Airbender" series high praise, saying it possesses "ingenious writing" and "brilliant characters."

This is similar to many sentiments about the show, revealing its source of popularity as its genuine quality in plot and animation. The same cannot be said for the Disney

XD show "Gravity Falls," which premiered in 2012 and had a large, active adult fan base throughout its run-through to 2016.

"Gravity Falls" is about two young twins and their summer vacation at their Uncle's scam museum, where they encounter several paranormal events.

Although many praise the show for its quality, perhaps its greatest appeal is within its many mysteries and codes that fans love to theorize and obsess over.

The influence of the adult fandom is apparent in this aspect of the franchise as adults are often the ones on Reddit and YouTube publicly sharing their findings and putting their heads together to decipher the series' hidden messages. Younger fans typically do not dive as deep into the show's conspiracies.

Not all shows that obtained a adult fan-base are well received. "Steven Universe," a Cartoon Network series that gained a great amount of publicity and interest upon its premiere, quickly fell short of viewers' expectations.

Some, like critic Lily Orchard, vehemently criticized the series' shortcomings in his popular video "Steven Universe is Trash and Here's Why."

# 2018 was the year of celeb relationships and breakups

By Jayne Zhou

2018 was a disappointing year for many reasons. One of them was that so many of our favorite couples broke up or got divorced.

Though some weren't surprising, some no one saw coming. One of the most surprising breakups was Liza Koshy and David Dobrik, the iconic YouTube couple who had been together since 2015. They announced their breakup in a heartbreaking YouTube video in June.

Another YouTube couple, Lauren Riihimaki, better known as LaurDIY, and Alex Burriss, or Alex Wassabi, announced their breakup in a similar fashion in September after almost three years of dating.

These couples spent years together documenting their relationship for the public, yet their busy lifestyle as YouTubers created stress in their relationship. Many fans were oblivious to the hardships of their relationships as well.

In Dobrik and Koshy's breakup video, Koshy explains it felt as if they were living

"separate lives." This seems to be a common factor in several YouTuber and celebrity breakups.

According to Glamour magazine, many celebrity power couples announced their "uncoupling" this year: Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie, Jessica Andrea and Logic, Channing Tatum and Jenna Dewan, Gigi Hadid and Zayn, G-Eazy and Halsey and Offset and Cardi B, just to name a few.

Many of these couples, such as Tatum and Dewan, had been married for several years before calling it quits.

In an interview with Health Magazine, Dewan said no one's life is perfect no matter how much it seems so, which is the case for many celebrity couples

who openly share their relationship on social media and in public.

Many couples, like the ones mentioned, seemed perfect to the public and on social media.

Other couples, however, have long seemed headed for the rocks. One such couple was Ariana Grande and Pete Davidson. They rushed into an engagement after only a month of dating, which caused fans to speculate that their relationship wouldn't last long.

Grande had also lost her boyfriend Mac Miller to a drug overdose during her new relationship with Davidson, which caused a strain on her re-

lationship, according to Complex.

Similar relationships that the public expected to end included Elon Musk and Amber Heard, Kourtney Kardashian and Younes Bendjima and Noah Cyrus and the rapper known as Lil Xan. Though somewhat predictable, these breakups weren't any less devastating for the celebrities themselves and fans.

The numerous splits last year caused several fans to question why it was so hard for celebrities to find lasting love.

According to Cosmopolitan, it is harder for celebrities to maintain relationships because they are constantly in the public eye and are "so used to everyone looking at them, everybody coming to them, everyone giving to them, they forget how to turn around and give it back."

With the difficulty of being a celebrity on top of the normal relationship struggles, it's no surprise most relationships can't last.

2018 was filled with heartbreaks, but we can look forward to 2019 and hope our favorite couples stay strong and more lasting celebrity couples come together. ♦

# MEMES 4 teens

popular pages draw fanatic followings



GRAPHIC BY CALLIA YUAN

# Asians find online community in Facebook group

By Manasi Garg

What is the "Asian American experience" or "Asian diaspora experience?" Growing up in a Western nation where the predominant narrative in media is, well, not Asian, sometimes it feels as if you're cherry picking between two cultures — that of your parents and that of the anglicized society you live in — to figure out where you belong and what your identity is.

This idea of cultural clash and confusion, of an inability to reconcile different values and belief systems, is a heavy one and difficult to navigate. Thankfully, light is being shed on the issue, and it's being done so in the most lighthearted way possible — through a Facebook meme group called "subtle asian traits."

The group consists of jokes and memes that attempt to (and often successfully) characterize the experience of being a second-generation Asian, ranging from balancing familial expectations with your own interests to worshipping boba and joking about lactose intolerance to touching on the microaggressions Asians face (for example, being told that you "speak good English for an Asian" or hearing someone say "I heard Asian men are unattractive"). In other

threads, people argue about the best ramen or boba chain, and punchlines are written in Pinyin, a romanized version of Chinese written in English letters.

Every time I scroll through Facebook, the first posts that pop up in my feed are "subtle asian traits" memes, where I see Saratoga High students constantly tagging each other. It's pretty likely that most Asians at SHS are in the meme group. And if they're not, they'll soon be added by a friend.

Even non-Asians are in the group, and the membership count is already more than 1 million. Second-generation Asian immigrants from places around the world, ranging from Australia (where the founders are from) to Canada and to Hong Kong, are all part of the group; members of the group upload hundreds of new posts every day, with approval from moderators.

The group has been accused of exclusivity — the majority of posts relate to the experiences of Chinese and Vietnamese speakers, since those two groups seem to make up most of the group's membership. Posts are often written in Mandarin, Cantonese or Vietnamese, and while sometimes translations are given, most of the time the punchlines are only relevant to people of Chinese or Vietnamese descent.

This has led to offshoots of the original "subtle asian traits" group that pertain to other ethnicities, such as "subtle korean traits," which has 10,000 members, and "subtle curry traits," which has 263,000 members and is for the South Asian diaspora, specifically India, Pakistan and other countries in that region.

reflective of some of the flaws of the Asian diaspora as a whole.

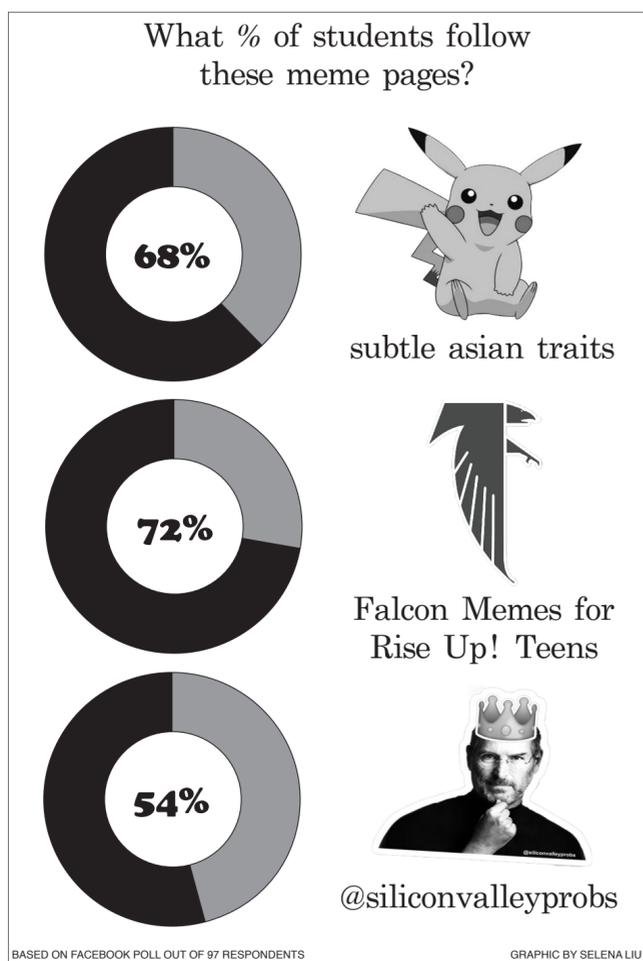
Still, "subtle asian traits" represents many good things. It brings together communities of people who feel that they don't belong or are misunderstood, and provides them with a space to comfortably be Asian-American, or Asian-Australian, etc.

But it also brings up other questions — is it appropriate to generalize so many different ethnicities and cultures under one label? And should we be feeding into the more negative Asian stereotypes, often dictated by Western media, by simplifying an entire continent into a sort of funny "tiger mom" joke? And is it even possible to have such nuanced conversations about race, class and trauma in a Facebook meme group?

**This idea of cultural clash and confusion, of an inability to reconcile different values, is difficult to navigate.**

Still, there is something weirdly and undeniably powerful about these meme groups. The validation and the support they all offer in the form of four boxed memes and text posts feels like an eye in the confusing hurricane of identity confusions and cultural expectations. And if that's too deep, at the very least, it's a great place to tag your fellow Asian friends in a "tag yourself" meme. Let them know whether you're miso ramen, a BBQ pork bun or chicken tikka. I bet they're dying to find out. ♦

Unfortunately, beneath the jokes about boba and lactose intolerance, there have been accusations of anti-blackness, colorism and racist slurs in the community through comments and other activity. Southeast and darker-skinned Asians are sometimes labeled as "not real Asians." Many non-Americans don't understand the history behind anti-black slurs, and even some Asian-Americans who do know the history use slurs such as the n-word casually, which is



# Bay Area teenagers relate to @siliconvalleyprobs

By Allison Hartley

"Bay Area kids: [go literally anywhere outside California for winter break]. Winter: [is cold]," reads a caption above the "Surprised Pikachu" meme from December 23. The post, which pokes fun at Bay Area inhabitants' softness to extreme weather, received about 7,500 likes on the popular Instagram meme page @siliconvalleyprobs.

The original owners of the account posted their first meme in August 2016, and the page has steadily gained followers since a popularity spike in early 2017, growing to almost 35,000 followers. Often referencing Tesla CEO Elon Musk, the e-cigarette Juul, Apple products, Hydroflasks and boba, the page captures nuances of Silicon Valley through memes targeting an audience of privileged Bay Area teens.

**The page captures nuances of Silicon Valley through memes targeting an audience of privileged Bay Area teens.**

A December post shows a falling building precariously supported by wood poles, labeling the building as "depression, anxiety, and overwhelming pressure from silicon valley's toxic schooling environment" and the lumber as "boba," "Philz [coffee]" and "vine compilations." The current administrator of the page thinks the page is popular because it speaks to situations many Bay Area teens have experienced.

"The culture of Silicon Valley resulted in a unique and somewhat bizarre experience for teenagers living in the area, and [the

original admins] created the page in order to satirize Bay Area culture and trends," said the current manager, who chose to remain anonymous in an interview with The Falcon. She started to post on the account about a year ago when the original administrators solicited help after growing busy with other commitments.

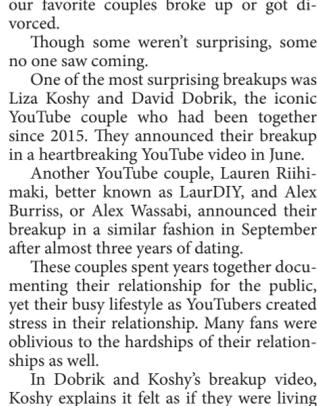
Senior Samyu Iyer, who submitted a featured meme in August 2017, said, "I still follow, and overall I think it's a solid page. Some of the posts are more relatable than others while some are more niche in their target audience and I don't always get them."

A few months ago, the page began to create community album posts with memes with a common theme sourced from followers "as a way to recognize the funniest memes from the teenagers of Silicon Valley."

For example, in the wake of the Paradise Fire in November, one community post featured a compilation of four memes, the first using the "You vs. the guy she told you not to worry about" meme format comparing the air qualities of San Jose and Chico. The post's caption credited the users who submitted each meme and asked followers to consider donating to fire relief.

Even with the success of the page, posts have been few and inconsistent recently, since the original creators are no longer associated with the account. With only one manager creating posts, other commitments and writer's block interfere with regular content.

"It's hard to be consistently funny in front of so many people all the time, and I don't want to post anything that doesn't meet the standard established by the previous founding admins," the current manager said. "I am currently working on expanding our admin team beyond just myself, and hope to bring you all more quality memes in the future." ♦



GRAPHIC BY ELAINE SUN

## My bank account cannot stomach my hunger for unnecessarily 'luxury' foods

pc  
muthu



Muthu Palaniappan

Whenever my friends and I can't think of what to do when we are bored, we end up getting food. This seems to happen all too often since we live in Saratoga, where boredom comes far too easily. Eating food seems to be the only activity all of us can agree on in the moment.

Of course, food is often expensive. A drink can be around \$5, and meals are anywhere usually from \$15 to \$20 if we decide to go to a sit-down restaurant.

Because of this, my friends and I always joke around about being "broke." In reality, none of us is broke, and we are just exaggerating a first-world problem.

Nearly every day I find myself at Sue's Gal-

lery Cafe studying or doing homework. While I'm there, I usually buy a \$4 tea or \$6 coffee, so the costs definitely pile up. Nevertheless, I should never refer to myself as "broke" or "poor" as a result of this unnecessary spending.

There are families living in other places who are really struggling with money and who cannot say where their next meal will come from.

It would be a good idea to stop mislabeling ourselves as "poor" or "broke" because we are only experiencing are first-world problems.

That being said, spending money on food and drinks so often isn't healthy for anyone's wallet.

I think that the main reason this problem of always buying food exists is the lack of other diversions in the area. The only realistic local hangout spots are restaurants or coffee shops, so overspending can sometimes be hard to avoid. However, it is much more economical to hang out at someone's house and watch a movie or play board game or a video game. We can still enjoy each other's company without the cost of

going to a restaurant.

Another thing that my friends and I have tried is going off campus for lunch less often. There is really no point in it, as all of us can bring food from home and be perfectly content.

Also, I find that if I always have a bottle of a water on me, I am less likely to spend money buying boba. Since I already have something to drink, I don't crave the expensive alternative.

All in all, food can be expensive, but spending money on it doesn't make any of us truly "broke." This simple exaggeration shows how small our problems are compared to those who truly do have to worry about where their next meal will come from. ♦

## A full closet but nothing to wear

Lak-  
hotia



Esha Lakhotia

"Ugh, I have literally nothing to wear to school! Why do I have no clothes!"

I'm constantly in this predicament in the mornings as I tear apart my closet every day for a decent outfit, yet I go shopping for clothes every month, whether it be online orders from Urban Outfitters or exploring random stores.

Recently, I went to the Brandy Melville warehouse sale where tops were \$5, sweaters were \$10 and sweatshirts were \$15. When I was there, I took full advantage of the

situation; I got \$90 in clothes: four tops, one sweater and four sweatshirts! For one week, it seemed like I had a new wardrobe, wearing each item a day. However, now, after a month and a half, I have gone back to the same old mentality that I have no clothes.

Browsing online, I feel like I shop as if I have no clothes. I put random items in my cart that have no relevance to my life; I buy beanies in the summer, shorts in the winter and random dresses I will inevitably shove to the back of my closet.

It seems like a cycle: I buy new clothes, wear them every day for two weeks straight, get sick of them, get frustrated because I think I have no clothes and then I go shopping again.

Even though I buy an absorbent amount of clothes, at the end of the

day, I usually just stick to my comfort zone of wearing a sweatshirt and leggings.

However, I do have ways to overcome my pessimistic mentality. I re-organize my closet every three months and sort through all the clothes I wear and the clothes I don't. I then put the clothes I don't wear in a garbage bag and decide which ones to throw away, which to donate and which to sell.

With the money I make from selling my clothes to friends and strangers on Poshmark, I am able to buy new clothes that I always have the best of intentions to wear.

The simple fact that I have a closet full of clothes yet find nothing to wear is an extreme first-world problem. However, I continue to find myself falling into this unbreakable cycle time and again. ♦

# THIS IS MY



first-world problem  
REPORTERS SHARE THEIR TRIVIAL DIFFICULTIES

## No headphone jack on my new iPhone: overpriced converter forcefully needed

eye-  
-ac le



Isaac Le

With the release of the iPhone 7 in 2016, many customers, including me, were outraged with the removal of the headphone jack.

Apple decided to remove the headphone jack from its phones in order to make the phone completely waterproof. This waterproofing is, of course, beneficial for accident-prone iPhone users. But it also means I had to carry a dongle

— an adapter that connects the headphone jack to the lightning port — everywhere with me.

In addition, Apple decided to remove the headphone jack in order to make space for a full-screen phone. I guess this little 3.5mm hole took up just a little too much space.

I recently received a new iPhone XS for Christmas, and I was still puzzled by the lack of headphone jack. I was not too worried at first, but soon enough, problems started to arise. After completing a large load of English homework, I decided to relax and watch my daily dose of Mr. Beast on YouTube. However, my phone was low on battery, so I plugged it in to charge, yet immediately found I could not listen to my video while charging my phone

simultaneously.

And the problems did not end there. One day after school, shortly after my father picked me up, I decided it was a good time to listen to my Spotify playlist. Unfortunately, I couldn't. I had forgotten my dongle at home, and I could not plug my AUX cable into one of the speaker holes.

Luckily, Apple has created a solution to these problems (though the problems were caused by Apple in the first place): a pair of AirPods, which sell for \$170. I had no choice but to give yet more money to Apple. What did I learn? No one can defeat Apple and their sneaky, ingenious ways to get you to buy more of their stuff. ♦

## Hydro Flexing with our water bottles

mana  
c-u-later



Manasi Garg

Everytime I walk anywhere in the Bay Area, I seem to be accosted with a triggering sight: hordes of people, mostly teens and young adults, lugging around multicolored water bottles plastered with stickers and featuring a human-like figure. I am, of course, talking about Hydro Flasks — overpriced, flashy and also something I desperately wish I had.

I can't explain why. I'm probably not responsible enough to own a Hydro Flask — I lost three water bottles last year alone, and I always have trouble keeping track of my belongings. And I wouldn't exactly take good care of it either. One water bottle I own has so many dents in it that it physically won't stand upright on a desk.

It's safe to say that my owning a Hydro

Flask would be equivalent to putting money in a paper shredder.

Maybe it's the wannabe hypebeast in me. Hydro Flasks are kind of the Supreme of water bottles, even though I know I'm not justified in paying \$50 for a water bottle (or \$300 for a white T-shirt).

Or maybe it's my inner artsy hipster. Yes, I could get a plain metal water bottle for \$10 at Costco, but why do that when I could get the special edition only sold at select stores sunset colored Hydro that I can make into a sticker collage?

Not that my parents actually care about my water bottle wish list. I can almost hear my dad demanding to know what the point of a Hydro Flask is. Why spend \$50 on a liquid container when you can buy three highly functional Contigo water bottles for that price? Or better yet, why not just use the water bottles he gets for free from work events? They can hold liquid perfectly too.

But they don't understand me. They don't understand my struggle. Imagine how hard it is to wake up knowing all your friends can carry their Hydros with pride. That they can

walk around, unashamed of their water bottles. Imagine being the girl who has to take her scratched up, dented, sad excuse for a bottle to school. Whose bottle doesn't even have vacuum insulated stainless steel double walls made of BPA and lead free material. Whose bottle doesn't come in seven different sizes and about a thousand different colors. Are you crying yet?

And how am I supposed to let the world know what my personality is if I don't own a Hydro Flask covered in cool and quirky stickers?

What my parents don't understand is the point of a water bottle isn't to hold water. It's to flex on everyone. It's to assert your water bottle dominance in the high school social hierarchy.

Unfortunately, there's nothing I can do. For now, I'll have to drink from a free Cisco water bottle and watch enviously as Hydro Flask owners delicately sip what appears to be holy water. Because, given their high price and unavailability, that's probably the only thing Hydro Flasks are worthy of containing. ♦

# Finding 'worth it' tacos proves tough

me and megang

Megan Chen, Callia Yuan, Jayne Zhou



or salsa, which we all tried. Considering that the taco was only \$2, we got what we paid for.

Next, we went to Big Basin Burger Bar in downtown Saratoga where they sell a plate of three tacos for \$12, with each taco around \$4. These cost twice as much as the previous tacos, so we were hoping for something special.

While the interior of the restaurant was friendly and clean, the tacos themselves proved to be to be greasy and uninviting and certainly not worth the extra cost.

For our expensive restaurant, we went to La Victoria in San Jose. We wanted to get the most expensive tacos they offered, so we decided to order the super tacos, which were about \$3.99 each, but came out to around \$4.50 after tax.

The super tacos came with beans, cheese, guacamole, salsa, sour cream and your choice of meat inside. The filling was much more generous than any of the other tacos we had before, despite its similar price to the tacos from Big Basin Burger Bar.

Each of these tacos was about double the size of the other tacos we had and were much more filling, so the price made sense. It also had much more flavor and complexity to it than the other tacos we had eaten.

After eating all three types of tacos, it was time for us to decide which was the most worth it. For Jayne, it was La Victoria because of their classic orange sauce. Megan and Callia picked Los Dos Compadres for its overall value.

In the end, the "drastically different prices" part didn't work out as well as for us as it did for BuzzFeed since we didn't have as large of a budget that Lim must get from BuzzFeed. In the future, we would want to review something with a wider price range than tacos. ♦

The BuzzFeed series "Worth It" has racked up millions of viewers and fans since its introduction by creator Steven Lim in September 2016. In each video, fans are introduced to a dish that is offered at three drastically different prices and the people who try the food try to determine whether or not the price tag attached to the item is really worth it — hence the title of the popular show.

We decided we had to try this concept for ourselves (on a much smaller scale of course) with one of our favorite foods that BuzzFeed has yet to review: tacos.

Before we began our experiment, we had to do some research on where to find cheap, moderate and expensive tacos. Perhaps not surprisingly, we had a hard time finding expensive tacos, while the low end of the price scale was crowded.

Starting our search for cheap tacos, we went to a small restaurant in San Jose called Los Dos Compadres. There, we ordered two regular tacos for about \$2 each, a pretty normal price for a taco.

The location of the restaurant was pretty hidden and can't easily be seen from the street; however, the inside of the store was clean and inviting.

The tacos themselves were pretty average: They weren't outstanding, but weren't dry or falling apart either. Los Dos Compadres also offers free extra toppings, like lime

# 14 lifestyles

**WORTH IT.**

**LOS DOS COMPADRES**  
San Jose  
\$2 for 2 tacos

**BIG BASIN BURGER BAR**  
Saratoga \$12 for 3 tacos

**LA VICTORIA**  
San Jose  
\$4.50 for 1 taco

GRAPHIC BY MEGAN CHEN AND CALLIA YUAN

# school scope 15

## CASSY preps to move to campus center

BY Anna Novoselov

Tucked away in the corner of campus behind the office and by the parking lot adjacent to Saratoga Sunnyvale Road are three portables that serve important roles in supporting student health and providing academic and personal assistance. While hidden from most of the main campus, many students rely on the services provided by the programs which reside there: CASSY, the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) and ASSIST. When the new Student Wellness Center in the 800 building is completed later in the semester, CASSY will move to the center of campus, according to assistant principal Kerry Mohnike. The Wellness Center will also include room for student leadership like ASB and an area for staff. Then, the two school psychologists currently in the office, Michael Slone and Darlene Norman, will occupy the vacant portable.

The psychologists assist students with Individual Education Plans and facilitate Student Study Team meetings, which help generate strategies to maximize each individual's learning.

"They each deal with confidential material and do a lot of testing," Mohnike said. "They need a space that is a little more private to do all of that work."

She said that although working in the main office did not pose any problems, the administration felt that the portables would be more conducive to their work. In addition, the speech therapist, Ronda Vierra, who provides speech and language support, may also occupy the portable.

Administrators hope to maxi-

mize the available space, as there is not a lot of available real estate on campus. They looked at the school's needs and what various programs required in terms of location.

While CASSY's current location has the benefit of privacy, the administration hopes that moving it to a central location will encourage more students to go there. Many students rely on CASSY therapists to process challenging situations and talk about their feelings. The therapists provide emotional support and teach coping strategies that students can take into their daily lives.

"We have a lot of students that use CASSY services," Mohnike said. "This will make them hopefully feel like it's nothing to be afraid of or ashamed of. It's something that all of us can take access of and benefit from."

Mohnike said she hopes the center will be more like a "hub and not something that's isolated to a specific program." There will be a mix of people coming in and out, including people seeking a place to simply relax or receive support.

The administration is hoping to normalize the idea that everyone needs help and support sometimes, Mohnike said, noting that "everyone needs a break now and then" and that with the move, CASSY will hopefully become more accessible to the student body.

"It's yet to be seen how much that 800 hub is going to make a difference," she said. "I think it's going to be super successful."

CASSY counselor Kaitlin Eastland said that some students may feel more self-conscious coming to CASSY when it is in the middle



FALCON // ALAN ZU

The CASSY portable behind the office will now become the office for the two psychologists Michael Slone and Darlene Norman while CASSY moves to the wellness center.

of campus; however, there will be multiple entrances to the program so students will not have to walk straight through the Student Center.

"Our hope is that [the new location] messages that this is not just for people who are suffering from depression and it doesn't have to be something major that you're struggling with. You can come in here and get support," Eastland said.

The other two portables currently accommodate the TLC and ASSIST, which is a student support program that allows students to either stay in the center and conduct their learning through the teacher (Megan Hunt), through online courses or through a combination

of ASSIST and main campus classes. Mohnike said that the isolated location benefits both the TLC students, as it gives them a quiet place to take tests, and ASSIST students, for it lets them access the main campus only when they feel they can and be easily dropped off or picked up.

According to Mohnike, the portables were brought in 2013 or 2014, when the former H wings, which housed the three support programs along with the psychology and home economics classrooms, got demolished to make space for the new music building (the current Media Arts Program Annex).

Before that, the H wing housed the Child Development Program,

a daycare facility that managed a preschool.

The portables were manufactured by a Enviroplex in Stockton, Calif., and then installed onto laid foundations.

"We needed a place to house [CASSY, TLC, and ASSIST]," Mohnike said. "The portables were built out of necessity. We knew what we needed before we brought them in."

Although the portables will remain tucked out of sight from the quad and most of the classrooms, they will continue to benefit students and the school.

"They're still going to be a vital part of the campus," Mohnike said. "It's always going to be important to have that space." ♦

# First time Pokémon player gets annihilated

lee-ve me alone

Andrew Lee



Little did I know that out of the blue, on one cold winter day, that aspect of my life would dramatically change.

It all started with Secret Santa in my fifth-period newspaper class, where I was forced to think of a gift that was under \$15. I couldn't think of anything other than food or stationery, both of which I wasn't interested in. Then, sophomore Andrew Li suggested that I get Pokémon cards, and just for the fun of it, I decided to give the original card game a shot.

**I realized that a Pokémon deck consists of a lot more than just cards with animal art, but also built around different energy, trainer and support card types.**

When others in my period heard about my quest to learn how to play Pokémon, everyone was extremely supportive and even offered to give me their own decks of cards. I was flattered by such a request offered by my friend junior Jeffrey Xu, and promised him that I would try my absolute best to take care of his beloved deck.

From there, it wasn't difficult to find a mentor to guide me through my Pokémon endeavors. Li, the one who first encouraged me to step into the world of Pokémon, be-

came my designated trainer.

Before any of the playing could begin, I needed to learn how to create a strong deck first. I realized that a Pokémon deck consists of a lot more than just cards with cool animal art, but also was built around different energy, trainer and support card types that would later play important roles in the game.

When Li and I began to play, I got destroyed. Annihilated. That's all I can really say about my first experience with this game. It was frustrating, to say the least, and so infuriating that I wanted to stop playing, but I knew that deep down inside, I had to endure in order to learn.

Li's Pokémon deck is stacked. Years of experience battling against friends and collecting the best cards made him a tough, yet knowledgeable teacher. He taught me the best tricks, card combinations and the most important rule of all: to shake hands with your opponent before starting the game.

Even though I don't have much time to play Pokémon, let alone do my homework, I still re-

arrange my deck of cards from time to time, thinking of creative ways to give myself an advantage during play.

Although I still can't say that I'm anywhere near as skilled as a Pokémon master, the card game is one that I hope to be I'll enjoy playing in future matches. I still think that the idea of making cute animals fight each other is a bit strange and silly, but at least now I can confidently say that I finally know that Pokémon is not just limited to Pikachu. ♦



GRAPHIC BY ALAN ZU AND ROHAN KUMAR

## togatalks

What do you think about moving CASSY to the Wellness Center?

"We've done a really nice job making it a warm, cozy space. I really like the portables."



CASSY counselor Kaitlin Eastland

"I think that a wellness center in the middle of campus would be very useful."



junior Daniel Ning

"In the wellness center, I think people would feel more self-conscious and use it less."



junior Krisha Minocha

# Seniors blog as a creative writing outlet

BY Shreya Katkere & Selena Liu

With more free time in second semester, seniors Anuj Changavi and Iman Laique have poured their time into a journalistic hobby — blogging.

When Changavi started his blog "Stuck in the Middle" during junior year, many of his friends thought it was an unnecessary distraction from school work; however, throughout the next year, his blog became a creative outlet to manage his stress levels along with incorporating his love for sports. Though "Stuck in the Middle" originally focused on sports, he



Changavi Stuck in the Middle blog



Laique Answers in Your Ceiling blog

expanded to politics. "Sports has always been a passion of mine, so I was inspired by my favorite sports columnists," Changavi said. "As I got more into blogging I realized I could write about many different things and I branched out from there."

Now finished with college applications, Changavi is dedicating more time to his blog than ever, and he writes a post whenever he has free time. "I just write what's on my mind, when I feel like it," Changavi said. "A lot of times, though, I'm just sitting at home doing nothing when I think of something to write about."

For her part, Laique only

recently started her blog at the beginning of senior year. Titled "Answers in Your Ceiling," her blog focuses more on her personal lifestyle and story-like experiences.

"For a long time, writing was a hobby for me, but it was a private hobby, and I was kind of insecure about it," Laique said.

Laique had been thinking about starting a blog for some time, but it was Changavi's encouragement that pushed her into actually starting it.

"I decided to start my blog because I think a lot of stuff I write about are things that people think about but no one talks about,"

Laique said. "My blog is basically storytelling: stuff I've seen, stuff I've experienced and sometimes even stuff my friends have gone through."

Since Laique often writes about touchy subjects such as mental health issues, one challenge she often faces is feeling like she should filter her writing out of fear of judgments.

"For me, it can be hard to write on my blog because I am constantly thinking about what people are going to think about my blog so I'm very cautious," Laique said. "Much of my writing is for myself but also a big part of it is how people respond to it."

Putting out opinions is, of course, risky.

Changavi remembers reading multiple hate comments under his posts, which he then responded to through additional blog posts.

Nevertheless, Changavi has also been touched by the comments many of his friends have left under his blog posts.

"I got these long paragraph comments from people I haven't talked to since kindergarten saying that they read my blog post and they liked it," Changavi said. "That's really touching."

Both Laique and Changavi said that on balance, blogging has been a beneficial hobby, and it has helped them both in deciding their future career paths and in improving their general writing abilities.

"For me, I knew from day one that I was going to do a writing career," Changavi said. "Writing this blog just further confirms it; let's just see where it goes." ♦

# Escaping the mask

STUDENTS  
VOICE  
THEIR  
INNER  
BATTLES

GRAPHIC BY ANANYA VADLAKONDA

By Alekhya Vadlakonda

This year, the theme for Speak Up for Change was “Escaping the mask we live in,” and in the assembly on Jan. 22, four students spoke to the school about their stories.

Junior Connor Oaklander spoke about how his two concussions and mental health struggles changed his soccer career and outlook on life.

Junior Surbhi Bhat talked about the academic pressures she faced after immigrating to the U.S. Senior Leena Elzeiny talked about having a father with a mental disability. Senior Enzo Coglitore spoke about his life after his mother passed away.

In light of this year’s theme, The Falcon spoke to four other students on campus about their hidden struggles and the mask they wear.

## Senior’s eating disorders leads to depression

“I’ve dealt with two eating disorders within six years: anorexia and binge eating. It was really difficult to cope because these disorders were polar opposites. It also caused me to go through depression and serious body dysmorphia. It also affected friends, family and the way I view food now. I am still healing, but through my journey I’m grateful I was able to realize I was sick.”

## Sophomore felt alienation as new kid

“I didn’t always have all the connections I had in Saratoga and I remember it was really hard for me because I was the new kid in sixth grade and I struggled a ton, and I literally had no one to help me out with it. I always sat alone at lunch tables and I was a loner for a long time. I don’t really like saying this, but kids in this community form groups and exclude and alienate everyone else from them who is different, and that just made it even harder to make friends here. I kind of gave up on talking to people that entire year, but the next year I allowed myself to be more outgoing and try to get

involved in activities that interested me and that definitely helped.”

## Sophomore deals with fading friendships

“The beginning of sophomore year was a huge change for me. Because I didn’t have classes with a lot of my friends who I didn’t eat lunch with or spend tutorial with, I began growing apart from them really fast.

“I was never an extremely social person so it made me pretty insecure to see that I only had a few friends left. I was wearing this constant mask of trying to act happy all the time at school while falling into severe depression at home. It’s only until I started opening up to people and escaping my mask at school when I started to feel better.”

## Junior works on finding true path

“When I entered high school, I felt pressured to fit in and try to be part of a group. I didn’t feel like I could be myself.

Eventually I realized when escaping the mask, the number one thing you need is support from others, and it took me a while to realize that.” ♦

# A dream rewritten

JUNIOR SUFFERED CONCUSSIONS AND SPEAKS ABOUT GREATLY CHANGED LIFE AND OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

By Krithi Sankar & Jeffrey Xu

As then sophomore Connor Oaklander sprinted out of the goalie box to tackle the opposing striker in a September 2017 game, his legs buckled as he fell to the ground. A jolt of pain seared through his body, dizziness taking over and a faint noise ringing in his ears.

Oaklander, now a junior, had been in the midst a soccer tournament in Modesto. However, after an unanticipated play from the other team, Oaklander’s poorly oriented slide-tackle left him lying on the ground, blacked-out.

“When I charged in, I didn’t sweep the ball with my feet while keeping my head away, which is what I should have done,” Oaklander said. “I believe I got kicked, and that concussion made me unable to go to school for three weeks.”

Following the match, doctors diagnosed the injury as a severe concussion, which they said would heavily impair his cognitive and athletic ability both in and out of soccer. Since then, Oaklander said that “nothing has been the same.”

## A shattered dream

One concussion led to the next for Oaklander, as he endured two additional concussions during another soccer game in November of the same year as well as during a basketball game shortly afterwards.

With what began to feel like a series of never ending concussions, the dream he once had of being the idolized star player on the Stanford University soccer team was “shattered.” “My dream was that I would go straight to Stanford, a D1 school, for college soccer, and everything was going to work out perfectly,” Oaklander said. “However, as time passed by, things started getting difficult.”

So, one week into the season in his sophomore year, despite having been elected JV captain, Oaklander had to quit the team.

Additionally, all of these concussions and his resulting weakened cognitive and physical performance led Oaklander down a dark path, to the point where he struggled day in and day out to find the strength to get himself out of bed.

Toward the beginning of junior year, almost a half year since his latest concussion, Oaklander said that his vision became blurry, and he found himself needing to sleep for 11 or 12 hours a day. The symptoms,



FALCON // ALAN ZU

Junior Connor Oaklander speaks about finding the strength to overcome the setbacks from the end of his soccer career. Oaklander said, “It felt unreal, man, just being up there. I couldn’t believe I did it after I came down.”

which appeared within a week of his concussion, dramatically affected his academic life, causing him to drop AP U.S. History in the middle of November.

**“We have struggles and problems, and holding it in isn’t going to make it any better. So why hide it?”**

JUNIOR Connor Oaklander

His concussion also manifested in physical issues such as light-sensitivity and sound-sensitivity. Although he was able to do most of his daily tasks, just the thought of having decreased abilities contributed to struggle.

“As a result of just thinking about that, it became so easy to attack myself,” Oaklander said. “I was constantly pouring out all of these faults like ‘Oh, you’re not capable, and you’re not smart.’”

He also felt that he no longer belonged

anywhere. Now no longer one of the “soccer kids,” he didn’t feel like he had a group.

He would reminisce often about the past. “Look at me,” he would say to himself. “I used to be this great guy, but now I’m just this piece of garbage.”

He said his depression reached an all-time low when he started having serious depressive episodes in September. He said he also had some relationship issues, including a breakup and family difficulties going on as well.

“It was like I had a plan and everything, but I just wanted to die,” Oaklander said.

However, his saving grace was his judgment, and Oaklander began coming to terms with himself and in September he started going to CASSY, the school’s mental health and counseling service.

Despite his perceived flaws, Oaklander said that he began to see himself in a more positive light and as somebody with a purpose.

## Sharing his story

After several months of coping with the situation with the help of family, friends and regular therapy sessions, Oaklander started to turn to social media as an outlet for ex-

pressing his emotions, periodically posting updates on Facebook and receiving support from his peers.

“Social media kicked the whole thing off,” Oaklander said. “I’m thankful for the huge support base, and I feel like the luckiest man alive.”

After using social media to provide others a glimpse into his life and his struggles, Oaklander then decided to also speak up through events at school.

“My therapist’s mentality was, ‘Go right at what is bothering you,’ and [what was bothering me] was talking to other people about my problems,” Oaklander said. “So I signed up and forced myself to go out there and be honest and tell the world my story.”

One of Oaklander’s main messages that he wished to deliver to the student body during his Jan. 22 speech is that nobody is perfect, and everyone has problems.

“I saw myself as someone can get this achievement and that achievement and display this image as someone who is invincible. But part of it is we want to be the best versions of ourselves,” Oaklander said. “The reason why I want to go up there to get this attitude out there of accepting problems that happen.”

Additionally, Oaklander wants to help cure the stigma against antidepressants.

“I have to rely on this pill that I take every morning to keep myself stabilized,” he said. “But how does that make me less worthy of a person? How does that make me not able to succeed?”

Oaklander said that once everyone starts to become comfortable opening up, it will be easier for everyone to talk about and take a huge burden off their shoulders.

“Things aren’t going to be perfect because we’re human,” Oaklander said. “We have struggles and problems, and holding it in isn’t going to make it any better. So why hide it?”

## Best speech of his life

On the morning of Jan. 22 Oaklander “didn’t think he could do it.”

Running through his speech at 5 a.m., Oaklander thought he had two choices: 1) stick with a script that he “hated” or 2) speak off the cuff and say whatever was on his mind. Moments before his speech, he chose the latter approach.

“When I went up there, I bit my teeth and was like, ‘I’m gonna just talk. So I just said whatever was on my mind and took the risk of failing, and I’m so stoked that I did it.’ ♦



GRAPHIC BY ELAINE SUN, ELAINE TOH AND ANANYA VADLAKONDA

# SENIOR SPEAKS ABOUT HER FATHER’S BATTLE WITH HAVING PARANOID SCHIZOPHRENIA

By Andrew Li & Elaine Toh

Senior Leena Elzeiny listened to her father mutter about an invisible force trying to get him, curtly accusing her for betraying him due to her small accidental actions — like leaving a small pile of trash on the floor while she was sweeping the floor at her house recently. Immediately, Elzeiny felt uncomfortable, but then an immense sadness washed over her as she realized, from her father’s perspective, he could depend on no one — not even family.

As her father’s symptoms started becoming more apparent, Elzeiny said that her family’s everyday life became severely impacted.

As a result of his condition, her father, who had worked as a nuclear engineer for approximately 15 years, lost his job. Her father started relying on medications and antidepressants to combat his symptoms. But his medications, which Elzeiny said barely help his mental state, keep him in bed a minimum of 14 hours a day; however, during his waking hours, he still remains self-sufficient. As a result of this financial blow, the family had to turn to Social Security and insurance for survival. Elzeiny’s mother took on the role of the household’s breadwinner, despite not having a high-paying job.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, schizophrenia is typically diagnosed from a patient’s late teens to early 30s, and in the U.S., 0.25 to 0.64 percent of the population has schizophrenia or related psychotic disorders. They bear symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, thought disorders and cognitive impairment. In fact, when Elzeiny’s father was informed of his schizophrenia, the delusions he was experiencing led him to believe that the doctors were “paid to give him that diagnosis.”

**In the U.S., 0.25 to 0.64 percent of the population has schizophrenia or related psychotic disorders.**

Elzeiny’s family moved to Saratoga about one and a half years before her father’s symptoms began to emerge in 2011. During this time, the family would occasionally hear about the injustices of the CIA or FBI.

Her father, who was in his 40s, started to exhibit symptoms that suggested paranoid schizophrenia — his constant fear and anxiety muddled his ability to decipher reality from delusion. For example, he would become skeptical if he saw the furniture in their house was moved around and he would hesitate when he was served food, thinking it was an indication of malicious intent.

At the time, Elzeiny believed her father’s claims, taking everything that came out of her father’s mouth “as the truth.”

Despite his formal diagnosis, Elzeiny was never informed of his situation and only vaguely knew that her father was sick. Elzeiny said she also didn’t have a reason to not believe her father.

“He would say things about the CIA and FBI,” she said. “I thought, ‘Oh, that’s pretty interesting.’ It occurs to me that I still believed him in seventh grade.”

However, by the time Elzeiny reached eighth grade, her trust in her father’s theories started to crumble.

One day, while she was in the car with her siblings, Elzeiny finally connected the dots when he repeated a phrase he commonly told her: “When the devil speaks to

you, you shouldn’t listen to him.”

Elzeiny realized that he really meant to say, “When the CIA talks to you, don’t listen to their orders.” His words, Elzeiny said, indirectly accused her of siding against her father by “working” with the CIA.

“From then on, I took everything with a grain of salt,” Elzeiny said. “Before, if my dad said something purely ridiculous, such as ‘this knocked down trash can is a result of [the CIA]; I didn’t believe that. But, I believed almost everything else.”

## Effects on family life

As her father’s symptoms started becoming more apparent, Elzeiny said that her family’s everyday life became severely impacted.

As a result of his condition, her father, who had worked as a nuclear engineer for approximately 15 years, lost his job. Her father started relying on medications and antidepressants to combat his symptoms. But his medications, which Elzeiny said barely help his mental state, keep him in bed a minimum of 14 hours a day; however, during his waking hours, he still remains self-sufficient. As a result of this financial blow, the family had to turn to Social Security and insurance for survival. Elzeiny’s mother took on the role of the household’s breadwinner, despite not having a high-paying job.

According to Elzeiny, her father has regular schizophrenic episodes, but the severity of each one differs from month to month. In the moments when he becomes occupied with his thoughts, he views his surroundings as viable evidence of the CIA’s corruption, even something as seemingly insignificant as “a knocked over chair.”

Furthermore, if a family member ever tries to disprove his statements with substantiated evidence, her father comes up with an excuse, claiming that the proof was falsely created.

Some of Elzeiny’s three older siblings still sometimes try to reason with their father with logical evidence. Elzeiny’s eldest brother, who is 10 years older than her, especially tries to change his viewpoints, even though his efforts are often futile.

Elzeiny said that because her brother was in college when her father began to demonstrate increasingly severe symptoms, the family decided to not inform him, on the theory that it was the last thing he needed to worry about while in college.

Because of this, Elzeiny said he still hasn’t fully come to terms with their father’s medical state.

Unlike her brother, Elzeiny has mostly adjusted to her father’s condition; for example, when he experiences an episode, Elzeiny now knows how to appropriately react by quickly shifting the conversation topic.

“It’s important above all else that he knows that he is not alone, so I don’t want to get aggressive and get mad at him,” Elzeiny said.

Despite her father’s condition, Elzeiny said she still loves him dearly. After all, his schizophrenia does not consume her family’s entire daily life — it only constitutes an important aspect of it.

“He’s still my dad and someone I communicate with regularly, such as at the dinner table,” she said. “He is still a parental figure. The difference is that I don’t trust any of his opinions anymore. As a consequence of



FALCON // ALAN ZU

Senior Leena Elzeiny opens up at the Speak Up For Change assembly about her father’s mental illness: paranoid schizophrenia. Elzeiny said, “I essentially wanted to prove people wrong that a lot of people just took me for a normal kid in Saratoga, but, in reality, I deal with a lot of other things. I wanted to challenge people’s assumptions because assumptions aren’t safe.”

that, I have learned to think independently.”

## Moving forward

In early January of last year, Elzeiny listened to an episode of “This American Life,” a weekly radio program and podcast. This one “Chip in My Brain” caused her to re-evaluate her experiences.

In this particular episode, a young man named Cody Treybig recounts his experiences with his childhood basketball coach, AJ, who became something of a cult leader in his life. Though Treybig’s parents remained unaware, their son started to adapt and learn the coach’s extreme and bizarre ideologies. Now, as an adult, Treybig said that he took all of his coach’s teachings for granted, and no one realized.

“How he said it made me look back and be like, ‘Wait, that’s exactly what happened to me. I took everything, no matter how absurd, that my dad said as truth,’” Elzeiny said. “I had no reason to do otherwise.”

**“It’s been very surreal because it’s all experiences that I’ve not really talked about.”**

SENIOR Leena Elzeiny

In addition, Elzeiny, under the pressure of writing her college applications, began to reflect on her life with her father. Upon encountering a question about her home life, Elzeiny’s thoughts were twofold.

“I was like, ‘If you really want to go into [my home life], there are two aspects,’ Elzeiny said. “I live in a rich society and my dad is unemployed, and the reason he is unemployed is because of [his condition].”

Elzeiny then had to come to terms that her father’s condition was a mental illness, and in her quest to write about her experiences she eventually discovered the formal name of her father’s condition.

“That was when I figured out the word was paranoid schizophrenia, and that made me realize I had this entire private life that I don’t even talk about,” she said.

After one of her father’s frequent episodes and being inspired by several YouTube videos, Elzeiny let out all her emotions on a document, which organized her thoughts for college applications as well as helped draft a speech.

>> **bigidea**

## Schizophrenia

### What is schizophrenia?

The disorder is primarily characterized by a decreased ability to understand reality, abnormal behavior, and strange speech.

### What are the subtypes of schizophrenia?

The disorder was traditionally seen to have 5 subtypes: paranoid type, disorganized type, catatonic type, undifferentiated type, residual type.

### How many people are affected?

For people that have relatives with the disorder, 10% of them are susceptible to getting the disorder sometime in their life according to National Alliance on Mental Illness.

# Flipping burgers for bucks? Not so much these days

## MORE TEENS SPURN TRADITIONAL FAST-FOOD JOBS

by Andrew Lee  
& Ananya Vadlakonda

As the influx of orders piled up at Jack in the Box in the summer, junior Shiv Gupta found himself fielding orders from both customers in the dining room and cars idling in the drive-through, since the restaurant was short staffed that evening. Juggling a mix of french fries, fountain drinks and sauce packets, Gupta settled into a steady rhythm, dishing out sandwiches for each fleeing order.

Gupta is not a stereotypical teen working in fast food for money and entry-level work experience. Instead, Gupta's family owns 48 Jack In the Box franchises along the West Coast, and Gupta often finds himself working at one of the restaurants over the summer, some weekends and on occasional weekdays, when help is running short. A generation ago, many teens would have joined Gupta in the fast-food trenches, but these days, he is one of the few SHS students working in the traditional teenage job of fast food.

**"A job in which you serve other people is an important life experience."**



SENIOR Sarah Meng

Nor are Saratoga students alone. Fast-food restaurants, exemplified by extended franchise chains that serve affordable food such as Taco Bell, McDonalds and Wendy's, are increasingly being scorned by high school students.

According to an article by The New York Times, economists from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the percentage of those ages 16 to 19 working in fast food

dropped 15 percent over the past 18 years.

Having lived and worked in the fast-food industry, Gupta said that he thinks that high school students are refraining from working at fast-food restaurants due to social stigma and "classism" toward these jobs.

"When people think of fast food, they think of lower-class citizens or blue-collar workers, and though people don't consciously think like this, they don't want to be seen with these lower classes," Gupta said.

Especially for high schoolers, students would rather be seen working for a popular or trendy cafe rather than a fast-food joint, Gupta said.

"Fast food is not as popular with my peers," Gupta said. "People would rather work at a boba place or a Chipotle because it is currently popular among students, and everyone wants to go with the popular decision."

Senior Sarah Meng, for instance, decided to apply for a job at an independent boba place called Boba Drive in Sunnyvale so that she could have "hands-on experience on different work areas."

Meng said that "having a job in which you serve other people is a really important life experience for young people to have and can impact the way we treat others in that industry in the future."

Meng also works for McArthur and Levin LLP, a small law firm in Los Gatos, where she files papers and goes on occasional coffee runs. Having a brother who has worked at the firm for 10 years, Meng was recommended the job by her sibling and was encouraged to apply.

However, Meng has noticed that many students do not feel the same way when it comes to working and getting experience in food service industry.

Senior Katie Hulme, who works at Jamba Juice, suggested that students tend to want to work at places they are attracted to as customers and where other employees are people that students can easily connect to.

"I think a lot of high schoolers avoid fast-food jobs because they have bad reputations, but finding a place where you like the people you work with is more important," Hulme said.

"Jamba Juice is super fun because most of the employees are high school and college students, and

they're easy to talk to."

Junior Christine Lee stays away from working for fast-food businesses because the type of skills required of an employee in the industry goes far beyond those that students obtain at school.

"[I feel like there would be] a lot of pressure because you have to get every single order correct and complete orders quickly, not to mention the food that you make has to actually taste good," Lee said. "I'd probably give the wrong person the wrong food and burn the kitchen to the ground."

Also, Lee expressed fear of having "to deal with crazy customers who think they're always right."

**Millennials, restaurant owner Rajeev Gupta has noticed, want to control schedules and want more freedom with their jobs.**

Another trend surrounding job interest and culture at SHS suggests that students are beginning to neglect getting jobs in general, let alone just traditional work in fast food. With long hours required for rigorous classes, students, especially upperclassmen, feel that spending time working at a job may not be as valuable of an experience.

Rajeev Gupta, Shiv Gupta's father and a Jack in the Box franchisee, said he has seen a decreasing number of millennials and teenagers coming to work for fast-food restaurants in recent years.

Millennials, Mr. Gupta has noticed, want to control schedules and want more freedom with their jobs and shifts they work. Fast food is fundamentally structured in the way it operates and demands certain hierarchy and old work ethics, things that do not appeal to younger audiences, Mr. Gupta said.

"Millennials want to work smarter, not harder," Mr. Gupta said.

For students like junior Kevin Chang, working in general is something that he does not plan on doing during high school, saying his "junior year is not permitting at all."

In addition, Chang has also noticed that



SOURCES: Child Trends, PayScale, CA.gov

while parents are encouraging their children to get jobs, a general trend shows that students are less motivated to work due to academics.

Studies on teenage employment have shown the employment rate to be at around 4 percent, and researchers have found that work intensity is often driven by the amount of time remaining after pursuing school-related activities, accounting for the absence of teenage workers in the fast-food industry.

The study found that non-employment doesn't guarantee educational success and that employment can positively impact educational outcomes if it remains under the certain threshold of intensity that is often determined by a student's academic responsibilities.

Lee said that although she still plans on getting a job eventually, she feels that school and extracurricular workloads prohibit her from getting involved in the workforce any time soon.

"I don't think I'll get a job this year or first semester next year because schoolwork, extracurriculars and pretty soon, college apps will take up most of the day," Lee said. "I might consider getting one in second semester senior year since I'll have more time."

But whether it is because of the social stigma surrounding fast food, fear of overwhelming pressure on the job or the sheer amount of school work that prohibits getting jobs, students, especially in communities like Saratoga, seem to increasingly avoid working in the fast-food industry these days.

"I think most students default to working at a tutoring or education center since it's in our comfort zone," Lee said. "We don't have to train ourselves to do new tasks like flip burgers since we already learned all the material we teach at school." ♦

# When is a B an F? How high academic expectations skew perceptions of success

by Manasi Garg  
& Christine Zhang

When sophomore Aileen Liao received her geometry test back in eighth grade, all she could think about was how disappointed she was for receiving a B and not an A.

"I felt really upset," Liao said. "I had to try really hard to raise my grade, and it made me study harder."

Similar disappointments play out almost daily here. Academic success is heavily prioritized and praised, and students in Saratoga hold themselves to abnormally high standards of achievement compared to other communities across the country.

These high standards are translated into tangible measures of academic success. According to Saratoga High's school profile, last year, its mean composite ACT score for the class of 2018 was 30.6 out of 36, whereas the national mean composite was 20.8.

As of Nov. 14, registrar Robert Wise said that the school has 416 students — approximately 31 percent of the school — with a total weighted GPA of 4.0 or higher.

In order to technically pass a class with full credit at the school, students need a D-, and the minimum grade colleges accept for college preparatory courses is a C-. Yet according to a Facebook survey of 119 Saratoga High students, 77 said that they considered a B a "failing" grade, and seven students said the same thing about an A-

### The root of the problem

The survey hints at the reasons for high-pressure academic environment. Over time students internalize the sentiment that anything less than an A isn't good enough.

On a deeper level, however, the pressure students at here feel may be originate at home. Most are children of Asian American immigrants, with parents bringing values that they instill in their children, particularly a higher emphasis on education than is traditionally found in many other cultures, and the belief that through hard work, upward mobility can be achieved.

"The Asian American Achievement Paradox," a book published in 2015 by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, attributes the importance on education in part to American immigration policies that favor people with more professional skills.

A 2016 census report found that 54 percent of Asians in America had bachelor's degrees, while whites, the next highest group, had 37 percent. Additionally, 22 percent of Asians had advanced degrees, in comparison to 14 percent of whites.

Another factor contributing to children of immigrants feeling more pressure to succeed is that their parents have given up so much to establish a stable life here. These internalized cultural expectations, combined with the ever-present academic pressure of peers, can lead to greatly increased levels of stress in students.

CASSY, the on-campus therapy service, reported that 62 percent of their services in the 2017-2018 school year were for referrals related to academic stress.

CASSY therapist Kaitlin Eastland puts some of the blame on the pressure to take AP and Honors classes at the school.

**"Your job is just to do well in class and try your best. Then, if you can handle more, you can take on extracurriculars."**

SOPHOMORE Aileen Liao

"I think there is this perception about grades and college that makes it hard for students to see any other path except the best colleges," Eastland said. "That puts a lot of pressure on students, and along with the expectations they place on themselves, it's harder to concentrate and focus."

### A competitive environment

For Liao, grades are the No. 1 priority. In addition to achieving high scores in her classes, Liao is the president of the UNICEF club and plays oboe as an accomplished member of the California Youth Symphony.

In certain circumstances, sophomore Rohan Kumar feels that an A- is a failing grade. He associates failure with the feeling of "I could've done better" rather than sadness, and he said that if he receives an A- instead of an A, it is "probably just me not trying hard enough."

Kumar said that his standards are self-

imposed. Instead of monitoring his grades, his parents usually comfort him when he doesn't live up to his own high expectations.

He also said he likes the competitive nature of the school.

"I think it's great because it encourages you to do better," he said. "If Saratoga wasn't so competitive, I wouldn't do half the things I do, and I end up enjoying everything I do."

Kumar is a member of Science Bowl, Quiz Bowl and robotics teams. Additionally, he was the only Saratoga High qualifier for the semifinals of the U.S. Biology Olympiad last year, and also qualified for the American Invitational Mathematics Exam.

Freshman Nikhil Kapasi admits to having high self-imposed expectations, but he thinks that the academic pressures at the school stem from both parents and peers.

"If one of your classmates is doing really well in the class and you're not, you're like, 'I need to get this better grade,'" Kapasi said. "There's always someone who's doing more, so you feel like you need to beat them."

Kapasi also noted that the competitiveness extends beyond just grades; it is ingrained in other activities students do.

"I not only need grades, I also need all this other stuff that other people are doing," he said. "I think that in the community we have, everyone just pushes each other, which can be a good and a bad thing."

Out of 102 student responses from a Facebook survey, 64 said that they spend 10 or more hours on extracurricular activities per week, and 52 said that they regularly participate in community service.

In the 18 years he has been teaching here, Spanish teacher Bret Yeilding said the culture has always been similarly competitive.

He recalled many instances in which students emailed him at unreasonable hours in the morning and begged him to raise test scores by as little as one point. He said that at the end of the day, there are 700 points possible in the entire semester, and questioned the hyper-obsessiveness over minuscule grades.

"There is way too much emphasis on grades instead of actually learning," Yeilding said. "I don't blame the students for that at all. Our entire culture in the Bay Area is if you don't go to Harvard or Stanford, you are a big fat loser, and you'll never do anything but work at a fast-food restaurant."



GRAPHIC BY ELAINE TOH

Yeilding also noted that Saratoga is unusual because of the large numbers of students who have this mentality — it is the majority of the school. In comparison to Leigh High School in San Jose, where he used to teach, Yeilding said that the competitive environment and fear of failure at Saratoga High is "so, so much worse."

"Leigh High School might as well have been on a different planet," he said.

**It's not everyone**  
However, even in the midst of this environment where the majority of seniors attend a four-year college, some students choose to go down alternate paths.

Senior Eveliina Niva will attend De Anza College next year, and she plans on transferring to another college afterwards. Because of the negative stigma surrounding community colleges here, Niva initially did not feel comfortable with her choice.

"It took me a while to accept the fact that I'm going to community college," she said. "I didn't really want to tell anyone at first."

Niva said that some of the competitive culture at the school comes from the students' mindsets, while other people may have more pressure from their parents. Either way, she said that everyone "needs to learn a bit of failure sometimes."

Eastland, the CASSY counselor, said that there is nothing wrong with students attending community colleges or taking a gap year to figure out their interests.

"There's many ways to be successful later in life," Eastland said. "I just think it's hard to see that when you're here in this school." ♦

# Wasian student walks the line between two cultures



Allison Hartley

Seven years ago, my family moved from Saratoga to an upper-middle class neighborhood in Houston, where I resumed second grade. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my predominantly white classmates expressed confusion over my ethnicity.

My skin tone certainly didn't match most of theirs, but my name was ambiguously Caucasian-sounding enough to intrigue them. I'm not sure how they rationalized my appearance, but I knew they were having their epiphanies that I was biracial when they would say blatantly, "Gee, your mom is Chinese and your dad is white."

I also don't blame them — many were unacquainted with Asian culture. That didn't make them racists — we were about 8 years old. Even if I'd never been questioned about my race before, I never felt uncomfortable or thought anything of their questions.

Over the years, I've noticed that people tend to perceive the "other" first — the part of my background that isn't similar to theirs. When I visit my mom's side of the family in Hong Kong, the majority-Chinese popula-

tion points out my white appearance, while my Caucasian peers in Houston saw my dark hair and eyes.

After moving back to Saratoga in 2015, these traits blend in, but I get my share of curious ethnicity conversations with friends and teachers.

People ask variations of, "You're not full?" The "Asian" is implied.

These are innocent questions, and I'll usually laugh them off — it can be an interesting conversation starter.

But those questions coming from a closer friend can be, frankly, weird. I would expect them to put two and two together — I mean, my last name is Hartley.

Anyway, in 2018, how much does my racial background matter? My Asian and white combo will really only be considered by the U.S. Census. Maybe College Board.

When applying to colleges, I've been told to mark "white" rather than "Asian" in order to curb any possible disadvantages due to affirmative action. I've even heard my friends fretting over hiding their Asian background in their applications, joking about changing their names to sound "white" like mine.

When my Hong Kong-born mother told her friends and family that she wanted to

marry my dad, a British white guy from Massachusetts, they weren't shocked. Her sisters also had white spouses, and they had largely assimilated into American culture.

Sixteen years later, we're back in Saratoga, and grocery store cashiers still ask my parents "Are you two together?" and glance back and forth between my parents

and me, trying to fathom this "Wasian" — half-white and half-Asian — girl in front of them as they pack our goods. Although a mixed-race couple may face a lot of judgment in the Midwest, my parents haven't experienced stigma for being a couple in the Bay Area, even if people don't always immediately recognize them as being a couple.

My dad said that the only times he becomes aware of race occur when the confused clerk at Trader Joe's asks if they're together. Although the sight of a mixed-race couple will be a surprise to some individuals, the culture of diversity in the Bay Area contributes to the normalization of mixed-race couples.

At home, my mom cooks food from a plethora of cultural cuisines, and although my dad may crave a tuna sandwich over fried rice sometimes, our home cooked diet doesn't correspond with Chinese any more

than it does British.

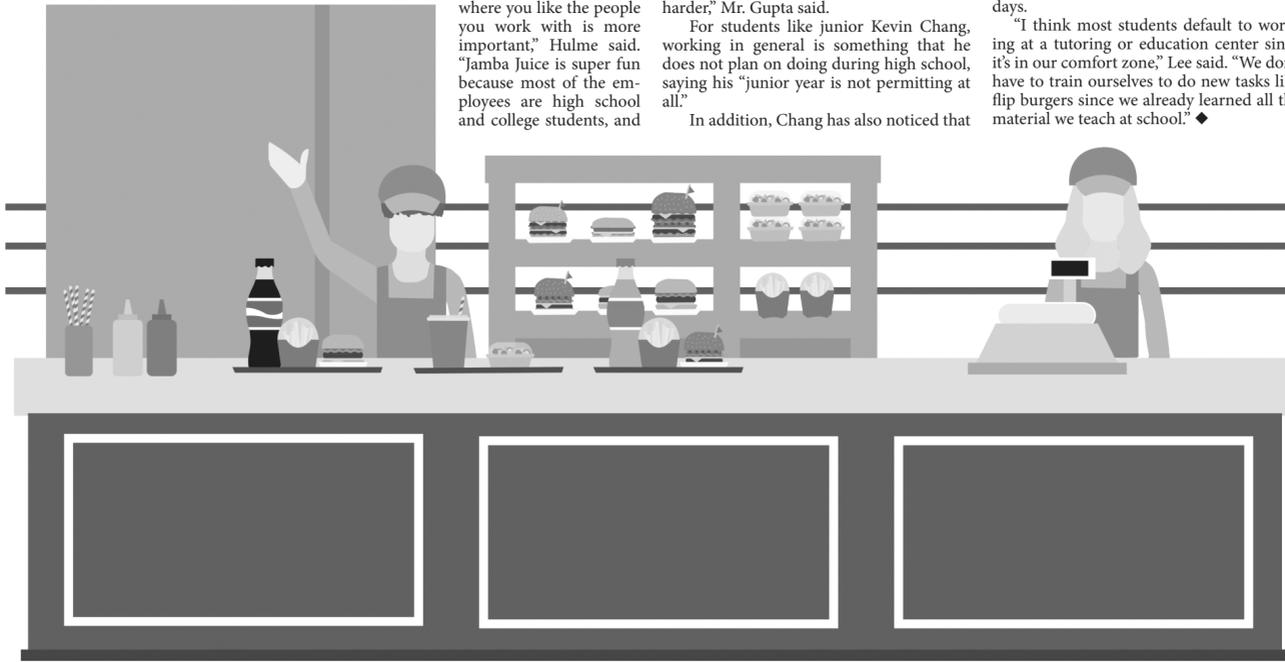
Of course, my mom always teases that the occasional double-takes I receive when I'm with both of my parents are due to my stunning half-blooded good looks — especially when we visit Hong Kong, where people tend to immediately recognize me as half and half.

Some people who are aware of my Wasian-ness will occasionally subject me to obscure Wasian stereotypes: "Some Wasians are super good at math," or "Wasian people are attractive!" I've heard them all.

Racial stereotyping is obviously not unique to any one race, but one element that might be specific to people of mixed ethnicities is dissecting their cultural backgrounds. I've had people analyze my face for white versus Asian traits and even decide that my outfit or water bottle made me more white than Asian.

Most of the time, they address the most irrelevant things, as if having a golden retriever makes me any more white than the next dog owner.

I have been fortunate not to have been subject to any truly negative experiences due to my mixed ethnic background. While I may be genuinely open to friends' curiosity about my mixed race and laugh about the nature of Wasians, I think individuals generally want to be perceived as themselves, first, without any racial labels. ♦



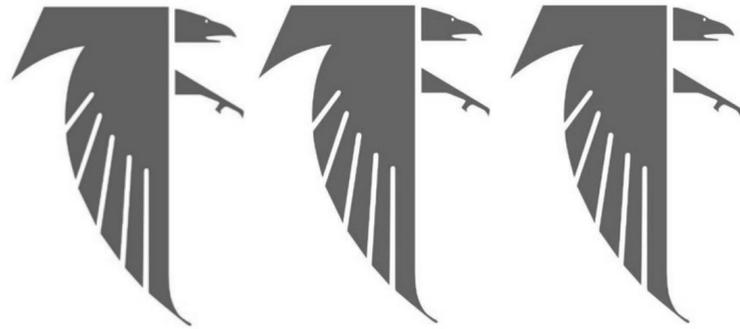
ALL GRAPHICS BY ELAINE TOH



# 2019 Falcon Fun Run

Saratoga's First Annual  
Walk/Run 5k & 10k  
Sunday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>  
9 am Start Time

Register at [falconsportsboosters.com](http://falconsportsboosters.com)  
Race starts and ends at Saratoga High School



**Pre-registration: Website**  
\$35 Adults  
\$25 Students/Teachers/Seniors  
**Day of Event Registration: Starts at 8am**  
\$40 Adults  
\$30 Students/Teachers/Seniors  
**Proceeds Support:**  
Saratoga High School Athletics

BOYS' BASKETBALL

## Wilcox tops Falcons in close game at home; team tries to rally for high seeding in CCS playoffs

By Leo Cao & Jeffrey Xu

As the clock wound down to 50 seconds left in the fourth quarter during their home game against the Wilcox Chargers on Jan. 25, the Falcons trailed by three points. Playing aggressive defense, senior forward Sehij Dhindsa reached into an opposing Charger's dribble, stole the ball and dished it out to sophomore guard Cameron King, who was wide open outside the 3-point line.

King sunk the shot. The crowd roared. The Falcons led by one.

But not for long, as the Chargers scored twice on layups and grabbed key rebounds to secure a 47-43 win. As of last Friday, the Falcons were 3-4 in league and 12-7 overall, but had qualified for CCS based on pre-season play.

Senior forward Patrick Li attributes the loss to Wilcox to the team's turnovers. "The Falcons turned the ball over 18 times compared to only seven assists, something that hasn't happened much this year.

Additionally the Falcons shot five for 30 from three-point range, the first time they failed to crack the 25 percent threshold this season. Despite that, the team remained competitive throughout, a sign of their vastly improved defense.

"We played a lot better defense on Friday against Wilcox, but we are still turning the ball over too much," Li said. "I think our next step is to take care of the ball better, and then our shots will follow."

Despite the loss, senior captain Kyle Yu said that the Falcons competed hard throughout the game and that there numerous instances that showed the Falcons growth over the year.

Early on, senior guard Hanlin Sun made

a pair of 3-pointers, putting the Falcons on top. Dhindsa also grabbed key offensive rebounds, allowing the Falcons to keep putting up points and keep pace with the Chargers. Finally, Li played amazing defense inside, preventing the Chargers from getting easy buckets at the rim.

With the average height of the players on the team being around 6' 0" to 6' 1," the Falcons often find themselves battling taller opponents. Yu said that for what the team lacks in size, they make up for in quickness.

"Our team is small, so we play really fast to make it difficult for the teams with big players to keep on," Yu said. "Once we get a rebound or the other team scores, we immediately run and try to score at the other end."

While the players individually are performing well, Yu said that their teamwork has also improved, allowing them to execute plays quicker and more cohesively under the direction of coach Patrick Judge.

"The team chemistry is starting to get better," Yu said. "We are beginning to trust each other more, and our defense is starting to pick up to be really good."

In recent games, the Falcons beat the Fremont Firebirds 68-58 at home on Jan. 22 as well as the Lynbrook Vikings 75-65 in an away game on Jan. 18.

The Falcons look to bounce back during tonight's game at Santa Clara. Additional upcoming games include a home game against Monta Vista on Feb. 4 and an away game against Milpitas on Feb. 6.

Because they have already qualified CCS, Yu said that their main goal for the rest of the season is to get a high seed in Division 3 of the CCS playoffs.

"I think we can make a good run in CCS," Yu said. "I think we can get to the CCS finals too." ♦



Senior forward Sehij Dhindsa finds sophomore guard Cameron King for a wide open 3-pointer during the fourth quarter against Wilcox on Jan. 25. The Falcons lost by four.



Head coach Patrick Judge addresses the team during a timeout in their win against Lynbrook on Jan. 18.



Sophomore point guard Tyler Chu dishes out to junior guard Siva Sambasivam for a 3-pointer against Fremont on Jan. 22.

WRESTLING

## Better coaching key factor behind improvement for team

By Isaac Le & Alex Wang

The judge raised senior Victor Chen's hand high in victory after a hard-fought match against Mountain View on Jan. 22. Chen had been taken down multiple times by his opponent, Tai Nguyen, who attacked Chen's weaker left side, grabbing his leg and twisting him to the ground. Eventually, though, Nguyen tired out and became sloppy. Chen took advantage and won in overtime by throwing his opponent on his back, winning the match by decision.

"The match was tough because I had an opponent ranked in CCS," Chen said.

Despite Chen's win, the team lost 56-9 to Mountain View and narrowly lost to Homestead 32-30 on Jan. 24. During these dual

meets, points are awarded to teams' scores based on the individual performances of the wrestlers.

As the final stretch of the season nears, the team is looking to send some of its wrestlers, most notably Chen and junior Kole Tippetts, to CCS, which is a tournament that is more individual-focused, unlike dual meets. For wrestlers to qualify for CCS, they must place top four in their weight class at the SCVALS tournament on Feb. 8.

The team has found more success this season compared to past seasons, mostly due to the fact that they have been able to fill their roster. Not only does this make their dual meets longer and more interesting, Chen said, but it also ensures that

the team does not lose points due to forfeit. Furthermore, Chen said that having more members on the team makes practices more fun, especially because they have been able to bond through activities like movie nights and trips to Safeway.

But because the newer wrestlers are younger and less experienced, Chen said, it is up to him and the other captains to lead the team during warmups and help them on moves, dieting and other general advice.

The team welcomed a new head coach this year, history teacher Kirk Abe. Abe has abundant experience in both coaching and wrestling when he was in high school. He is joined by assistant coach Taylor Wilson,

who has coached for the past three years. During Abe and Wilson's practices, the team learns and drills techniques and then utilizes those techniques in live wrestling matches against other team members. This method has worked well so far, Chen said.

"In past years, our feedback [from previous coaches] has generally been a bit on the negative side and some people get discouraged and burnt out easily," Chen said. "Abe and Taylor have been pretty positive recently about our performances and have not put too much blame on us. They might say this is horrible and that is sloppy, but it is still very good improvement."

To end the season, there are two remaining meets: a dual meet against Los Altos and the league tournament, an opportunity to qualify for CCS. ♦

GIRLS' SOCCER

## With Krishnan sidelined, team needs scoring to make CCS

By Siva Sambasivam

After a strong 3-1-1 preseason, the girls' soccer squad has hit a rough patch as of late, failing to win their last three games while dropping to fifth in the De Anza league. The team still has a good shot to qualify for the CCS playoffs but will need a strong showing in their second half of league play.

The team has completed the first half of their league season, winning only one of its six games, and holding a 1-3-2 record. Their one win was a 3-0 victory against Fremont.

Coach Ben Maxwell has had a tough time figuring out lineup combinations with the numerous injuries the team has suffered this year. Most importantly, the Falcons lost junior forward Ananya Krishnan to a nagging

leg injury. Krishnan was the team's leading goal scorer and attempted to play through the pain for two games. However, after re-injuring her leg during the second game, Krishnan has remained out since winter break. The team is hopeful that Krishnan will return this season.

Not having Krishnan for the entirety of their league season thus far has made scoring goals extremely hard for the team. In games which the Falcons score more than two goals, they are undefeated.

However, when the Falcons fail to reach the back of the net, it creates a snowball effect that hurts their defense as well. For example, during their match against Mountain View, the best team in the league, the Falcons altered their gameplan.

According to sophomore Michelle Lim, the team employed a defense-first approach to counteract the explosive goal scoring of Mountain View.

"Since Mountain View was so good offensively, we came out really defensively in the first half, and it didn't go so well, so we had to quickly change that after halftime," Lim said.

It wasn't enough. The team ended up losing 5-0 to the Spartans. Despite the blow-out, the Falcons have remained relatively competitive in every other league game, giving them hope of entering the second half of league.

"We are getting better every game, and we've had some really good games," Lim said. "We have really good chemistry, and

share the ball well. As long as everyone plays for each other, we should do really well for the rest of the season."

The team will face Homestead in their senior night today. The Falcons lost to them in a 2-1 heartbreaker during their last match, and hope that being at home with the senior night environment will help turn the tables.

Their match against Homestead also has playoff ramifications, and the Falcons still have a chance to make the CCS, and the rest of their league games will determine their seeding.

"We lost to [Homestead] the last time we played them, so it will be a tough game but we still have a chance at CCS," senior goalie Jennah El-Ashmawi said. "It really depends on the next couple games." ♦

## GIRLS' BASKETBALL

# Despite rash of injuries, team pushes on as players are forced to learn new positions

BY Allison Hartley

In the fourth quarter of the game against Los Gatos on Jan. 15, sophomore point guard Iris Lee raced down the lane, passing the ball out to sophomore guard Kaitlyn Yu on the wing for a fast transition play and a shot. Lee was in the position of playing key minutes and making important contributions, especially considering that many of the Falcons' projected starters have been out recuperating from injuries, with some only recently returning.

Among the injured have been two starting sophomores: point guard Jane Loo (calf) and Yu (Achilles heel and calf injury). Also, out have been starting junior guard Anika Prasad with a hand and wrist injury, and senior Kirstin Kruka due to recent appendix complications.

Loo expects to be back for the game against Santa Clara on Feb. 1. Yu returned for the Jan. 11 game against Santa Clara. Prasad returned on Jan. 15, but Kruka is not likely to recover by the end of the season.

The team beat Los Gatos 47-37 on Jan. 15, but lost to Palo Alto 51-47 on Jan. 23

and against Wilcox 52-39 on Jan. 25. The Falcons also lost at home to Cupertino 62-55 in overtime on Jan. 28. Cupertino tied the game with a 3-pointer at the end of regulation, making the loss especially crushing. The team will play Los Gatos on Feb. 5 and Mountain View on Feb. 8 for the second time.

Although the team lost by four point loss against Palo Alto, the team played a high-caliber game against the league's top team, seeing success especially with rebounding and achieving true moral victory.

As of Jan. 27, their season record is 11-8, with a league record of 2-5 and preseason record 9-3.

"We had some rough games [without key players], but overall it made our team stronger because some players who aren't used to playing as much stepped up," sophomore center Berry Bailey said. "Some players play a lot more than others, and the players that don't play as much have their time to shine."

Lee, who continues to suffer from shoulder pain and multiple jammed fingers, replaced star player Loo as starting

point guard after the second game of the preseason.

"In the beginning, I felt a lot of pressure playing as the starting point guard, but now it's just playing basketball," Lee said.

**"When I'm on the floor, I'm focused on my own man."**

SOPHOMORE Jane Loo



Lee added that bench players' previous experiences on the court will help the team's depth; the disruption in the starting lineup has given starters the chance to help their teammates improve by observing from the bench and by giving comments that they otherwise would not have noticed from the floor.

"I can give feedback on how to play help-defense whereas when I'm on the floor, I'm focused on my own man and I would never

be able to help my teammates," Loo said. "Just from sitting out I've been able to help everyone on the team more."

Despite the injury issues, the team remains optimistic about prospects for the rest of the season and CCS.

"It would be helpful if all of our team healed, but midway through the season we have adapted and gotten a feel for how we play with each other," Bailey said. "It'll have an impact on the score, but it won't be the difference between winning or losing a game."

The team continues to promote wellness by encouraging using foam rollers, stretching and scheduling weekly workouts in the weight room. Following particularly difficult games such as the one against Los Gatos, coach Danny Wallace takes the team through a light practice, giving time for muscles to heal, before practicing hard to prepare for the next game.

"We know who we're up against," Bailey said. "We have to expect the best out of all of the teams that we play because they're the best of the best, and we need to go in thinking like it's the CCS championship." ♦

## BOYS' SOCCER

# Opponents feast on offense-lacking Falcons

BY Andrew Li & Alan Zu

After moving up to the competitive De Anza League, the boys' soccer team has struggled to score in a season where a lack of experience combined with being in a tougher division have made it virtually impossible to win.

As of Jan. 28, the boys have not scored since an 11-3 loss against Santa Teresa on Dec. 14.

The team lost 3-0 to Santa Clara on Jan. 25, lost 5-0 to Mountain View on Jan. 18, lost 3-0 to Homestead on Jan. 14 and lost 3-0 to Los Altos on Jan. 11.

There have been occasional bright spots. During a game vs. Los Gatos on Jan. 2, senior center back AJ Lee made a mistake and left an opponent wide open, allowing the player to shoot the ball. Sophomore goalkeeper KJ Jasti, with good reflexes, extended his body "like a slinky toy," Lee said, and blocked the shot, maintaining the score of 5-0 in favor of Los Gatos. The team celebrated the great defensive play.

Even so, the final score was 7-0, marking

their seventh loss of the season.

Though more than halfway done with their season, the Falcons are still struggling to come away with a single win, with a disappointing record of 0-12 overall and a league record of 0-6. For eight out of the 12 games played so far, the team has been shut out as of Jan. 28.

The main reason for the team's struggles is the loss of 18 seniors to graduation last spring, senior striker and captain Owen Keogh said.

"We had seniors who were used to what we do, and our style of play is to play hard," Keogh said. "We work really hard, but because we're not as skilled, we grind out games."

However, the team still sees a possibility in doing better the rest of the season. Keogh said that toward the end of the pre-season and now during the regular season, "we're not getting destroyed" as much as in previous games.

To improve, the team has been working on their fitness more than usual and trying to build competitiveness through scrimmages, Lee said. But despite the team's per-



FALCON // ALAN ZU

Sophomore Nolan Chen contests a Mountain View opponent on Jan. 18. The team lost 5-0.

severance, they are still struggling to cover for their lack of experience.

"We're putting up a fight, but our lack of execution and lack of experience doesn't help us," Keogh said.

Even with the unsuccessful season so far, Lee said that the players should still keep their heads high.

"It is important that we should stay positive throughout the season," Lee said. "Morale has improved throughout the season, so we should finish strong."

The Falcons will play Homestead on Feb. 1, Palo Alto on Feb. 4 and 6, Mountain View on Feb. 8 and to close the season out, Los Gatos on Feb. 13. ♦

# Dedicated parents support sports behind the scenes

BY Shama Gupta & Christine Zhang

As she received the soccer ball on her back foot and quickly connected a pass to a teammate during a recent game, varsity midfielder sophomore Leila Chaudhry heard a roar of cheers from the sideline as her family applauded and shouted their encouragement.

She ran down the field, reinvigorated and filled with confidence by her mother, Rehana Rehman.

Parents are often the main fans at school games, but they also play vital roles behind the scenes in support positions that allow sports to run smoothly on campus.

Chaudhry began playing soccer when she was one and a half years old when her mom signed her up for Kids Love Soccer, a program in which parents guide their children through starting the sport.

Today, along with being a two-year member of the school's varsity soccer team, she plays for the Mountain View Los Altos (MVL) soccer club and practices three times a week outside of school — a big time commitment, and one that she could only manage with the help of her parents.

Her mother, who played soccer in high school, also loves the sport, and has taken on many responsibilities in Chaudhry's teams. Along with coaching Chaudhry at a young age, Chaudhry's mother is now the team manager for both her high school and club team.

Chaudhry has some of her fondest memories of the sport with her mother. When she played recreational soccer at American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), she and her mother would stay after practice and play together.

Chaudhry said that her mother still attends almost all of her club and high school

games.

"I love having her and my family there because it's like having my own cheering squad," Chaudhry said. "I love playing and she knows how dedicated I am to it, so she puts her time into my soccer career."

Math teacher Kristen Hamilton said that she also tries to attend all of her children's games. Her daughter, junior Kathryn Hamilton, plays lacrosse, and her son, freshman Tyler Hamilton, plays lacrosse and football.

"I think it's very important to not only support them, but be there in case of injuries," Hamilton said. "I know they appreciate it, and I like to be there to cheer them on and be supportive to the team."

Both her children started off playing soccer, a decision influenced by the fact that she herself played the sport growing up. As they entered high school, they both picked up lacrosse, a choice that Hamilton supported.

Hamilton is also an active volunteer, as

she helps raise money for the football and lacrosse teams in various ways. As a teacher on campus, she sells snacks in her classroom, and the money helps the team afford new uniforms and buses for the upcoming season.

Last year, with the help of a few other parents, Hamilton became the team manager for girls' lacrosse. She is continuing to fulfill the same position this year; she has already sent a welcome email to other parents of the team, as she knew that such a gesture would have greatly helped her when her daughter was a freshman in the sport.

Hamilton said that communication is key in managing teams. After each fundraiser for lacrosse, she asks one of the team members to spread the message about the money raised.

"I think this empowers the girls," Hamilton said. "It lets them know that if we work together, we can accomplish a lot." ♦

# Rams' talent will win over Patriots veterans

BY Michael Zhang

Following a second-half comeback, partly thanks to a controversial pass interference no-call and a 57-yard field goal from kicker Greg Zuerlein in overtime, the Los Angeles Rams punched their ticket to Super Bowl LIII. They will face the New England Patriots in a rematch of Super Bowl XXXVI, where Tom Brady won his first championship.

However, it will be a different story this year, as the star-studded, well-rounded Rams team will hoist the Lombardi trophy Sunday night.

Although star receiver Cooper Kupp has been out since Week 10 after an ACL tear, the Rams have numerous other threats on offense.

Los Angeles' running game is especially potent. Pro-Bowl running back Todd Gurley, who rushed for 115 yards against Dallas in the divisional round, will enter the Super Bowl well-rested after only carrying the ball four times against New Orleans. Along with head coach Sean McVay's creative misdirections, Gurley will surely have a productive night.

C. J. Anderson, a recent acquisition for the Rams after being released by the Raiders, has proven valuable, especially when Gurley was injured at the end of the regular season. In two regular-season and two post-season games, Anderson has accumulated 466 rushing yards on 82 carries, good for 5.7 yards per carry.

With the Patriots' defense ranking 22nd in pass yards per game this season, McVay and quarterback Jared Goff will find a way to get the passing game going.

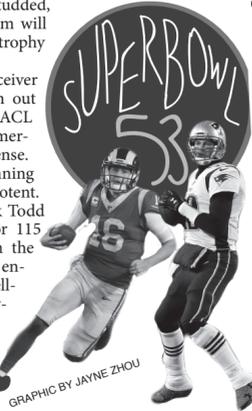
Wide receivers Brandin Cooks, who played for the Patriots last year in Super Bowl LII, and Robert Woods will play instrumental roles in a Rams victory as they find holes in the New England secondary through McVay's clever play designs.

On the other side of the ball, the Rams' front four will get to Brady the way the Giants were able to in the 2007 and 2011 Super Bowls.

While the Patriots' offensive line has done a good job protecting Brady this post-season against impressive Chargers and Chiefs pass rushers, the Rams' defensive line is an entirely different beast. Featuring sack leader Aaron Donald, veteran Ndamukong Suh and first-round selection Dante Fowler, the Rams will be able to pressure Brady, who is certainly not known for his speed and becomes human when defenses are pressuring him.

Even the Rams' secondary is improving. After cornerback Aqib Talib's return from injury in Week 14, the defense has been giving up fewer passing yards per game, even when counting playoff games.

Overall, the amount of talent on the Rams roster will prove too much for the Patriots to handle, meaning Brady and Belichick will be denied their sixth ring together for the second straight year in a 28-24 Rams win. ♦



GRAPHIC BY JAYNE ZHOU

# Nothing new: Patriots headed for sixth title

BY Leo Cao

Illustrating why the New England Patriots will win the Super Bowl is similar to explaining how to breathe in oxygen. At this point, it should be pretty clear what the results will be.

The reasons the Patriots will be raising their sixth Lombardi Trophy since 2001 are essentially the same as those from their first five victories: quarterback Tom Brady and head coach Bill Belichick are going to outplay and outsmart all of their opponents.

Obviously, winning a Super Bowl is not that simple, so let's take a look at some of the factors that greatly increase the Patriots' chances of winning the big game.

First of all, the Patriots' run game will be too much for the Los Angeles Rams. Although the Rams shut down the rushing attacks of their two previous playoff opponents, the Dallas Cowboys and New Orleans Saints, they allowed 5.1 yards per carry during the regular season, dead last in the NFL.

Enter running backs Sony Michel and Rex Burkhead, who have come up big in key moments during the playoffs this year. Rookie Michel has a combined 242 rushing yards and five touchdowns in the Patriots' two playoff games and veteran Burkhead had a number of key runs and the game-winning touchdown during the Patriots' final offensive drive in the AFC Championship game.

In addition to a resurgent run game, Belichick's mastery of an unpredictable game plan will be too much for the Rams' coaches and players to handle.

The 66-year-old Belichick and his staff have repeatedly shown that they can adapt to the times and produce innovative schemes.

During their first playoff game this year, the Patriots featured running back James White, their pass-catching specialist, in a dink-and-dunk short passing game. The next week, they switched to a power running game with Michel to chew up clock and keep opposing star Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes off the field — a huge factor in their overtime win.

The final component for orchestrating another Patriots victory is arguably the greatest quarterback of all time, Tom Brady. Similar to Michael Jordan's game-winning shot over the Utah Jazz in 1998 that cemented his legacy as the greatest basketball player of all time, Brady's comeback win from being down 28-3 in Super Bowl LI forced even Patriot haters to recognize and accept his greatness.

The Patriots are playing for in their ninth championship game in the Brady/Belichick era and it seems that Brady always plays his best under the bright lights of the Super Bowl. In his previous three appearances Brady has a total of nine touchdowns and 1,299 passing yards, including a record-breaking 505 yard performance against the Philadelphia Eagles last year.

Sure, Brady had his rough moments during the AFC Championship game against the Chiefs, such as an interception in the endzone early in the game, but he came through when it mattered the most. With the game on the line against, Brady marched his team down the field for three straight touchdowns to win the game.

That's the type of performance that will likely transpire during the Super Bowl and offer a storybook ending for the 41-year-old Brady. The Rams are too talented to get blown out, but Brady and Belichick don't need a 20-point win; a three-point win and a sixth Lombardi Trophy for the display case will do. ♦

# Junior coaches tennis at Bay Club Courtside

BY Megan Chen & Jayne Zhou

Three days a week for an average of two hours, junior Katie Lam isn't doing her exhausting AP US history reading or her extensive AP Biology homework; instead, she teaches younger children how to play the sport she loves: tennis.

Lam recently started coaching tennis at Bay Club Courtside, where she has been training since age 5; she represents Courtside in the USTA NorCal Junior Team, playing for them every summer since she was 7.

For Lam, it was easy to get the job because of her familiarity with the club. They didn't require an application and simply asked her to coach their younger teams.

During the three weekly sessions, Lam works with students from ages 3 to 6 and 8 to 12.

On Mondays, she teaches one-hour sessions, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, she teaches two-hour and forty-minute sessions. She mostly teaches forehands and backhands, but depending on age and skill,

she also has students serve and play for points.

"My favorite part is teaching the kids that don't know how to play, especially the really little ones, and when they get it, it's really rewarding," Lam said.

Her passion for coaching younger students sprung from being taught by high school students herself.

"When I was younger, there were always high school coaches alongside the regular coaches, so I knew

that was something I wanted to do when I grew up," said Lam.

The hardest part of coaching as a student is balancing school and work, Lam said. However, the block schedule helps her maintain a balanced schedule because she is able to get her homework done a day early.

According to Lam, the work is worth the sacrifices involved.

"I just remember that once you're there enough, you are able to build this bond with the kids," Lam said. "They actually remember you and things about you, and that makes it very rewarding." ♦



Lam  
Tennis Coach at  
Courtside

# More to badminton than hitting birdie with racket

BY Andrew Li

Badminton, a school sport that attracts dozens of participants each spring, consists of individual players or pairs of teammates facing off, trying to make the birdie touch the floor on their opponent's side of the court.

I decided to try this sport because I thought I had decent hand-eye coordination from playing baseball. My thinking: If I can hit a fastball, curveball or slider with a bat, I shouldn't have much trouble hitting the birdie with a racket.

Before trying out badminton recently, my only experience was in seventh-grade PE. The only thing I remembered is that badminton is pretty simple: You just need adequate dexterity to do fine.

At least that was what I thought until I faced sophomore JV badminton players Max Gendeh and Rishabh Anand. We met up at the school's small gym, where we

played without a net because we could not find a net to set up.

First, I learned about how rackets can have differing weights. A lightweight racket is generally used for doubles, in which quick reactions are necessary, while a more top heavy racket is used for singles for more powerful shots.

Next, I learned how to properly grip the racket, which felt very awkward compared to the way I naturally gripped the racket, especially with the different grips. Though I naturally gripped the racket the way I would a football, the specific grips for forehand and backhand shots required specific placements of the thumb in order to prevent injuries.

They taught me the different types of hits and how they can be used to deceive the opponent. For example, you can hit a clear

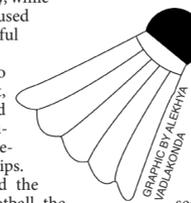
shot, where you hit the birdie to the back of the court, and hit a drop shot, where the birdie drops right in front of the net.

You also learned the footwork of the sport: I am supposed to try to stay in the middle as much as possible.

Most of these concepts were pretty simple to understand, but there's a reason badminton is said to be an easy sport to play, but a difficult sport to master.

It turns out that trying to run around with the right technique while returning well-placed shots is harder than it seems. When facing Gendeh, I often got tangled up while trying to move around correctly, and on multiple occasions, I failed to make it back to the center in time.

To make matters worse, Gendeh smashed the birdie right at my face. I just could not return it, and I often



GRAPHIC BY ALEKHIA VADIVANDANA

ducked away. The one time I returned a shot that soared right at my face, I stood there, admiring my skills. Gendeh quickly hit a clear shot into the back corner of the court.

I was too winded to run to return the shot, and sat down to take a break. After a quick breather, I played a couple more rounds, getting pummeled by well placed shots coupled with smashes.

Anand and Gendeh then demonstrated how they play against each other. They flawlessly returned each other's smashes, and seemed to rally for decades. Their game was fast-paced with a lot of well-placed shots. If I was on the receiving end of some of those shots, I would have been demolished.

Despite badminton seeming like a pretty straightforward sport, it requires a lot of coordination and agility to succeed.

After this experience, I now hold a higher respect for badminton players. Hitting the birdie is only the tip of the iceberg of mastering this deceptively difficult sport. ♦

# Ugly photoshoot challenge goes off target

BY MeganChen, CalliaYuan & JayneZhou

A Target shopper stopped and stared as two strange teenagers, Jayne and Megan, stuffed themselves into a ball storage rack, while another attempted to take a picture.

After seconds of throwing panicked looks at each other, the two struggled to escape their ball prison and sprinted off in embarrassment.

Recently, the ugly photoshoot challenge has gained popularity among Instagram and YouTube influencers, and involves going to “ugly” locations and using camera angles and editing to produce nice pictures. We decided to give it a try in an attempt to boost our dying Instagram accounts.

After watching numerous ugly photoshoot videos and scrolling through endless posts for inspiration, common locations we found were Home Depot, for its lighting aisle, and Michaels, for its fake flower aisle.

However, we were too intimidated by

the high probability of getting kicked out of those two stores, so we instead decided to take photos at a seemingly safer location, Target.

At first, we were most worried about embarrassing ourselves in front of other shoppers or seeming impolite for not buying anything. Upon entering the store, we grabbed a shopping cart

and went to the home section in hopes of finding aesthetic decorations. One of us climbed into the cart, and another pretended to push as the third started taking pictures.

However, after numerous blurry shots, which can be attributed to our lack of photography skills and attempts to escape when we saw other shoppers, we decided to go to the less crowded upper floor.

Spying an empty ball storage rack in the corner of a toy aisle, we quickly scanned the area for any workers and proceeded to squeeze ourselves into the metal cage, banging our heads several times as we

tried to stand up.

Unfortunately, we realized that although it was fun to climb into the ball rack, the pictures were so bad that we didn't even

want to edit them (not that we can edit pictures in the first place).

Discouraged by our previous failures, we moved on to the bedding and clock aisle, where several Target employees complimented our dramatic poses and even encouraged us to continue taking pictures. Knowing that we weren't going to get kicked out, we were finally able to snap some non-blurry shots, but even those weren't close to the quality of the ones we'd seen on social media.

Taking nice pictures was a lot harder than it seemed in the Instagram posts and YouTube videos we had seen.

Because we lack any real photography skills, we weren't able to “transform” the background the way most practiced photographers were able to.

Although none of us ended up posting the pictures, we had a fun time running away from Target shoppers, and the hilarious photos we captured were worth the embarrassment. ♦



GRAPHIC BY JEFFREY MA

# Seniors go on warehouse shopping adventure



AME  
Ava Hooman, Esha Lakhotia, Muthu Palaniappan

Saturday, Dec. 1, 2018, was a day that changed our perception of shopping completely: one of the brands we shop at regularly, Brandy Melville USA, had a warehouse sale in San Francisco.

A warehouse sale can be described as a really big sale of leftover products. In the case of Brandy Melville, everything at the sale would be \$5, \$10 or \$15, including all types of clothing from hoodies, to skirts, to

tops and even sweaters.

We were ecstatic. Normally, clothes at Brandy Melville range from \$25 to \$50, so this sale was a pretty big markdown. We knew that we had to go and stock up on more clothes.

The sale was advertised to start at 9 a.m. and end at 4 p.m. However, after doing some research via YouTube vlogs of other people's experiences with previous sales, we realized that we had to be at the warehouse hours before the sale even started to line up for entry.

We decided to leave home at 4 a.m. It was hard to figure out the logistics of getting to SF, but finally we convinced one of our moms to drive us.

We reached the warehouse location at around 5 a.m., and there was already a two-block line surrounding the building. Since

the line was already so long, we got into the actual warehouse at 11 a.m. — meaning we spent seven hours in line despite being early.

The Brandy Melville employees let in only around 50 girls every hour from the line, and once inside the warehouse, each group of 50 girls got one hour to shop.

When we walked in the warehouse, we noticed the lack of organization. There were cardboard boxes filled with clothes lined up against the wall and in the middle of the room. Girls were sprinting and pushing each other to get to the clothes in the boxes.

Additionally, several of the clothes had stains or rips on them; hence, they were being sold at a warehouse sale instead of the actual Brandy Melville store.

After grabbing all of our chosen clothing pieces, we went to a side of the warehouse

and started sorting through the clothes. Our incredibly large stack of clothes quickly became smaller after we realized many of the pieces were stained and needed to be put back in the box. We each had around 15 pieces of clothing at the end.

Once we had our final collection of clothes, we headed to purchase the clothes, which was another battle of its own. We spent another two hours just waiting in the “line,” which was loosely enforced and covered with clothes as young girls were throwing out pieces of clothing they no longer wanted.

All in all, we had a long, hectic, but worthwhile experience in our long day there. We managed to buy clothes for \$5 or \$10 that were originally being sold in store for \$30. And, more importantly, we had survived. ♦

## ISSUE

# highlights

“Our entire culture in the Bay Area is if you don't go to Harvard or Stanford, you are a **big fat loser**, and you'll never do anything but work at a fast-food restaurant.”



— teacher Bret Yeilding on academic toxicity (pg. 19)

“After we somehow ended up making an actual **SoundCloud** account, recording the track, editing it and uploading it, we realized we're **real rappers** now.”

— senior Rohan Pandey on his SoundCloud music (pg. 10)

## 1 million +

number of members in the **subtle asian traits** Facebook group (pg. 11)

“Kids in this community form groups and **exclude** and **alienate** everyone else from them who is different, and that just made it even **harder to make friends** here.”



— anonymous sophomore on social culture (pg. 16)

GRAPHICS BY KAREN CHOW AND ELAINE SUN

## topten

THINGS TO DO AS A SECOND SEMESTER SENIOR

- 10 **Get a boyfriend/girlfriend.**  
You probably haven't had much time for a relationship, but Valentine's Day is coming up...
- 9 **Eat out every day.**  
Might as well drain your parents' bank accounts while you still can.
- 8 **Sleep.**  
If you don't have enough time at home, just do it in class.
- 7 **Come to school ON TIME.**  
hahahahahahaha
- 6 **Flex on underclassmen.**  
They still have to worry about maintaining high grades!
- 5 **Spend quality time with your friends.**  
Your days of hanging out are numbered.
- 4 **Play Brawl Stars.**  
Join the Battle!
- 3 **Start watching anime.**  
It's never too late to become a weeb!
- 2 **Stress out over college admissions.**  
It won't make a difference now, but you can't really help it.
- 1 **Spend 34,883 hours scrolling and deciphering initials.**  
The Saratoga HS Confessions page is a double-edged sword.

>> Jeffrey Xu