



Dump truck catches fire in SHS back parking lot.



Schools worldwide face difficulties returning.



Colleges cut sports, leaving student athletes upset.



THE saratoga falcon

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Friday, December 11, 2020

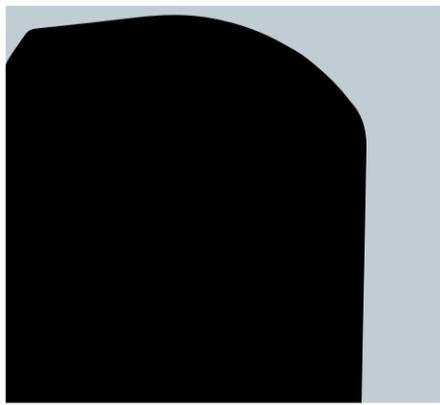
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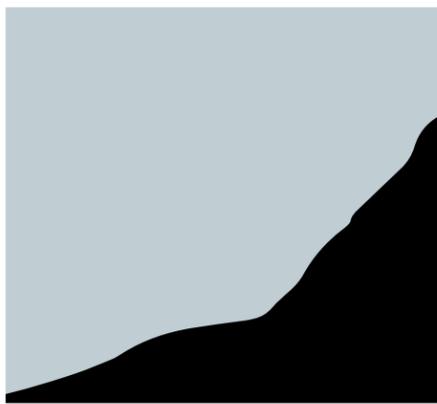
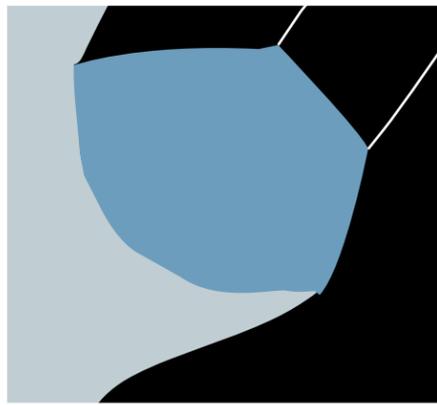
THE NEW NORMAL 2020 ... and now 2021



Drama students filmed scenes on-campus for their original productions.



Sports like football returned for masked, socially distanced practices.



SHS to remain in online learning

BY Christina **Chang** & Anjali **Pai**

The district introduced the four-phase plan for returning to campus at the beginning of the school year. The school year began in Phase 1 with all students in remote learning. In Phase 2, which began in the fall, the school brought back specific groups of students in small stable cohorts. Phase 3 involves bringing back all students into a hybrid learning model, and Phase 4 would consist of bringing all students back for full-time in-person learning. The schedule for reopening is influenced by the tier the county is in.

>> **SEMESTER** on pg. 3

Graphic by ALEKHYA VADLAKONDA AND JOANN ZHANG

>> **COVID-19 NEWS** on pg. 3

McAfee manager Benjamin Brotzman transitioned into Zoom coordinator.

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Season 1 sports postponed

BY Jonathan **Li** & Carolyn **Wang**

Athletes' hopes for school sport seasons to finally restart in mid-December were crushed when coaches announced that practices would be canceled for the rest of the year and may tentatively start in January following the recent surge of COVID-19 cases and Santa Clara County's move back into the purple tier.

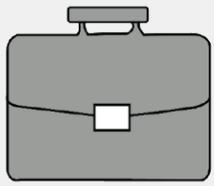
Although the county still allows schools to host in-person sports practices provided that social distancing can be maintained, superintendent Michael

Grove directed the school to shut down non-academic onsite school activities, although four academic cohorts are still on campus. The last in-person sports practice occurred on Nov. 20.

Governor Gavin Newsom has not released guidelines for athletic activities, leaving many schools and athletes uncertain of what lies ahead. In a press release on Dec. 1, the state announced that the governor would delay the release of sports guidelines until January at the earliest.

These delays come with a local cost.

>> **SPORTS** on pg. 21



newsbriefs

Hope for an in-person Homecoming dims further

Despite initially postponing this year's Homecoming festivities, spirit commission currently has not set any official Homecoming plans for next semester. According to senior Emily Choi, head spirit commissioner, in-person Homecoming activities have been canceled until further notice.

At the beginning of the school year, ASB and the spirit commission floated the idea of combining Homecoming celebrations with Spring Fling week or a potential January date if the school reached Phase 4 of the reopening plan. Given the recent surge of COVID-19 cases and Santa Clara County's return to the purple tier on Nov. 16, the school may be less likely to move beyond its current status of Phase 2A.

The Leadership class has discussed the option of live-streaming quad day performances without an audience, but that would also require a progression in phases of the reopening plan. Because quad day practices are considered social gatherings, they would have to be supervised and regulated for health safety, which Choi said would be difficult.

Other traditional Homecoming events are even more difficult to modify.

"One of my favorite parts of Homecoming is the coronation ceremony and football game," Choi said. "But football season is in question, and separating the coronation ceremony from the football game kind of defeats the purpose."

Still, Choi is optimistic that some aspects of a traditional Homecoming might be possible next semester. But until the school reopening plan is finalized, Choi said that the spirit commission cannot plan large in-person activities.

— Audrey Mah

picturethis



FALCON // SELINA CHEN

Fruit Fundraiser | Sophomore Anushka Sankaran hands a box of fruit to a customer at a fruit sale fundraiser for Speech and Debate on Nov. 4. The club sold pears, apples and grapes among other fruits.

Private schools try hybrid model

BY Christina Chang
& Chris Chen

Editor's Note: This story was written before the most recent coronavirus surge in the Bay Area and reflects the situations at these schools as of mid-November. The King's Academy and Bellarmine College Preparatory have returned to a fully remote learning model as of late November.

This fall, many local private schools have tested in-person teaching, a path Saratoga High has been tiptoeing toward with a pilot program that began on Nov. 9. In Phase 2A and 2B, a few small teacher-led groups have returned to school, and others were slated to return after Thanksgiving.

"For us as a school district, I think the issues that we'll have are that we will have [teachers, students and their families] who will be concerned about coming back," principal Greg Louie said. "Whether it's us or any other public or private high school district, [reopening is] very much dependent upon the availability of teachers, and the interest of the students and families."

Private schools like The King's Academy and Bellarmine College Preparatory started the return process in late September and October, with students and staff back on campus until the recent surge in cases in Santa Clara County forced them back online recently.

The King's Academy

The King's Academy, located in Sunnyvale, reopened on Oct. 26 with an opt-in hybrid learning model. Sixty percent of the student population of 935 chose to return. Those who wanted to participate in the blended model were split into two cohorts that alternate returning to the campus every week.

The King's Academy uses Webex and PresenterTrack from Cisco to broadcast their classes. PresenterTrack consists of two cameras installed in a classroom, one in the front and one in the back, and teachers are free to switch between the two. The one in the front of the classroom enables students at home to see their classmates who are at school, while the one in the back tracks the teacher.

The school also has hall monitors who remind students to maintain social distancing. King's Academy sophomore Kiyu Peter-

son said she now rarely sees big groups on campus.

According to The King's Academy high school principal Jeff Williamson, pre-pandemic, the school averaged class sizes of 19 students. Now with hybrid learning, the in-person class size averages seven students, with a maximum of 12.

King's Academy sophomore Keila Barton believes that many students find it difficult to stay locked-in during online classes.

"I'm looking forward to learning in person because I have a really short attention span," Barton said. "Being at school really makes me more accountable for this."

After returning to campus on Nov. 2, Barton said she found in-person school to be more engaging, as there are fewer distractions and physically being on campus with a teacher motivates her.

Another benefit of returning is the ease of social connections. Many students have had little social contact for the past half year.

"Something as simple as raising your hand or speaking in class is not as easy as it would be in in-person class."

BELL. JUNIOR Ryan Alapatt

"I resolutely believe returning to campus is extremely important for the learning, mental and emotional health for all of us," Williamson said. "As amazing as Zoom is from a technological standpoint, it can never fully replace the in-person interaction."

But parents have the final say in whether or not they will allow their children to return to in-person schooling. Peterson says her parents are fine with allowing her to return to campus and she found that her friends' parents have similar feelings about their children returning. Although they are concerned for their family's safety, they trust the school to take the necessary precautions, she said.

Returning to campus may be beneficial in increasing student performance and allowing students to regain the social aspect, but the risk of COVID-19 remains. Though many have returned to campus, some are still hesitant.

For those who have opted to return, they express excitement and satisfaction for finally being able



Graphic by CHRISTINA CHANG

to reconnect with friends and staff. As of Nov. 23, the school has now been back at school for four weeks, with no COVID-19 cases.

"I'm really excited that we're all going back, especially for being able to connect with friends and teachers," Peterson said.

Bellarmine College Preparatory

Although Bellarmine College Preparatory originally planned to have a cohort system like the two other schools, the plans were adjusted to lower the number of students and ensure their safety.

In the revised system, put into place on Sept. 23, teachers who are comfortable with returning to campus would teach classes that are offered in-person, so students can opt-in to attend one class per day. In order to better integrate both students attending class from home and those on campus, cameras display both groups in Microsoft Teams. These cameras display those who are on campus and broadcast it to students attending class from home, and vice versa.

Bellarmine junior Ryan Alapatt said he looked forward to returning to in-person schooling.

"I know online classes have definitely put a damper on participation," Alapatt said. "Something as simple as raising your hand or speaking in class is not as easy as it would be in in-person class."

He tried in-person classes for two weeks, but has not returned due to transport being inconvenient. He estimates only 10 percent of Bellarmine students returned to in-person schooling so far.

Although he decided not to participate in-person, Alapatt still believes that the hybrid model Bellarmine uses works. He appreciated that teachers could fairly divide attention between students online and in-person, and that the school followed all safety precautions.

"I am glad current safety guidelines have permitted the option to come back to school, and I believe having that option to [return] is important," Alapatt said. ♦

1: Widespread

-Close many non-essential businesses while building out testing, contact tracing, PPE, and hospital surge capacity.

2: Substantial

-Open lower risk workplaces, some schools, and some indoor non-essential business operations

RED Zone

3: Moderate

-Open some indoor businesses, higher risk environments, and gatherings with modifications

ORANGE Zone

4: Minimal

-Open most indoor businesses and highest risk workplaces with all indicators satisfied

YELLOW Zone

4 PHASES OF LOCKDOWN

SOURCE: SCC

Graphic by SINA SALEHI

Falcon Focus



FALCON // SELINA CHEN

Seniors Divya Sarkar and Amy Munson wait to be picked up after taking the SAT on Oct. 27. The school also hosted the PSAT at school for juniors on Oct. 29.

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SEMESTER

continued from pg. 1

The district entered Phase 2B of the four-phase plan on Nov. 9, but due to the recent surge in COVID-19 cases, they cannot transition into Phase 3. Until the county moves out of the purple tier and it is determined that the potential benefits of the Phase 3 model outweigh the risks, the district will remain in Phase 2B.

SHS will allow the same small cohorts on campus, but may not reopen to more students until Santa Clara County has been in the red tier for at least two weeks. According to Grove, the district also needs to solicit more feedback from staff, students and families before they make a decision on potential implementation and timeframe.

He said it is crucial to keep an eye on

the community health status as most public health experts are predicting a post-holiday surge in new COVID-19 cases.

Even before the recent announcement, many teachers didn't favor starting Phase 3 anytime soon.

"It was more of a hope to come back to school in January rather than a reality."

SOPHOMORE Anusha Neerkundar

"I would not feel comfortable returning to Phase 3 in January given the health risks and the questions still surrounding a potential hybrid model," English 10 teacher Melissa Hesselgrave said.

After being in remote learning for almost nine months, sophomore Anusha Neerkundar said she misses being on campus.

She said she misses walking into different rooms, seeing someone she didn't expect there and starting a conversation with them. It's small interactions like these she values most from in-person school.

"I miss just being at school," Neerkundar said. "The atmosphere there is something that cannot be replicated by online school. Just having short conversations in class with the people next to you or walking from place to place with friends are things I miss."

However, the district's inability to move forward with Phase 3 in January did not come as a surprise to her.

"This whole situation is still so new to us and it is likely to get worse before it gets better," Neerkundar said. "I thought it was more of a hope or a dream to come back to

school in January rather than a reality."

Principal Greg Louie said he has received numerous emails from students, staff and parents in response to the delay of Phase 3, expressing their appreciation at the district's attempts at ensuring their safety.

Louie, who has worked at the school daily since the pandemic began, said it is likely going to be a couple more months of remote learning before the school can officially have significantly larger numbers back on campus. Still, he looks forward to the day students and staff return.

"I think it's getting really close to the fact that I've been principal of an empty school at Saratoga almost as long as a principal with students at Saratoga," Louie said. "I'm super excited to walk out my door and see hundreds of students and dozens of staff members interacting. Right now sometimes there's more wildlife here than people." ♦

Cohorts return to campus as part of Phase 2B plan

BY Viraj Reddi

At the beginning of the school year, the district announced a four-stage plan to gradually transition from online school back into in-person school. The district is currently in Phase 2B and for the first time since March, small cohorts of students and teachers have been allowed back on campus.

These groups were selected through a number of factors, including county safety guidelines, whether teachers were comfortable with returning and student interest. According to principal Greg Louie, there are currently four cohorts on campus.

The administration first reached out to all teachers and gauged their interest in returning. Of these teachers, special education Sequential math teacher Jennifer Chong, Algebra I teacher Kelly Frangieh and English 11 and 12 special education teacher Lauren Taylor are all running small cohorts in their classroom. In addition, campus supervisor Allan McGurk is supervising a group of students in the library. These students have either had trouble with online learning or their home technology.

"All of our teachers who are involved are doing it because they believe their students will really benefit from it and need it," Louie said. "Kudos to the teachers for really being there for their students and caring about their well-being."

For the first time since March, small cohorts of 2 to 8 students are allowed back on campus.

From there, teachers communicated with the students' parents and determined a plan for them to come onto campus for a certain period. By the end of the process, each of the four teachers had 2-8 students returning as part of a cohort.

With Phase 2 being the first time that students would return to campus since March, the school was focused on ensuring their safety against the virus by taking extensive safety measures.

"Every possible precaution right now is being taken," Louie said.

Everyone is required to wear a mask and social distance in and out of the classroom. Every morning, teachers have asked students screening questions to check for COVID symptoms. Within classrooms, teachers have spaced desks 6 feet apart and left doors open to air circulation. In addition, hand sanitizer is available in each classroom, spare masks are available and maintenance workers disinfect cohort classrooms daily.

"It really depends on students being upfront and honest with us," Louie said. "We ask all students to take their temperature before coming to school. If the student is honest but doesn't have the right answer for the screening questions, we communicate with the family and send them home."

In the event that someone on campus gets COVID-19, the district has a set protocol to deal with the situation. The school must notify the county's public health department, which then would start with a contact tracing process. Various teachers would also coordinate to notify all student families of the situation and next steps.

At the same time, Louie stressed the importance of ensuring that the sick person's identity remains confidential.

"As many of the precautions as possible are being taken," Louie said. "But if someone were to come down with COVID-19, there are a ton of steps we'd have to take to follow protocol."

As of now, the vast majority of students remain only in distance learning, which has taken place through scheduled Zoom meetings and asynchronous homework. However, many of these students had returned to school for school-sponsored extracurricular activities such as robotics and band until the county's recent lapse into the purple tier.

Junior Sajiv Shah, the hardware lead for the school's FRC robotics team, had been regularly returning in-person to school since Nov. 7. He was impressed with the precautions the school was taking.

"All team members were taking their temperatures at home, wearing masks, social distancing, and if anyone left the county, they stayed home," Shah said.

"I absolutely thought it was safe."

Shah believes that the productivity of their team was greatly improved by being able to come onto campus. Due to Santa Clara County moving into the purple tier in November, all the team's in-person meetings have been canceled for the time being. Shah believes the impact of this is so great that he is unsure of whether their season will even be able to continue.

Junior Arnav Shah (no relation to Sajiv) found that much of the same rang true for the marching band's percussion section. In addition to socially distancing and wearing masks, they also practiced outside instead of inside as they typically would, which greatly reduced any chances of transmission.

In terms of performance, Arnav saw that they were able to be far more efficient in person.

"Everyone improved a lot through the in-person direction," Arnav said.

Until they are allowed to go in-person again, Arnav said that winter band sections will be switching over to Zoom.

"I think it will be hard to see the same progress as in-person band, but they will still be able to finish the show," Arnav said.

To gauge how comfortable the general student population is with returning to school, administrators have sent online surveys to all students and families. Responses to these surveys are yet another factor the school takes into account when assessing whether they can move forward to the next phase.

According to administrators, the school will remain in Phase 2B even at the start of second semester.

While the school originally planned for 1-2 more cohorts to return as part of Phase 2B after the Thanksgiving break, this was also delayed.

Through following public health recommendations, assessing students' comfort with returning and attempting to keep themselves safe on campus, administrators have been steadily working to return as soon as possible to school.

"This whole thing is relatively unpredictable, and everyone is trying to just make it work without taking excessive risks," Louie said. ♦



Sajiv Shah



Courtesy of IRIKA KATIYAR

Seniors Irika and Irith Katiyar dance together in the McAfee Center at Bombay in the Bay 2018 during their sophomore year.

ICAC plans virtual Bombay in the Bay

BY Nitya Marimuthu

The rising number of COVID-19 cases in the county has ended any hope of putting on the usual grand display of Indian culture and dance during the annual Bombay in the Bay (BNB) event, usually held in mid-February.

According to senior Irika Katiyar, an officer for the Indian Cultural Awareness Club, the show will likely be a virtual showcase, where each cohort of dancers is filmed, and then those videos are aired live in the manner of a drive-in theater in the school parking lot in early April. The officers worked out this plan with principal Greg Louie.

"We're open to redoing our plans given how quickly the circumstances and regulations regarding the pandemic change," Katiyar said.

The main goal of the event is still to raise money for a charity helping children in India. As of Dec. 3, the officers are unsure about whether they will charge admission for a drive-in event as they do not want to see traffic backing up. To replace the money fundraised through admissions, Katiyar said they are considering selling snacks or merchandise, or setting up a donation system.

The show normally has grade-level dances, a classical dance, a Bhangra set, a Tamasha set, a singing performance, an all girls dance (AGD) and all males dance (AMD) for seniors that have participated for all four years, a co-ed dance and a skit that ties together all the different mini-performances.

This year, the co-ed dance has been cut, and each grade has been separated into two casts as the county and school guidelines limit meetings to 15 people or fewer, according to senior Neeti Badve, another officer.

As of Dec. 3, 84 students had signed up to participate, although the officers expect more to join

soon.

Practices will still be held at school, but everyone will be socially distanced and required to wear masks, Katiyar said.

The officers will also have a spreadsheet coordinating practice times, and will leave a one hour gap between them so that no practices overlap. Badve said that practices will begin on Feb. 14 and will continue until the show, which is currently scheduled for the weekend before spring break, April 3 and April 4.

These two casts will likely put on four shows in total; each cast's recording will be played on two different days as the show normally takes place on Friday and Saturday night.

Katiyar said that the drive-in idea was introduced as a way to preserve the togetherness of the audience as they watch the show. This way viewers can stay socially distanced and within their own bubbles, while mimicking the experience of a live show.

Badve said that another option the officers considered is to have each cast perform live shows to the drive-in audience, although this was less feasible than filming videos.

The mechanism for distributing the show might still shift since the drive-in style is just one way the officers considered hosting the event — the spacing and ability to broadcast the shows on a large screen might prove difficult. As the event nears and the situation becomes clearer, the officers will solidify their plan.

"I'm excited to see what creative ideas we come up with to keep the spirit of the show the same even with these changing times," Badve said. "I know everyone's going to have to adapt as we go but I think it's nice to have some hope of normalcy that the show represents, no matter what way we do it in." ♦

\$7,000 worth of gym equipment missing

BY Andy Chen
& Allen Luo

The weight room has traditionally been a place for both students and teachers to freely exercise during tutorial, lunch and after school, with the privileges of using the thousands of dollars in equipment there.

From the school's closure in March to the beginning of sports practices in September, however, visitors to the space have misplaced — or perhaps even stolen — around \$7,000 worth of equipment.

According to Tim Lugo, athletics director and head football coach, all equipment in the weight room was accounted for when he and fellow P.E. teacher Yuko Aoki took a full inventory of it in March. When they came back in August, they realized that some weights and bumpers were missing but attributed it to students and staff borrowing it.

The athletics staff knew the problem was worse than they suspected after requesting that students and staff return their equipment in September; the department realized that a significant number of bumper plates, dumbbells and 45-pound Olympic bars never came back.

"I don't want to accuse anyone of anything, but it's very possible that the weights were stolen," Lugo said. "What's interesting is that the missing weights were taken from the cardio room where all the extra weights are kept, instead of the large mounting platforms in the open, where it would have been obvious that some of the weights were missing."

Lugo said that the situation was frustrating because the staff had recently replaced the locks to the weight room just before the school closed in March. Since only one trusted coach, the janitor staff and the P.E. staff have the new keys to the weight room, Lugo suspects that a bold student either walked in while the room was in use and took equipment or a staff member for-

got about equipment they checked out.

According to Lugo, the \$7,000 worth of equipment lost reflects a larger security problem across campus — the weights being stolen may be just one in a string of problems with break-ins and incidents of theft.

While only a limited number of adults have keys to the weight room, Lugo suspects some people may have obtained copies of the school's master key over the years.

"I don't want to accuse anyone of anything, but it's very possible that the weights were stolen."

ATHLETICS DIRECTOR **Tim Lugo**

To address these security problems, Lugo has supported the idea of implementing a card identification system. With card identification, staff would be able to check when and who unlocked the room, disable access to individuals or coaches in the off-season, and replace lost cards for just 3 to 4 cents. The athletics department also plans to install cameras above the entrance and exits to the weight room.

Ultimately, the theft or misplacement of equipment in the weight room has negatively impacted athletes on campus. For example, the football team stopped using weights during the summer because there weren't enough for each member to use while social distancing.

Lugo urges students or anyone who might have the weights to return them anonymously.

"Regardless of intention, the situation is frustrating," Lugo said. "There's a lot of money lost and there aren't many leads — it's a big mystery." ♦

Trumpeter invited to All National Honor Ensemble

BY Vicky Bai
& Andrew Li

After submitting his video audition to the national band in May, junior Yoshiki Shimokawa did not feel confident about getting accepted to the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) All-National Honor Ensemble considering that he was competing among the top players from All-State band.

However, when results came out in August, he was surprised to see his name under the Trumpet 1 section, which has four members.

Shimokawa said he did not expect to get accepted into the national band, as there were around 16 people above him in the All-State Band. Even so, he was pleasantly surprised by the news, and is grateful to be able to represent California in the prestigious national band.

"I had to go against the very best in the nation to get into nationals," Shimokawa said, "so getting in is already a huge accomplishment. Even then, I got in as Trumpet 1, so I'm pretty much guaranteed [to be a top-four trumpet player in the national band]."

Shimokawa first started playing the trumpet in fifth grade. At the time, Shimokawa said that he was "one of the worst players" in the band. He only stayed because he thought the music they were playing was fun.

Shimokawa said he continued to grow from sixth grade onwards, finally becoming a serious trumpet player in eighth grade. Now in his junior year, Shimokawa has

been in band for seven years and plans to major in music in college.

"Yoshiki is one of the hardest working band members we've had. He is always practicing and sets high goals for himself," said Jason Shiuan, his current band director who has known Shimokawa ever since Shimokawa was an eighth grader. "I never have to push him because he is always pushing himself."

Ultimately, Shimokawa's interest in music drove him to audition for the national band. To be eligible, applicants had to already be in the exclusive All-State band, which Shimokawa joined just last November, making the national band even harder to get into.

Applicants were required to submit recordings of them playing an excerpt from a concerto and a few chromatic scales.

This year, the program will be formatted differently from a normal year. Typically, the national band would meet in November in Florida to work on pieces with selected conductors and other musicians. However, the program has gone virtual and is instead meeting online to go through the music they plan to play together and for musicians to meet their sections. Shimokawa will then submit recordings for his music part which will be merged by professional editors to replicate a band.

Shiuan said that he was proud of Shimokawa's dedication, and was glad that his hard work paid off.

"He absolutely deserves it. The fact that he thinks he doesn't deserve it is a testament to his character and how humble he is," Shiuan said. ♦

AP Gov mock election favors Biden in landslide

BY Oliver Ye

If this year's seniors are any indication, California will remain firmly blue for years to come, as the vast majority favored Democrat Joe Biden over Republican incumbent Donald Trump in a mock election.

In addition, seniors voted to pass multiple progressive Californian Propositions in a mock election hosted by AP U.S. Government teachers Mike Davey and Kirk Abe. Abe and Davey held the poll a week before the 2020 presidential election.

The seniors in the five AP Government classes gave Biden 170 votes, or 85 percent. Incumbent Donald Trump received 20 student votes, 10 percent; Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins received six votes and libertarian Jo Jorgensen received four votes.

In comparison, Biden won 64 percent in Santa Clara County compared to Trump's 34 percent. Nationally, Biden received 51 percent of the vote compared to Trump's 47 percent. Biden easily surpassed the 270 Electoral College votes he needed to become the next president with 306.

In other mock election results, longtime incumbent Anna Eshoo beat fellow Democrat Rishi Kumar for California's 18th congressional district representative position with a 98-92 vote; Ann Ravel was elected

over David Cortese for state senate with a 105-79 vote.

In comparison, actual Santa Clara County voters re-elected Eshoo with 63.2 percent and Cortese won the state senate seat with 54 percent.

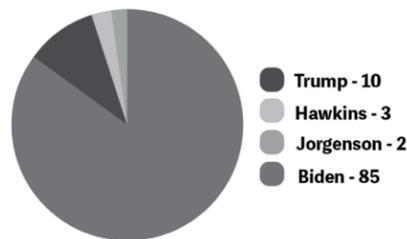
With the wide-ranging ballot measures, seniors voted in favor of the failed Propositions 15, which would have increased funding for K-12 schools through increasing property taxes on businesses. They also favored the failed Proposition 16, which would restore affirmative action in state and local governments.

By contrast, the seniors' votes aligned with the passed Proposition 17, which would have ended the cash bail system and allowed citizens on parole to vote.

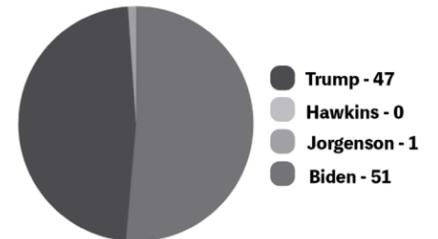
The results of the mock election differed widely from the actual national and state-level results, leaning much more progressive.

"Since SHS has a solidly liberal student body, I expected most of the left-leaning candidates to win," explained senior Nikhil Nair, who is the president of the Democracy Matters club. "Given the affluence of our community, an outsider might expect the general opinion to be more conservative, but Saratoga falls in line with the overwhelmingly Democratic Silicon Valley." ♦

SHS Senior Vote on President



U.S. Vote on President



Graphic by CAROLYN WANG and OLIVER YE

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Alumni move onto campus next semester

BY Audrey Mah

While the country faces yet another surge in COVID-19 cases, some college freshmen are preparing to move on campus for the second semester. For many, the choice to attend college in person was an easy one.

“Doing college from home never seemed like an option for me due to the fact that the expensive tuition would not translate to the education I would receive online,” said Class of 2020 alum Alvaro Fernandez da Ponte, who currently attends Duke University.

Fernandez da Ponte spent this past semester on campus in a double dorm room by himself in Durham, N.C., and will move back next semester as well.

In July, Duke announced only underclassmen would have the option of living on campus during the fall semester, while upperclassmen would have their turn with housing priority in the spring. But after a highly successful first semester, Duke announced that both upperclassmen and underclassmen could also stay on campus throughout the second semester.

Duke University’s handling of COVID-19 response has been highly effective, particularly because of its testing and contact tracing measures. According to Fernandez da Ponte, students at Duke are tested roughly twice a week and are “incredibly responsible when it comes to following social distancing and mask-wearing regulations.”

Two out of the four of Fernandez da Ponte’s fall semester classes were held in person. In these classes, students were required to wear a mask for the entire time and were seated in every other row with three chairs between each person.

“This made the in-class learning experience a lot safer, but an auditorium that had 500 chairs would end up only being able to hold 80 students or so,” Fernandez da Ponte said.

Class of 2020 alum Joshua Yoon has spent this past semester taking online classes at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) at home. CMU gave freshmen the choice of moving on campus either first or second semester, and Yoon plans to be at school next semester.

CMU, located in Pittsburgh, has had just over 50 COVID-19 cases on campus since last March and is currently using none of its isolation and quarantine housing, according to data from the school. In addition, CMU requires its students to quarantine for two weeks upon arrival on campus and administers weekly tests for COVID-19 to random samples of asymptomatic students. All dorm rooms are assigned as single-occupancy, with a maximum of five students to a bathroom.

Despite these measures, Yoon noted that simply living outside of his home will pose additional risks.

“I’ll have to generally leave my dorm more often for things like groceries, and just being outside in public places will put me

more at risk regardless of where I am,” he said.

Still, Yoon said he is most concerned about how well the other students on campus will follow health and safety guidelines. Because the college community is much more diverse than Saratoga, Yoon said he fears many students may come from areas of the U.S. that either don’t support mask-wearing or don’t take it seriously.

“I don’t want my own safety and the safety of others to be jeopardized by someone who isn’t taking health guidelines as seriously as they should,” Yoon said.



Wang

Class of 2020 alumna Lillian Wang, who attends Boston University (BU), expressed similar concerns about students’ disregard for COVID-19 precautions. Wang said BU especially needs to improve its monitoring of outdoor activities, where many students choose to gather without following COVID-19 protocols.

After spending the fall semester as a gap semester and taking community college classes online, Wang will live on campus next semester.

“From hearing the experiences of people who I’ve talked to on campus, it seems relatively safe as long as you are making responsible decisions,” she said.

BU tests all students for COVID-19 upon their arrival to campus and continues to test them twice a week, regardless of whether they experience symptoms of COVID-19. According to its testing data, the school has seen over 430 positive COVID-19 tests since late July, when it first opened its COVID-19 testing program.

“I’m most concerned about the amount of people living in dorms as well as how well and how regularly the dorms will be cleaned,” Wang said. “Dorms can get crowded, and if one person isn’t responsible, it affects everyone.”

In terms of preparing to move on campus, Wang said she has had to be more careful in her travel arrangements and cut back on what she plans to bring with her. To prevent crowding and close contact with others, BU has mandated that only one other person can help a student move into their dorm.

“Figuring out what to pack has been more difficult because I can’t bring a lot of things I would’ve brought, and it won’t be easy for me to go out and get what I need either,” Wang said.

Both Wang and Yoon said they look forward to experiencing a more conventional college life and meeting new people. From his experience living on campus, Fernandez da Ponte echoes this sentiment.

“I’m overjoyed to have gone [to campus] as I was able to experience life as a fully independent adult along with receiving a world-class education,” Fernandez da Ponte said. “There were some ups and downs and a couple all-nighters along the way, but I wouldn’t change my first semester at Duke for anything.” ♦

School fights students’ Ds, Fs with aid systems

TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS TAKE ACTION

BY Nilay Mishra & Lihi Shoshani

Although the average unweighted GPA has increased at the 12-week grading period (from 3.51 to 3.55), the number of F’s has almost doubled from about 75 to 139, according to registrar Robert Wise.

In an effort to combat this increase in failing grades, administrators, teachers and the guidance team are looking to create new programs and resources for students. Every Monday, administrators and guidance counselors meet to review information regarding individual students. Teachers have also been holding monthly department meetings to review programs and approaches to helping struggling students.

According to English 11 Honors teacher Natasha Ritchie, the weekly department meetings consist of teachers asking themselves questions such as are teachers noticing some patterns? Do all the teachers have similar approaches to accepting work for late credit?

“Those aren’t always easy conversations to have but we’re spending more time talking about these problems than we have in the past,” Ritchie said.

There is a disproportionately large number of F’s among freshmen, whom she believes are having trouble transitioning to a new online environment.

“I think it’s indicative of how hard it must be to start high school in remote learning,” Ritchie said.

Head of the English department Michael Tyler said he believes some freshmen are having a more difficult time during this pandemic because of the snowball effect: They miss one assignment and in trying to make it up, they’re suddenly behind in other classes.

“It’s not so much for academic reasons but because they’re crashing in how they’re reacting to the pandemic and being in isolation,” Tyler said. “It’s the social-emotional issues that are hurting their academics.”

Especially with the shift into remote learning, freshmen are having more trouble keeping up with the rigor of high school since they are less experienced than upperclassmen.

“[Freshmen] may not have the coping skills or ways of compartmentalizing of 17 or 18 year olds,” he said. This maturity is a result of learning to put situations into different boxes. “I think that is a maturation that occurs with older students since they’ve been through more things,” Tyler said.

Teachers of all grades have started encouraging students to join office hours on days other than Wednesday. During in-person school, students had the opportunity to meet with their teachers during tutorial every day. But now both teachers and students have a harder time accessing each other.

Ritchie has tried to help students during online school by finding out early on who is missing assignments and immediately reaching out to them through Canvas.

The administration is also looking for ways to help students with failing grades by introducing three new tutoring programs: Toga Times, Falcon Fam-

ily Tutoring Program and the Mentoring Program. Admin and guidance counselors work with students and families to determine what program would fit their individual needs best.

Toga Times consists of a small cohort of 14 students working in the library daily.

This program provides a stable environment for students to work, and an adult is available to answer questions and provide assistance as needed.

The Falcon Family Peer Tutoring program allows students to attend a Zoom session from 3-6 p.m. where they’re placed into breakout rooms for help with different subjects. While this part of the program is open to all, there are also individual peer tutors for one-on-one meetings outside of the public room.

There is also a more intensive mentoring program, where staff members communicate continuously with a small

cohort of between three to five students, acting as constant points of contact.

The students and their parents have weekly meetings with the staff to track the student’s attendance and performance; this direct communication improves students’ grades drastically.

“If I notice something, I make phone calls or send text messages to the students,” Thompson said. “It’s like a buddy

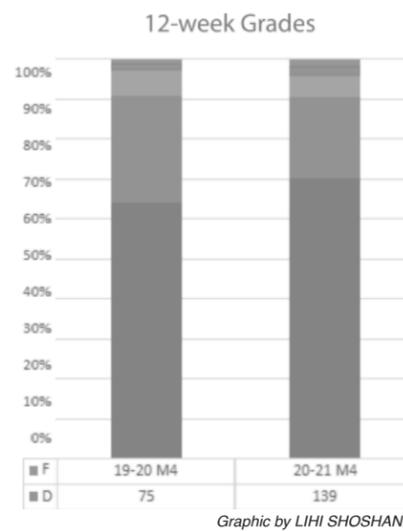
system, but a mentor program.”

The school is providing students with only one D or F with the opportunity to get tutoring for the specific subject area they are struggling with as part of the established mentoring programs.

The administration is also looking to give opportunities to students from both Saratoga and Los Gatos with multiple failing grades by Air Tutors, an outside tutoring agency.

Ritchie believes the administration has been taking the right steps to help students who are struggling to keep up with schoolwork from home and those struggling with mental health issues.

“I’ve been impressed with what we’ve been able to create and come up with on the fly,” Ritchie said. “We just have to keep monitoring the grades: teachers need to really keep their eye on the students that have those D and F grades and the administration has to help us figure out how all these support systems work to make sure nobody slips between the cracks.” ♦



Graphic by LIHI SHOSHANI

>> THE bigidea

Online Learning Resources

Toga Times

Toga Times consists of a small cohort of 14 students working in the library on a daily basis.

Falcon Family Peer Tutoring

Students can attend a Zoom session on any weekday from 3-6 pm to get help from a peer tutor.

Mentoring programs

Staff members communicate with a small cohort of 3-5 students. This includes checking in with students via phone call or text message in this more intensive program.

Could outdoor proms be possible?

BY CICI XU

Anyone who makes confident predictions about school events in a pandemic is likely to be proven wrong.

Even so, junior and senior class officers have hopes they might be able to salvage some kind of prom for their classes in the spring.

Their optimism comes despite knowing so much depends on events beyond their control, including when people will be able to get vaccines, how effective they will be and when full in-person school will start again. In the meantime, they're determined to plan for the events.

"It's very likely that we're going to be in Phase 3 by April," said junior class president Nandini Desai. "Mr. Torrens has already given us the contact information for a decorator and a DJ."

(Phase 3 refers to hybrid education in the district's four-phase plan.) Class officers hope to hold senior prom at a venue close to Saratoga, while holding junior prom on campus. Even though both proms are Phase 3 activities and would be held outdoors, students would be required to wear masks.

Class officers say they realize that it would have to be a socially distanced prom, and mask wearing is crucial. They acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining six feet apart during the dances and dinners. The proms would be held indoors with masks and social distancing if the district reaches Phase 4, in which all students and staff return safely to in-person learning.

The only circumstance where masks and social distancing is not required in proms would occur if all the students and staff attending already received the COVID-19 vaccine and it is fully effective.

The senior class officers are searching for venues close to Saratoga so students can drive there themselves if they do not want to ride buses. The venue the senior class officers originally chose for their junior prom will be passed down to the current juniors for their senior prom. Bringing prom onto the agenda is exciting for the class officers as they realize they might not miss out on all the memorable high school moments of being upperclassmen due to the pandemic.

"I think that it would be really fun to have a senior prom because we're going to go to college soon and a lot of us haven't been to prom before," said senior class president Lauren Tan.

Even though neither the junior nor senior class officers have put forward concrete actions for prom, they are optimistic about the event because it serves as a celebration for students' progress and connections made in high school.

"I am motivated to deliver the best prom possible for my peers," Desai said. "I'm going to put in all my efforts to deliver something reminiscent of prom even if it's outdoors." ♦



Graphic by CICI XU

Garbage truck fire in SHS parking lot

FIRE RESPONSE INVOLVED THE FIRE DEPARTMENT, THE SHERIFF AND SHS STAFF

BY Selina Chen

Principal Greg Louie was in an online department chair meeting in his office on Nov. 16 when he was called out to the back parking lot.

There, he saw a dump truck with its charred trailer open and a heap of garbage on the ground engulfed in tall flames.

Meanwhile, weekend maintenance supervisor Robert Delfino was attempting to put out the fire with an extinguisher, while a construction team member who was renovating the 900 wing and the driver of the truck both called 911.

Santa Clara County Fire Department (SCCFD) firefighters who arrived on the scene eventually distinguished the fire.

As a result of the coordinated efforts of the fire department, sheriff, city waste management service and maintenance staff, no damage was done to the school.

Louie said that the driver of the truck was driving through Gerald Zappelli Court (which leads to the back parking lot) around noon when he recognized that smoke was rising from his trailer.

The protocol for this situation is for the driver to unload in the middle of an intersection, where the fire and possible explosion can be away from drains and other infrastructures.

The driver intended to drive through the back parking lot and come back out, Louie said.

"Unfortunately, the exit gate of our back parking lot was closed and locked, so he dumped his load where he was stuck," Louie said.

According to Luisa Rapport, Information Specialist for SCCFD, after three hours of removing burning debris from the truck and spraying them with water and firefighting foam, the two dispatched fire trucks extinguished the fire and departed from the scene.

Meanwhile, the campus maintenance team went through the 100, 300 and 500 wings to make sure that no teacher was inside and that the HVAC was turned off so that no smoke would be drawn inside.



Courtesy of GREG LOUIE

A garbage truck unloaded its burning trash in the back parking lot on Nov. 16. It took firefighters three hours to fully extinguish the flame, but no damage was done to the school.

A sheriff deputy also arrived to divert traffic from the scene.

Afterward, West Valley Collection & Recycling came to scoop up the burned trash and dumped it into a green bin.

Since large quantities of the water from the fire hydrant flowed into the nearby storm drain, the city of Saratoga also worked to ensure that the run-off would not pollute the nearby creek.

"Like any emergency, the response was well-coordinated by the community," Louie said. "Kudos to our maintenance team for being responsive and to our fire department for doing everything they can to put out the fire."

Due to the way the school's fire alarms work, the fire in the parking lot did not trigger them.

If school was in session, school-wide evacuation would not be the best action, Rapport said, because staying inside the classrooms would actually be safest to avoid smoke.

As a result of the fire, Louie outlined several action items, such as reviewing emer-

gency protocol with all staff and ensuring that all vehicles on campus are registered with visible tags so that the owner can be identified.

But most importantly, the exit gates to the back parking lot will be opened whenever the entrance gates are opened to avoid a similar situation.

SCCFD suspected that flammable contents of the truck cargo was what ignited the fire.

"This is why we remind residents not to throw away smoldering items such as ashes in the trash," Rapport said.

Studies show that around half of waste vehicle fires are caused by electrical components and 25 percent are caused by hot loads. It's not a matter of negligence or fault on the waste collection company's part, Louie said.

"The message to families is to be cognizant of what you throw away," Louie said. "Maybe it's a cigarette that's still warm, maybe it's a chemical reaction maybe with someone else's trash, who knows what might cause an accident like this." ♦

Cafeteria workers keep providing food

BY Howard Shu & Mina Yeap

When the school closed to in-person learning on March 13, cafeteria employees temporarily stopped working in the kitchen. Although the school is still in remote learning, they are now busy at work.

"I really missed the students and preparing meals for them."



FOOD MANAGER Pamela Carlino

All the cafeteria employees in the school district, including district food manager Pam Carlino and cafeteria assistants Barbara Herrera, Dotti Trifilo and Mari Escobedo, went on paid leave for the remainder of last school year.

But this year, they are back to work at the Los Gatos High kitchen, providing food to

some students in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) from both schools in the district every day.

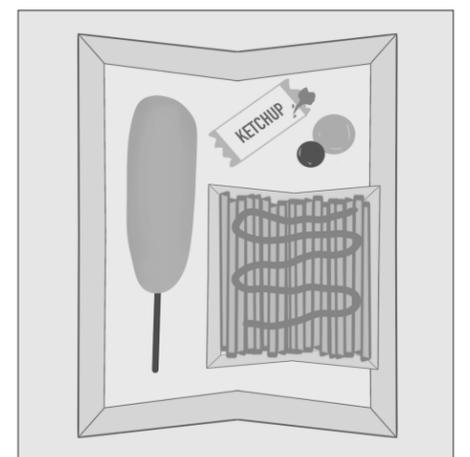
The program provides low-cost or free lunches for public and nonprofit private schools, and although the district took a waiver from the program, they still feed any students who qualify. Going on paid leave last spring was a relief for the cafeteria workers since they were all worried about getting laid off, Carlino said.

"When the school district first closed, I have to admit I thought it was a mini vacation. Boy, did that get old fast," Carlino said. "I really missed the students and preparing meals for them."

Though Carlino and the other cafeteria workers have been less busy this school year, the year has not been a good one for them, she said.

"Some of what's going on seems much more stressful because of not being busy and missing students and staff," Carlino said. "We are all used to being extremely busy."

As small cohorts of students have come back on campus this fall, Trifilo returned to the Saratoga High kitchen to provide food



Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

for them as well.

The cafeteria staff has also planned a new food program in which all food will be made from scratch.

The district office first introduced the program at Los Gatos High last school year, and it was warmly accepted, as it provided better and healthier food.

"Look for great things to come as we return!" Carlino said. ♦

togatalks

How do you feel about the prospects of outdoor prom?

"It would be nice to see people and experience another dance before our senior year."



junior Mira Bugata

"I would be glad to have an outdoor prom, but this prospect is very much up in the air."



senior Wilson Fung

FOURTH PERIOD

STAFF POLICY

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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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Going test-blind will distort the college admissions process

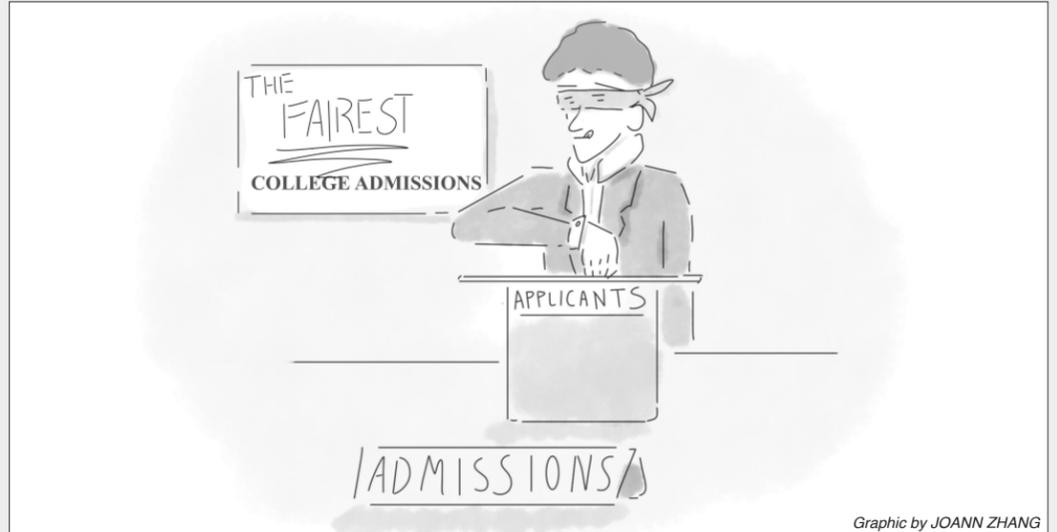
Imagine this: a college receives applications from two high school students. Both have similar course loads with a mix of Honors and AP courses, extracurricular activities, great essays and glowing recommendation letters. The only difference is one has a perfect unweighted 4.0 GPA — straight A's — while the other has a 3.3, a B+ average. The college knows that the two schools have roughly equal graduation and college acceptance rates. Choosing the first student seems like an easy decision.

But what the college doesn't know is that the high school which the first person attends awards mostly A's: attending class is enough to earn an A. In contrast, the high school the second student attends is far more rigorous, giving mostly B's and C's.

Colleges, including the University of Chicago and Hampshire College, took unsustainable test-blind and test-optional approaches to admissions before the pandemic. Although the ACT and SAT are far from perfect, colleges need to require students to take a standardized test to ensure an equitable admissions process, even beyond the pandemic.

Grade inflation is rampant, as shown in a study by Michael Hurwitz of The College Board and Jason Lee of the University of Georgia. Moreover, as in the hypothetical example, merely factoring in data like graduation rates isn't enough to determine the rigor of a school's classes. The discrepancy between the level of rigor at different schools makes it so that comparing students' academics is difficult.

Standardized tests are still the most uniform way of assessing applicants' levels of academic achievement. While it is no secret that students from higher-income backgrounds can afford better study resources, this in-



Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

creased access is not limited to standardized testing.

According to the ACT, students from high-income families have significantly higher GPAs than those from low-income families across all school locations (2.98 and 2.38 out of 4.0, respectively). In Michigan, a study revealed that 24 percent of students from low-income families did not participate in extracurricular activities compared to just 11 percent from middle to upper-class families. In Saratoga, many families pay thousands of dollars for college essay writing services. These studies suggest that wealthy students perform significantly better, having parents who allocate more money than poorer students in all aspects of college admissions, not just for standardized test prep. Removing the most standardized measure of applicants' academic achievement doesn't make sense if other portions demonstrate a similar skew.

If colleges really wanted to remove the factor of wealth from the equation, they might as well stop considering GPA, extracurriculars, clubs and sports — in that case, a lottery would be the most equal way to run college

applications.

A solution that would resolve the issue of wealth gap would be for colleges to create their own free-response tests for applicants, paralleling the pre-major tests of Oxford. To determine how well applicants would do in college, these tests should mimic those of college freshmen but with longer time limits. These tests would inform colleges of their applicants' backgrounds and ways of thinking better than multiple-choice tests like the SAT do.

Moreover, even though it would be possible for students to prepare for these tests within a few years of their implementation, it would be much more difficult for ambitious parents to "buy their students in" through standard test prep courses simply because of the sheer number of different colleges and majors each student applies to.

Although these tests would

accurately measure students' major-specific ability, some may argue that the high school journey — taking challenging classes, improving over time and dealing with failure — is not recorded in a single test as it is in grades and essays. However, the destination is as relevant to college success as the journey itself. Students who have improved but are still struggling will most likely struggle at top-tier institutions.

Simply not considering standardized testing in an application is removing a facet in which students can demonstrate their true potential for being able to survive in a college. For some students, taking standardized tests is the best way for them to showcase their knowledge and the material they have learned over the years — and colleges shouldn't abandon their most valuable tool in assessing who will thrive in their classrooms. ♦

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The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 25-10 in favor of the article.

Copying others, Instagram has ruined itself

BY Shaan Sridhar

Instagram now has become a place of ripoff TikToks mixed in an abyss of shallow social justice posts, with a couple photos of friends sprinkled on top. It wasn't always like this.

Over the years, Instagram has polluted its platform by copying features from others and trying to be an app it is not.

I downloaded Instagram four years ago when I was in sixth grade. The app was appealing to me because, unlike other social media apps, it seemed much more intimate and real. Where apps like Twitter and Reddit prided themselves on news and jokes, Instagram was a place to be with just your friends.

Instagram was a personal social media app. But as Instagram grew, it began to introduce new features and copy trademark parts of its competitors. Instagram first

introduced Stories in 2016, a complete ripoff of Snapchat's stories. Recently, it introduced Reels, a ripoff of TikTok; Shop, a feature that gives users the ability to buy low-quality products directly from the app; and IGTV and Live, two video-sharing features from their sister app Facebook.

These features have changed Instagram from an intimate social media platform into a cluttered mess.

Stories allowed Instagram users to create temporary posts that last for 24 hours, fueling the shallow activist posts we see today. The feature has been abused by so-called social justice warriors who create a flurry of stories that users have to click through every day.

When Instagram tried to out-duel TikTok with Reels, it failed. This was because it lacks TikTok's full-screen design and its algorithm falls far short of the original. As a result, short videos from

friends (which usually aren't very good) flood users' feeds instead of TikTok's perfectly tailored videos from diverse sources.

These features have changed Instagram from a social platform into a cluttered mess.

Instagram also added e-commerce directly into the app, similar to how Facebook lets users buy products in-app. Instagram Shop was touted as an easier way for users to interact with businesses, but, in reality, in reality, it migrates Facebook's existing problems to Instagram.

Shop opens Instagram to thousands of low-quality products manufactured overseas. The products are often faulty and not

as described. Many users, like my mother, consistently fall for this trap. The only results Instagram sees from Shop are a decrease in consumers' trust and a reduction in the app's quality.

These three features — Stories, Reels and Shop — have each contributed to the downfall of Instagram. If Instagram, which Facebook purchased in 2012 for \$1 billion, wants to return to the intimate app it used to be, these copycat features should be removed.

Now, just because these new features have helped destroy Instagram, that doesn't mean Instagram developers are purely incapable of improving their app.

Instagram used to be one of my favorite apps. Now, I steadfastly avoid it. The soul of Instagram has been rotting because of bad decisions, but there's still time to heal the problem. All the app has to do is to return to the features that originally made it popular. ♦

Nonprofits are a full-time venture, not a hobby

BY Rohan Kumar
& Manasi Garg

Scrolling through our Facebook feed recently, we noticed that every other post seemed to be a high school student advertising their new nonprofit, coupled with flashy buzzwords like “youth empowerment” and “raise awareness.” We couldn’t help but feel a flash of annoyance: Nonprofits shouldn’t just be hobbies to be picked up in your free time; they’re organizations with ethical implications that impact real people.

On the surface, these new nonprofits have positive goals: donating to firemen relief funds, helping girls get into STEM and donating computers to underprivileged communities. Unfortunately, they don’t have much beyond their loud rallying call.

The lack of human resources, reach and experience of nonprofits founded as high school side projects ultimately detract from established nonprofits that have the infrastructure and experience to meaningfully impact their target communities in the long term.

Many of these high school “nonprofit” events clock attendance in the single digits, and their advertisements are limited to Facebook posts and the occasional mention in the principal’s weekly newsletter. Their websites often look like they were put together in a day, and some of their services are essentially YouTube videos rebranded as a paid course raising money for charity. Some students call their organizations nonprofits despite not being officially recognized as 501(c)(3) organizations. Others are run by a single high schooler and some friends, with their own parents being the primary donors.

Nonprofits founded and run by high school students are usually treated as “Extracurricular Number 4,” not as the full-time, business-like venture that founding a genuine non-profit actually requires to

succeed.

To be clear: Nonprofits are not supposed to be mom-and-pop stores doling out community service, side projects for padding college resumes or a club under the guise of a nonprofit for the sake of seeming altruistic. Creating a long-term, positive impact in marginalized communities requires consistent, targeted work over the span of years, if not decades.

For example, if your organization’s goal is to tutor underprivileged students, you’ll first need to develop a trusting relationship with those students and their community, then constantly evaluate how impactful your volunteering is and identify areas of improvement. You’ll also need to create a solid curriculum, manage other tutors and schedules and implement infrastructure that allows the nonprofit to last.

Regardless of the intention, founding a nonprofit as a high schooler often comes with tangible negative impacts.

Sound like a full-time job? That’s because running an ethical nonprofit is a full-time job, one that multitasking, stressed-out high schoolers cannot sustain with schoolwork and other activities.

But why is sustainability and long-term impact so important for a nonprofit? If a high school student runs a nonprofit for a year or two, then ditches it after going to college, at least they did something good for a year, right?

Wrong.

Regardless of the intention, founding a nonprofit as a high schooler often comes with tangible negative impacts. When a new nonprofit comes into existence with



Graphic by ROHAN KUMAR

the same goal as an existing one, they begin competing for funding, media exposure and volunteers. But because the majority of student-led organizations simply don’t last, all that funding becomes a wasted investment.

A preexisting nonprofit that would have received long-term benefits from those resources now loses the opportunity to utilize them, directly harming the communities some students may have been trying to help. Of course, every nonprofit starts out with little recognition, manpower and impact. But at the same time, there is no reason to reinvent the wheel.

Our advice: Instead of creating one of your own, find an existing nonprofit where you can apply your skills to actually help more people.

You can find plenty of established nonprofits in the Bay Area, and the major difference between these nonprofits and those founded by high school students is that the former are led by members with extensive experience in serving their target community, employ thousands of full-time employees and already impact the lives of

thousands of people.

Instead of forming your own nonprofit, support organizations like Sunday Friends by volunteering your time and donating your money.

Every volunteer is one more person to teach classes to families, one more person to help get materials to the families who need them. Every donation is another toilet paper roll for a family with nothing, another toy for a child with nothing. Sunday Friends has the resources and man-power in order to make these community service efforts work.

And if you notice an issue in your community that no one is addressing, reach out to local organizations and see if you can build on the infrastructure they already have. Instead of floundering about trying to create your own nonprofit, make the most of your time, energy and innovation by partnering with existing community organizations and creating a new branch to address the problem.

Above all, when it comes to nonprofits, it makes no sense to reinvent the wheel. Instead, let’s strengthen the wheels we already have: Every spoke counts. ♦

Help wanted: more business and economics classes

BY Andy Chen
& Shaan Sridhar

Before the pandemic, if you took a quick walk around campus, you’d notice dozens of students frantically studying for their next science test, future engineers building complex robots or members of a coding club working together.

This image paints a clear picture of what Saratoga High is: a mostly STEM-focused school since most students aim to pursue college majors and jobs in those specialized fields.

While there’s nothing wrong with a school catering to the majority’s interests, the school must do its best to remove obstacles for students seeking a career in other fields. Saratoga High needs to make it easier for non-STEM students, particularly those interested in business and politics, to take fundamental classes earlier, so they can pursue higher-level opportunities like STEM students do.

Because there are few opportunities for business and political science students at Saratoga High, the school naturally sees less interest from these students, in turn making the school more disinclined to create more programs for them. If the school takes a leap of faith and creates new programs for those interested in business and politics, they would be taking the first step towards breaking this vicious cycle.

For students striving for careers in business or entrepreneurship, the lack of business classes offered at the school may set them behind their peers at other schools that do offer such courses, like Lynbrook and Harker.

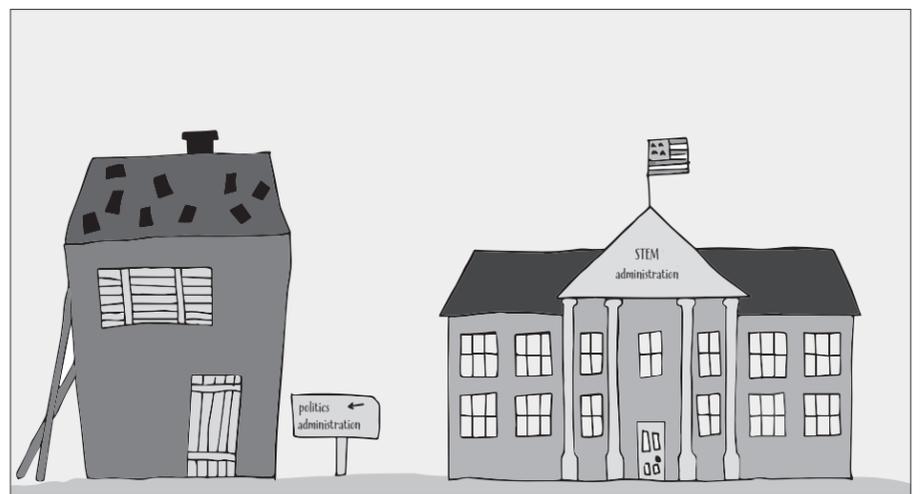
Currently, the school offers two business-

related courses: Introduction to Business and AP Gov/Econ. Lynbrook, on the other hand, offers five business courses — including a business simulation class and multiple levels of accounting. Saratoga High should make a greater effort to create additional opportunities for students interested in economics. Of course, it wouldn’t make sense to introduce new courses if nobody wanted to take them, but considering the popularity of clubs like the Toga Econ Club, which averages 40 members per bi-monthly meeting, demand is strong. The relative success of these clubs just signifies that many are interested in learning economics and business but have nowhere else to go to learn.

This isn’t to say that the school hasn’t done anything to promote economics: Seniors have to study economics as part of their government/economics classes, and the school recreated the Introduction to Business elective just last year.

Still, two classes aren’t enough to properly explore the vast field of economics — especially considering that economics takes the backseat in AP Gov/Econ because students and teachers focus more on preparing for the AP Gov exam. The Introduction to Business course was a step in the right direction, but the course is what it sounds like: an introduction. After getting a taste of various economic concepts and financial strategies, students should be able to dive deeper into the world of business and economics, whereas right now, they lack such courses to do so.

That’s not to say that adding new courses would be easy. In fact, it would be incredibly difficult for the school to add



Graphic by SHAAN SRIDHAR

new courses given a decreasing number of students attending the school — the school’s population decreased from 1,350 last year to 1,290 this year, resulting in a loss of participation within programs like MAP, drama and journalism.

Another problem arises with the way courses are placed throughout students’ careers.

Students complete required fundamental STEM classes in the early years of high school; most take biology and chemistry in their first two years. The math department allows students to choose their class based on their prior knowledge, so students may take Algebra II or PreCalculus in their freshman year. Computer science and engineering are electives that students can take whenever they want.

This system allows STEM students to gain basic knowledge of these subjects at an early stage. They’re mandatory, fundamental classes and must be completed early, leaving STEM students with plenty of time to build on their knowledge and further their understanding.

But non-STEM students aren’t so lucky. Like business-inclined students, those interested in politics may only take U.S. Government and Politics as seniors. The only way for these students to gain the fundamental knowledge of these topics earlier in their high school careers is to take the classes outside of school — only to retake the same course material in their senior year.

As such, the district would do well to give non-STEM students a way to take these classes at an earlier stage of high school. In addition to introducing new non-STEM courses, the school could also credit students for taking classes at schools verified by the University of California system and require that students prove their mastery of the material with exams to test out of the respective classes.

What the district should not do is continue to push SHS towards not being just a STEM-first school, but perhaps a STEM-only school. A school’s job is to help all of its students succeed, not just the students whose interests align with most others. ♦

Christmas music is always in season

BY Harshini Velchamy

I don't care what anyone says. The holiday season is the best time of the year. It's the only time (excluding my birthday) I actually look forward to something.

And now, Christmas is closer than ever. So reasonably, I've started to prepare. I have reorganized my home screen to match the winter-y aesthetic, started blaring my Christmas music while I do my work, and redownloaded a Christmas countdown on my phone, and the elf app (for those unfamiliar, it lets me paste my friends' faces on dancing elves and is kinda my Christmas trademark).

For some reason, though, my family doesn't understand my enthusiasm for the holidays. For the past week, my parents have unplugged my speaker when I'm playing music, have ignored me showing them my new wallpaper and have constantly reminded me that we don't celebrate Christmas. An unnecessary detail.

Despite all the Uncle-Scrooges in my family, my holiday spirit remains unfaltering. My holiday playlist is as festive as ever; Mariah Carey's covers are the only thing keeping me from crying over junior year. Christmas music is undeniably cheerful and keeps me upbeat even while struggling to understand my APUSH textbook at 4 a.m.

I don't understand why playing Christ-

mas music weeks or months early has so many haters. Christmas music does no harm. If anything, it spreads the holiday magic throughout the entire year but still doesn't detract from the actual holiday season. Christmas music will always be more special in December, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't play it at other times.

Honestly, if it wasn't so socially unacceptable, I'd play it in the summer. Christmas music on the beach in June is an underrated vibe. Just imagine merging two of the most celebrated times of the year, Christmas and summer vacation. That sounds like pure bliss to me. Blasting Darren Criss and Chris Colfer's rendition of "Baby it's Cold Outside" on repeat while having a picnic on the sand seems like the perfect cure for any type of sadness. ♦



Graphic by ANJALI PAI

Repetition undercuts Christmas favorites

BY Nilay Mishra

When Santa Clara County headed into the purple tier at about the same time the holiday season arrived, I knew I wouldn't be able to walk around admiring streets decked out with Christmas decorations, roll around in the snow like I used to before moving to California or take a vacation to Hawaii.

I don't typically act like Uncle Scrooge, grumping around and watching people celebrate jealousy from the sidelines. Instead, I try to use the break to rewind from a long semester and celebrate the holidays by simply relaxing at home.

This year, I'll be cooped up inside my room, with a jug of hot chocolate, reading my backlog of books and listening to Christmas music. But while the pages of my book will turn, the music will not. I will hit the "next song" button over and

over again, but to no avail: There simply aren't many popular Christmas songs that are actually interesting.

Christmas songs rose to popularity in the 16th century with the advent of songs such as "O Christmas Tree!," "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" and the famous "The 12 Days of Christmas." Even though most of these are older than the United States but are still highly popular today.

Even the Christmas songs that are relatively new are hard to find and are rarely played on albums or soundtracks. This makes creating Christmas music a hit-or-miss scenario, and with most of it missing, creates less incentive for artists to make music that resembles the themes of the holiday.

After hearing a song once, I enjoy it. After hearing it twice, I come to appreciate it. After hearing it five times, I get bored and the tune is stuck in my head. After hearing it 10 times, I get annoyed. After hearing it 50 times (which was the case for "Feliz Navidad"), I start to get positively angry.

I've learned a couple of Christmas music lessons. First, listen to other types of music if you don't want to be bored out of your mind during the holiday. Secondly: After you put the book down and want to sleep, you can play "Feliz Navidad" again. Here's an amazing tip: It's surprisingly effective as a lullaby. ♦

Breaks between online classes are too long

BY Nilay Mishra

My alarm goes off at 8:23 a.m. One eye still closed, I fumble around in the dark. Brushing my teeth and slapping some water onto my face, I log in to my first-period chemistry class, with precisely two and a half seconds to spare.

One class down. Three more to go.

At 2:45 pm, when World History finally finishes, I realize that half my day is gone. On average, however, I have about four hours of synchronous class time. On Blue Days, I have less than three hours of class the entire day. So why am I getting less work done with almost two hours less class every single day?

The time accumulates through three breaks for Red Days and two breaks for Blue

Days, adding up to 60 minutes on both Red Days and Blue Days. This excludes the additional 35-minute lunch break that happens every Red Day.

The breaks are too short to get any real homework done, but long enough that I end up wandering aimlessly.

Where I used to spend my time between classes power walking across campus, I now leave my room after Zoom-induced isolation, then wander and relax until it's time for my next period.

I had high expectations for this quarantine bell schedule when school began in August. I told myself I would get up early and have a fully productive day, using the 20-minute breaks to their full potential.

But quickly, I realized that the 20-minute breaks between classes were both uncomfortable and unproductive. The breaks are too short to get any real homework done, but also long enough that I end up wandering around my house aimlessly.

Some of my friends claim that 20 minutes is the ideal time to complete all the tasks that aren't too intensive but are hard to fit in a busy schedule, like cooking lunch. Unfortunately, I don't really cook anything, unless of course you count pouring milk into a cup and adding some cereal as cooking.

To solve the problems caused by the awkward break between classes, breaks should be reduced to about five to 10 minutes. This is enough time to chat quickly with a friend, or do some last-minute studying, but not enough to end up wasting the time. The best part is classes will end sooner, freeing up the rest of the day.

With an average break of five minutes, even keeping the relatively long lunch break of 35 minutes, school can end at around 2:15 on Red Days and even around 12:25 on Blue Days.

This would help free my time up and use it effectively, even when my definition of effectively using time is watching Netflix and eating ice cream since I don't have enough time in the 20-minute breaks to do that either. ♦

Please let me go back on Canvas quizzes

THE BACK ARROW LOOKS SO CLOSE YET SO FAR

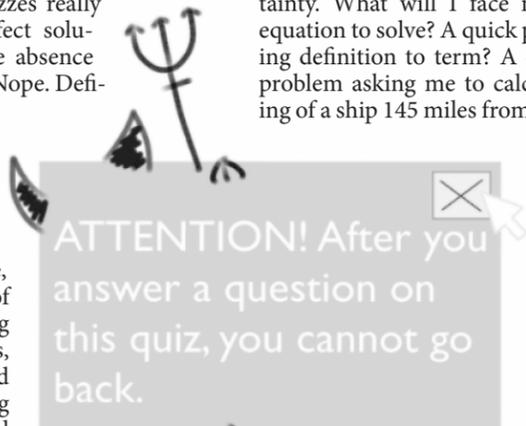
BY Shreya Rallabandi

Are Canvas quizzes really the seemingly perfect solution to counter the absence of in-person tests? Nope. Definitely the opposite.

These quizzes are truly the bane of my existence. Not only are they a key reason for my bad math grade, but now, instead of just overthinking a couple problems, my mind is riddled with distracting questions: "Did I do the notation correctly? Did I make a typo?" I end up overthinking literally every. Single. Part. Of. The. Test.

Yet some teachers just have to take it even more over the edge by disabling re-

turning to previous questions, throwing me into the world of oblivion and uncertainty. What will I face next? A simple equation to solve? A quick problem matching definition to term? A dense, complex problem asking me to calculate the bearing of a ship 145 miles from a starting port,



Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

complete with parts a-f? With no way for me to manage my time on top of the already unmanageable short answer system, Canvas quizzes are a perfect recipe for disaster.

Teachers, please have mercy on your pupils and change the settings on Canvas quizzes to let us visit previous questions. Clicking a checkbox really isn't that hard. ♦

Masks are not necklaces; wear them correctly

BY Harshini Velchamy

For the past couple of months, I've been extremely cautious about COVID-19. I always have extra disposable masks in my car and at least 2 bottles of hand sanitizer in the glove compartment.

And honestly, I thought people following the "masks are social constructs formed by liberals" were a myth. That the people screaming "Trump 2020" after angrily running out of coffee shops were poorly paid actors.

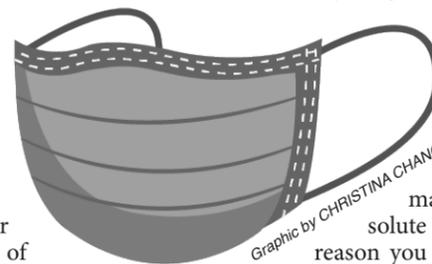
But on one of my weekly Costco trips, I was shocked to see the overwhelming number of people not wearing their masks. Over 20% of the people in the parking lot had absolutely nothing covering their nose and mouth and made no effort to stay away from other people. Furthermore, the number of people who had masks but just were wearing them around their chin rather

than over their nose and mouth was just confusing.

It confounds me why people can't use the mask correctly. They already had it on their faces, but just couldn't move it up two inches to cover their mouth.

If anything, wearing a mask on your chin is probably the worst thing you can do. It's just as bad as not wearing a mask and endangers others around you; but on top of that, it also makes you look like an absolute idiot. The only possible reason you would wear a mask on your chin is if you have a nasty pimple on your chin that you want to cover up. Even so, wearing a mask properly would still cover it up.

Please wear your masks properly! It stresses me out having to take the long way to avoid being in any range of distance from you. Just pull it over your nose and mouth. If not for you, then for all the people who could be susceptible to COVID-19 that you're possibly infecting. ♦



Graphic by CHRISTINA CHANG

The power of education does not lie in the content being taught

BY SerenaLi

“Why do I have to go to school? I’m never going to use the law of sines.”

Many of my friends used to complain about the stupidity of completing school work such as tedious physics labs and long English readings.

For my younger self, going to school seemed absolutely unnecessary because many topics that we learn are not related to my areas of interest or my dream career. To this, my parents always replied with “you’ll understand when you’re older.”

Now that I’m older, I do understand: The value of education does not lie so much with the content of lessons. Rather, it comes from the problem-solving process and the act of learning itself.

Regardless of whether students are solving chemistry problems or annotating a reading in history class, one of the biggest values that education can bring is teaching students how to tackle problems.

For example, though it’s unlikely that I’ll ever need to know how the electron transport chain works in cellular respiration in my future work, understanding the system and how it functions has taught me critical thinking and a new perspective on how the human body functions.

According to University of Waterloo, teachers actually often deliberately teach problem-solving rather than specific problems because it prepares students to stay on their toes and enhances career readiness while also improving academics.

Problem-solving also helps students develop resilience to barriers — a skill which, according to Colorado State University, is commonly exhibited by successful people.

Solving difficult problems is a task that requires multiple trials and errors, and sometimes even the work of groups of people coordinating their efforts. Current education allows students to develop this perseverance, even teamwork, necessary to solve these problems.

Another value that education brings,



FALCON // ISAAC LE

which is often overlooked, is that it can teach students how to self-study.

Especially in an online setting, students are often forced to learn concepts asynchronously by reading ahead or by watching videos to reinforce their understanding, which allows for efficient absorption of class material.

Ultimately, education doesn’t only teach students math or science — it prepares and trains students to innovate and become the problem-solvers of the future.

So before complaining about having to memorize the law of sines again, try to also remember the hidden yet powerful skills you’re developing through education. ♦

Stop buying real Christmas trees

BY AmandaZhu

Imagine waking up on Christmas morning and sprinting downstairs to open your presents. But you’re greeted by the Christmas tree. And it’s on fire.

If you purchase a real tree, this scenario could very much become a reality. Obviously, trees are flammable. So why would anyone take the risk and string lights on one?

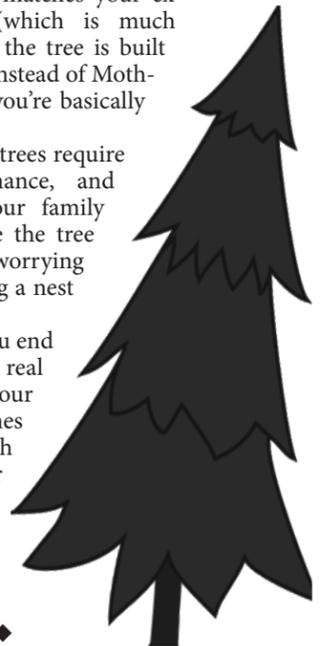
If you like real trees for the scent, just add a pine scent stick on your artificial tree. It’ll smell identical (if not better) to a real one.

Another reason artificial trees are superior: They can be used for decades.

Once you find the perfect tree that exactly matches your expectations (which is much easier when the tree is built by humans instead of Mother Nature), you’re basically set for life.

Artificial trees require no maintenance, and you and your family can decorate the tree without worrying about finding a nest of bugs.

Still, if you end up buying a real tree and your house becomes infested with bugs or your tree catches fire, I hate to say I told you so, but ... I told you so. ♦



Easy fixes to decrease needless holiday waste

BEING MINDFUL OF YOUR PURCHASES CAN HELP MINIMIZE YOUR FOOTPRINT DURING THE HOLIDAYS

BY TiffanyWang

As I stepped into Target, a blast of Christmas music filled my ears and I looked at the rows of holiday decorations, the store decked out in red, white and green. When I was little, I would obsess over all of the toys and candy that stores would be stocked up on because I wanted them all.

But whenever I would get a new toy for Christmas, it would usually be covered in dust at the back of my desk by the time February rolls around. A couple of months or years later it ended up in the trash or was sent to Goodwill.

According to Stanford University, Americans throw away 25 percent more trash during the Thanksgiving to New Year’s holiday period than any other time of year, totaling over 25 million tons of trash that is created in under two months.

During the holiday seasons, many people end up buying many products that they only use once, such as Christmas decorations or gag gifts. While such gifts do bring instantaneous happiness and humor, they ultimately will be harmful in the long run because of the environmental impact.

Some ways to decrease the amount of waste created include recycling newspapers as wrapping paper or reusing gift bags from previous years. Another great way is to give e-gift cards instead of physical ones.

Many times, physical cards costing \$5 or \$10 are thrown away after the recipient opens them, creating unnecessary tons of plastic waste. Often, the packaging of gifts accounts for 65% of the trash produced in households. By buying electronically or second-hand, it could potentially reduce the waste created. An even better way to express love instead of traditional gifts could be by spending quality time with others. While it may not be possible during this pandemic, going ice skating with friends or having a movie sleepover creates memories that have no significant impact on the environment.

Additionally, while many people might think that buying an artificial Christmas tree is better for the environment, a real Christmas tree actually produces less of a carbon footprint. Yearly, U.S. consumers purchase over 10 million artificial trees. Considering that they are usually made of plastic, this creates a lot of landfill waste. On the other hand, buying real trees will help support local forests and growers, and when one is cut down, it is replaced by a seedling.

Although this year’s festivities will no doubt be reduced, it is still important to be mindful when purchasing products and think about the impact they will have on the planet as they rot in a landfill for the next hundred or more years. ♦

I can’t get off TikTok, and it’s becoming a big problem

BY IsaacLe

2020 will forever be primarily defined by COVID-19, and secondarily by a divided presidential election, the loss of many loved celebrities and the emergence of the increasingly popular social media platform, TikTok.

Owned by Chinese company ByteDance, the platform allows creators to post dancing, comedy or even informative videos under a minute.

Although the app provides a great source of entertainment, TikTok has become a major distraction to teens trying to get things done; its unique algorithm to pair videos to the users’ specific interest can leave them swiping for new videos for hours. I see myself as on of the victims. While doing homework,

I often find myself scrolling down my For You page, aimlessly searching for content that would make me laugh. I’ve even diverted my attention to TikTok while writing this article, watching my favorite TikTok user WalterPicks provide me with necessary fantasy football information, forcing me to refocus three times already.

While TikTok does provide some educational content, such as SAT and AP test tutoring, most users focus more on comical or entertaining videos like ones about cooking or dancing. After all, the algorithm doesn’t know and isn’t interested in

what subject I’m working on; it only cares about keeping my attention, and videos about fantasy football are a sure way to accomplish that goal.

The addictive nature of TikTok is not only restricted to the app itself. Popular TikTok stars such as the D’Amelio family and Bryce Hall have made their way onto other social media platforms such as YouTube, attracting their fans to spend more time watching their content. In addition to their YouTube, their major sponsorships further lure fans into a “social media hypnosis,” luring them into researching and discovering more about the stars’ products, eating up into the time necessary for students to perform at a high level in school.

With all of these factors combined, I cannot keep myself off of TikTok even when I try different methods such

as setting time restrictions or even deleting the app as a whole. All of the new celebrities that have garnered fame through the app are constantly involved in some sort of drama, whether it is Dixie D’Amelio eating boogers or Bryce Hall being involved in a restaurant fight. This snowball effect of constant drama leads to more time spent on general social media apps such as Snapchat, where the relevant news in the TikTok world is easily accessible.

The great deal of time that I spend on TikTok and other social media apps is ultimately unproductive, and I need to find a solution before the grind starts for finals. ♦



Amateur chef tries to bake without a recipe

oliver
ye-ast



Oliver Ye

I love cooking. The sounds of a sizzling steak in a pan and soup bubbling in a stock pot are a euphonious symphony to my ears. What makes cooking so fun to me is the freedom that comes with it — adjusting the seasoning as I see fit and being able to move pans on and off the fire in order to adjust the heat.

Baking, by contrast, is an activity that I abhor. I've never understood why so many people like it so much. Whenever I bake, I always feel as if I have no control over what I'm doing — I just toss things in a bowl, stick everything in the oven and then pray that the baking gods have mercy on my soul. They usually don't. Even when I try to follow the recipe perfectly, it doesn't work out.

So when a friend challenged me to a recipe-less baking challenge — making a loaf of bread — my first reaction was to say no. But as I thought about it, maybe the problem was that I followed the baking recipes too closely. What if I just applied my cooking

philosophy of freedom to baking?

Before I began, I had to navigate the confusing list of ingredients that normally go into bread. Flour, butter, milk, yeast, salt, sugar ... eggs? I wasn't sure if bread normally contained eggs. But this was a recipe-less bake. Who cares if bread normally has eggs? My bread was going to have eggs. In fact, I decided it was going to have two eggs. I also noticed that our pantry had approximately 80 types



of flour — cake flour, all purpose flour, wheat flour, self rising flour, the list went on.

After finally figuring out all the ingredients and laying them next to a big bowl on the kitchen counter, I realized that I had no idea what the ratios of ingredients should be

to each other.

I decided not to get too caught up in the technicalities of bread baking. Remembering that yeast normally needs activating, I warmed a glass of milk and put a pinch of yeast into the milk to sit and do its yeasty thing. Then, I ran into the first major challenge of the bake. How much butter? I paused for a second, trying to figure out the answer, before I came to the

conclusion that it didn't matter!

The more the better, I told myself, as I tossed a stick into the

mix.

A s

I stuck my hands in to combine the mixture of ingredients, I found that the dough was too gloopy. In a stroke of genius, I realized that adding more flour would make the dough drier. But sadly, I eyeballed the amount of flour I added incorrectly: Suddenly, the dough was way too dry. Realizing my mis-

take, I desperately poured a glug of milk into the dough. Tragically, it was 0.8 glugs too much. The dough only needed 0.2 glugs of milk.

Eventually, after several back and forths of adding too much flour and then too much milk, I finally began kneading the dough on a board. At some point, I found a rhythm in my kneading — it was actually quite relaxing.

I wasn't sure if what I was doing was correct, but the great thing about being clueless was that I wasn't sure if what I was doing was wrong either. Ignorance is truly bliss.

I clicked the "start" button on my oven, and put my lump of dough in. I didn't know what temperature and for how long my bread was supposed to bake at, so I ended up just setting the temperature to the oven's default setting — 350 F.

Ultimately, I don't think what came out of the oven can even be called bread. Though it was edible, I think it could be best described as a bland scone. But hey, I never said I was baking bread in the first place.

Though my baking adventures haven't taught me much more about baking other than that I am bad at it, I relearned an important lesson: Sometimes, ignorance is bliss. I had no clue what I was doing, but I did have a lot of fun. ♦

TAROT CARD MEANINGS



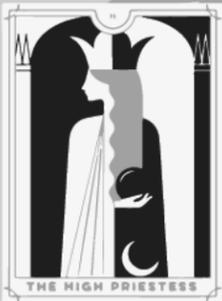
manifestation, resourcefulness, power, inspired action



femininity, beauty, nature, nurturing, abundance



authority, establishment, a father figure



intuition, sacred knowledge, divine feminine, the subconscious mind



strength, courage, persuasion, compassion



beginnings, innocence, spontaneity

A dummy's guide to tarot

jole
the mole



Joann Zhang

Life is full of important choices: Coke or Pepsi? Shower or bath? Football or basketball?

In a world with so many paths, only one thing is certain: Showers are definitely superior to baths.

But to choose between big decisions without getting a stomach ache, sometimes we need a little extra guidance from the supernatural. Meet Lionel, my tarot deck.

Tarot decks contain different cards with different meanings and advice, and are a form of divination, or fortune-telling. Lionel has given countless sage counsels on matters from college applications (Cornell or Penn?) to the love lives (Jacob or Jesse?) of my friends and I. For daily wisdom, I pull a card from Lionel in the morning, and I find that the wisdom inside it is much-needed. More time-consuming readings can forecast themes in your life for the next few months, like disaster (the Tower Card) or love (Two of Cups Card).

Whether you believe a tarot deck's magic comes from actual spiritual power or human psychology and interpretation of cards, there's no denying that tarot divination can help even the most indecisive make a choice.

For example, I've lately been feeling very panicked and fearful for no apparent reason when I try to meditate. Google provided no helpful answers; but Lionel did. I pulled the Knight of Cups and King of Cups cards, which told me to get in touch with my emotions and intuition and subconscious, and stay firm, balanced, and calm. So I kept meditating, stayed attentive and present with my emotions. Lo and behold, a couple weeks later, anxiety had be-

come something that I could stay with and acknowledge, like a fly on my shoulder.

If you want to purchase a tarot deck, chances are you're a bit of a mess (it's OK), so let me guide you through the process. Lionel is a classic Rider-Waite tarot deck, perfect for beginners, and can be found on Amazon for a mere \$13.99: a serious steal. However, if you're an extreme cheapskate or artistically gifted (or both), you can make your own deck by looking up the name and art of each card.

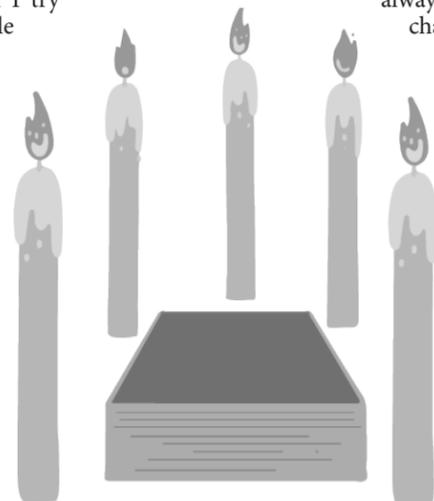
Before using your deck, I recommend clearing it of unwanted "energy" so that it gives true answers. You can smudge (which cleans with the smoke of dried white sage), burn incense around your deck, or leave your deck submerged in salt.

Now that you've named and cleansed your deck, it's time to choose a card. Choose a question to ask the deck (will my teacher let me turn in my project a week late?), and shuffle the deck until a card jumps out. More advanced tarot-ers can spread out the cards and pick one, but having to choose a card to make another choice? Nothing but pain.

Flip over the card(s) that have fallen out while shuffling and look up the meanings online or in the guidebook. For cards that are upside-down, look for the "reversed" meaning in the guidebook or website. For example, the Chariot card means "action, willpower, success" when it's right-side-up, but reversed, means "lack of direction."

If the cards are bad (e.g., drawing the Death card when asking about your love life), never fear! The cards only show the outcome of your current path; you can always change your future by changing how you're dealing with a situation.

All tarot does is remind you of the power you have over yourself and your life. If you wanted to turn in your very late project and receive a scathing submission comment on Canvas, you could, but you probably shouldn't. If you wanted to take a bath, you could, but you definitely shouldn't. Tarot can inform you of the destination of a path, but you have to take the steps. ♦



... I have over 2020 subscribers

When quarantine started last spring, I did not expect to become a YouTuber (or at least a very minor league version of one).

I'm now making \$100 a month by goofing around with math and coding on my channel, called Cararra. I started my channel during the summer before junior year, but I could not monetize my videos until I reached 1,000 subscribers three months after quarantine began. I still earn 20% of the minimum wage in California, but it's a start.

2020 has been a crazy year, and what's funny is that finally monetizing recordings of me acting uncharacteristically hyper was not even the craziest part. Quarantine decimated the routine I had been building up since ninth grade, but that very break in routine was a blessing in disguise. And no, not just because I got to binge-watch Cody Ko.

Before quarantine, I thought I had things mildly figured out. On a typical Red Day, I would fumble for my alarm at 7:15 a.m., stumble into the shower, magically wake up during my first period class, drive home, eat too many chips, finish my homework and sleep.

I also kept a long list of items to do each day after I got home. After I finished my "Beloved" essay for English, I jumped into physics homework. I quickly prepared for any club meetings I had the next day, then used whatever time was left over to record videos or study for the science competitions I participated in. If I was lucky, I could squeeze in a bit of John Oliver or Pewdiepie, depending on how mature I was feeling.

The routine worked pretty well: I was able to finish everything I needed to, albeit barely. But hey, barely is the only way to get through junior year.

At least it was until March. Suddenly, I had so much time my routine was not only unnecessary, but also limiting. When I finished everything on my todo list, I had no idea what to do.

There was no "Beloved" essay to work on, no physics homework to complete. I didn't even have to prepare for clubs since all the meetings were canceled.

ced. So, I did what any self-respecting high schooler would do: I watched hours and hours of YouTube.

Of course, watching YouTube got old quick. Instead of just doing the bare minimum to satisfy my commitments until the next day and watching videos for the rest of the day, I now had to find pursuits that I actually enjoyed.

Being forced to think every day "What would I like to do more of?" allowed me to discover the things I liked way faster than I had ever imagined possible. I realized I liked reading science articles and going down Wikipedia rabbit holes, though my browser did not appreciate the dozens of tabs I opened as I read about electrons. I found out that I actually liked making art now that I had the time for it, somehow drawing up (pun intended) the resolve to make it through Inktober, a challenge where I had to create sketches for daily prompts throughout October.

I discovered that I enjoyed doing puzzles and brain teasers and started doing more math and programming challenges. I even tried out hacking competitions called Capture The Flags, but I'm unfortunately not yet qualified to hack into my friends' League accounts. I might have been able to if they had told me their passwords, but, being the bad friends they are, they did not.

However, the most important thing quarantine has allowed me to do is grow my YouTube channel, which I originally started to help people with math and science olympiads.

While school was still in person, I would only get home at 4 p.m. I was always exhausted, and whenever I recorded my videos, I would just try to get them over with as fast as possible.

Yet with more time on my hands and more flexibility for when I could record, I was able to take the time to watch my videos and improve my presentation style. I quickly went from explaining algorithms in an incoherent mutter to hysterically laughing at myself

camera when I failed to draw a geometry diagram for the third time. I even started diversifying, making AP crash courses and some cringe Minecraft gameplay videos.

At the beginning of June, I finally reached the magic 1,000 subscribers, and I now have around 2,000. College apps have forced me to cut down on video-making temporarily, but I still have time to get out two videos each week.

At the start of junior year, it felt as if I was mindlessly hitting ball after ball down the field. Math homework, a double. Chemistry homework, a single. Twenty text-heavy pages of APUSH reading, a home run. And it was already time to sleep. I didn't get any strikes, but I also never got a timeout.

During quarantine, I finally got the break I needed: instead of struggling to meet my commitments, I had time to not only relax, but also try out new things and spend more time on activities I enjoy. Whether by recording more entertaining Minecraft videos or reading about Hector and Achilles duking it out in the Trojan War, I can now escape the monotony of my pre-quarantine life. I can finally put down my bat and throw some curveballs of my own. ♦

On to a new journey,

Rohan Kumar



YouTuber



Licensed Driver

... I learned how to drive

The first time I caused a car to move (I'd rather not disgrace the word "drive") was characterized by my shaky "uh-h-h-h" from the driver's seat, my father's impatient sighs from the passenger seat and my friend's shrill soprano from the back seat.

It was an overcast day in January, the day before my scheduled session with an instructor, so I figured that I should at least learn how to move the car 200 feet down the driveway in front of my house. Was I successful? In the liberal sense of the word, yes, so technically I now had five stressful minutes of experience in the driver's seat.

So the next day, when Instructor Lin showed up and asked in gruff Chinese whether I'd driven before, I muttered, "yes but —"

I was cut off by an enthusiastic "Well, get on the road!"

Putting all my trust in the brake under Instructor Lin's foot, I drove onto Los Gatos-Saratoga Road.

I'm the type of person who always ends up running the race course backwards in Mario Kart because I can't figure out how to turn around, so I was quite surprised when I survived the two-hour driving session that included a

journey in hell — that is, Lawrence Expressway — where I received a lot of glares for going 35 mph. I was also slightly traumatized from running over a dead (I stress, already dead) squirrel.

But despite my trepidation every time I got behind the wheels, I kept asking to drive — admittedly in a wobbly and snail-like fashion — to everywhere my parents or I needed to go. Driving to Westgate myself for the first time to buy a cup of Jamba Juice felt like it ought to be at the top of my accomplishments list in my college applications.

The first time I drove on a highway was the day after the quarantine was ordered last March. Normally, Instructor Lin would have been the one to take me through my first trip on the highway, but my father had other ideas as the roads became relatively empty due to quarantine.

My father didn't say anything until I suddenly found myself merging onto a highway. Unprepared, I panicked as my head was filled with 65 mph, 65 mph, 65 mph — there was also a fleeting thought comparing death by coronavirus to death by car crash.

The trip was a blur, perhaps because my brain was too focused on steering to encode memories. All I remember was the triumphant grin on my face as I pulled back into my garage without a scratch.

Driving on highways became my favorite activity, especially because of the unofficial "follow the traffic" clause that allowed me to drive at 80 mph when safe. It was a glorious feeling to glimpse the scenery that flashed by in the corner of my eye.

A couple of months into quarantine, my family was dying to go somewhere, so we opted for a trip to Carmel. That day, I learned that 1) not all highways are friendly and 2) I can get sore muscles for being too sweaty and tense at the wheel for a prolonged period of time.

I mean, is there anything more squiggly than Highway 17? Its twistiness trumps even that of instant ramen. Looking back, it was a miracle that I did not hurl my entire family into the welcoming embrace of the redwoods.

I must admit, not dying on CA-17 was what vanquished my fear of driving once and for all.

Armed with the knowledge that I survived Highway 17 — and with stories of my mom's friend who failed three times — I stepped into my driving exam in July with 50% confidence and 50% nerves. I tried to focus on the former because, hey, you should always look at the gas tank half full.

I remembered the advice from Instructor Lin and exaggerated every movement: a stop sign must be followed by three alligators on the left, three alligators on the right, and another three alligators on the left. Really, who drives like that?

But the comical exaggerations did get me a "well done" on the exam. Of the 15 points I could have lost and still passed, I only lost one point, which was much better than my parents' results — and they already knew how to drive in China prior to the American exam. My mom was thrilled and immediately showed off my score to all her Asian mom friends.

For me, however, getting my license was about getting some degree of control in a time when everything else feels out of control. The degree of freedom and independence I gained from getting my license is precious to me when I feel trapped and unable to go anywhere.

So, as 2020 comes to a merciful end, I'm still as enthusiastic about driving as ever because it gives me a sense of purpose and a destination — and because I have something to prove to those who laughed at my Mario Kart skills. ♦

Yours truly,

Selina Chen

... I became more politically aware

As I sat browsing my Instagram earlier this year, my eyes glazed over the normal pictures and polls until something caught my eye: a graphic on Black Lives Matter. Intrigued, I read more about the movement and clicked on the next story. Another graphic, this time on deportation and the DACA program.

I started counting how many posts on my feed were related to political and social issues: in total, 15 of 28.

I have always loved to read the news and learn more about political events, good or bad. As a toddler, I used to mimic my dad reading the paper newspaper on the couch, even though I didn't understand a thing it said.

Even today, the first thing I do after waking up is getting a bowl of cereal and opening the Morning Briefing newsletter from The New York Times. Until this year, many of

my classmates questioned my fascination with news and politics.

I remember one time in seventh grade when a friend of mine said that politics is for adults and I shouldn't be worrying about civic issues.

This kind of attitude worried me. At 12, I may not have understood the complexities of the issues as well as I do now, but I still realized that voting is important to democracy, and if my peers didn't care about global issues, it could spell trouble in the future.

This all changed this in 2020. With many people stuck at home because of COVID-19 and the November elections and social unrest dominating headlines, I saw a growing trend of my peers starting to follow the news and speak out about their opinions.

One specific event that caught my eyes was the unrest after the killing of George Floyd. I saw #blacklivesmat-

ter wherever I went on the internet, whether in a Google Hangouts chat with my friends or on Facebook.

On Instagram, I saw many of my peers, who I thought were apolitical, change their profile pictures to a black square in solidarity with the movement, donate to causes combating police brutality and express opinions in bold text on their stories.

Many of those same people went to a march in front of the City Hall soon after and pushed the school district to offer more education about racial inequities in America.

While I am usually the type to take in information and not amplify to a larger audience, I did try to become more active in the community. I gave information on various social issues to many of my friends, many of whom weren't aware of events like the march and made a commitment to read more into world issues rather than glossing over the headlines.

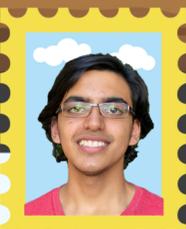
Most importantly, I started talking with my family about these issues again and got a chance to adapt my own views based on the past experiences of my family members.

I welcome this change of pace. For a democracy to be fully functional, its citizens need to be informed and ready to make good decisions, whether through information gathered through traditional news outlets or social media.

2020 has objectively been a horrible year. Every month brings a new disaster whether it be a new COVID-19 hotspot or wildfires raging across the West Coast. However, this new movement of more politically active young people is one of the few trends that I hope will continue well beyond this year. ♦

See you next year,

Shrey Desai



Woke

Lessons learned from this year

"I learned about the importance of discipline and consistency through working out and taking care of my body."

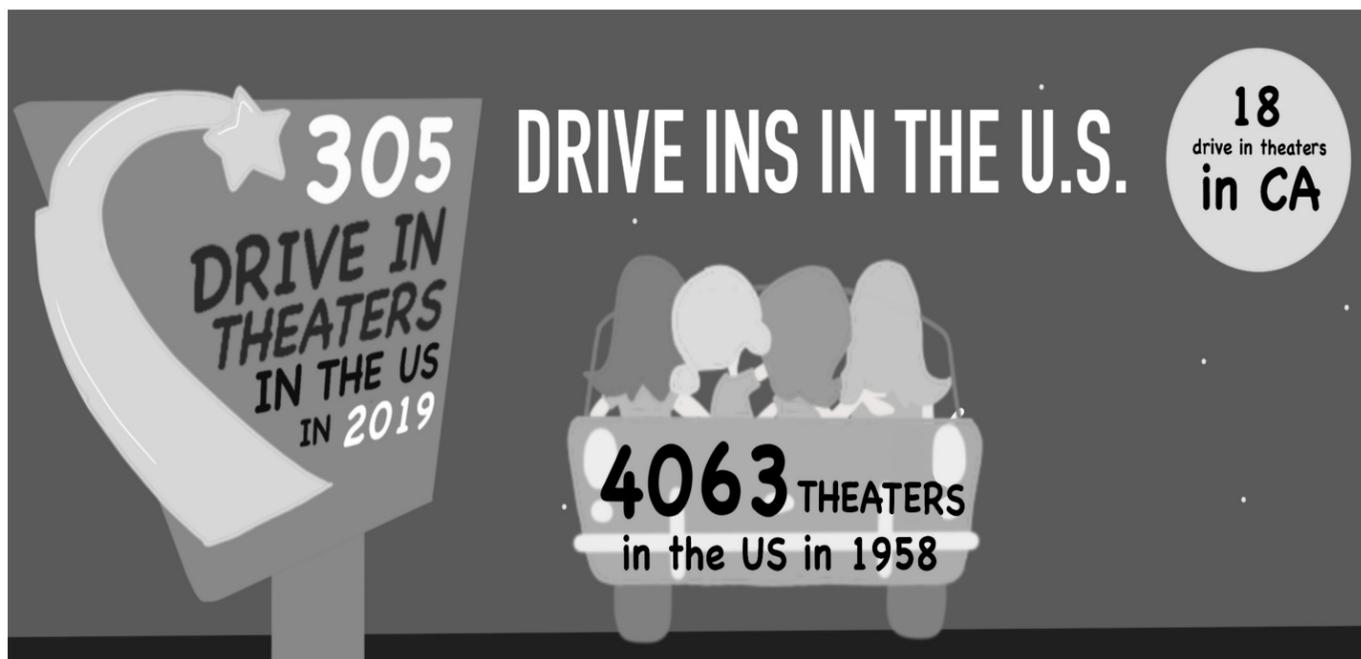


junior Ishaan Bhandari

"I realized that we take a lot of little things for granted. This year, I'm very grateful to have met a lot of new people."



sophomore Ethan Kung



Drive-in movie theaters stage a comeback during COVID-19

BY Christina Chang
& Lihi Shoshani

What better way to catch up on all that social interaction missing from theater outings than by catching a drive-in movie instead.

Of the 18 drive-in theaters in California, West Wind Capitol Drive-in is available in San Jose, streaming movies daily to a quickly increasing audience.

Junior Maanvi Chawla went to a drive-in theater in the beginning of August with her family to watch the film, "Abominable." She noted it was similar to a movie theater while also providing its own, unique benefits.

"The screen was big, and the audio coming from our own car's radio made it feel like we were in an actual movie theater," Maanvi said. She was able to bring pillows, blankets and food during the movie, making the experience all that more exciting.

And having a barrier with the car that separated her from others allowed her to give loud commentary that she otherwise would not have been allowed to do in a standard movie theater.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, movie theaters are closing all around the world. For example, Cineworld, the second largest theater chain in the world is closing its 663 theaters in the United States and Britain.

"I think drive-in movies will become more popular because it's safer than going to a crowded movie theater."

SOPHOMORE Arshi Chawla

Warner Bros. and MGM/Universal are postponing movies until next year — drive-in movies have been making a comeback, according to *The New York Times*.

"I think drive-in movies will become more popular because it's safer than going to a crowded movie theatre. It's also a fun place to go with friends," Maanvi's sister, Arshi Chawla said.

As of October 2019, only 305 drive-in theaters remain in the U.S., down from 4,063 theaters in 1958. But because of the social distancing restrictions of COVID-19, they are experiencing an unexpected revival.

Drive in theaters have started to act as a new night out for teens who are struggling to remain social during quarantine.

However, they tend to be spread out across large areas.

For instance, the only other drive-in remotely close to Saratoga other than San Jose's West Wind is in Concord: an hour's drive away.

Still, this chance to time travel to an earlier era and experience the thrill of going to a drive-in movie has many benefits right now due to the ability to maintain social distancing.

"I think a lot of people miss going to the movie theater to watch something," Maanvi said. "I hope people will learn to see drive-ins as a better, safer alternative because they are essentially the same thing except you're not sitting with other people. It is also a brand new experience for a lot of people which makes it even more fun." ♦

Harry Styles' Vogue cover shoot does not deserve all of the hype it has received

raw-
llabandi



Shreya Rallabandi

After Harry Styles made history by being the first man on the cover of *Vogue* Magazine and wearing a dress, for the next couple of days, my phone was packed with content about the *Vogue* cover — TikToks, Instagram story reposts, you name it.

Styles received a massive amount of backlash and praise, yet he deserved neither to the extent it was given.

In this *Vogue* photoshoot, he sports 10 different looks including a dress paired with a Gucci jacket, a *Comme de Garçons* Homme Plus blazer and kilt, and an intricately-styled trench coat.

Far-right conservatives Ben Shapiro and Candace Owens deemed Styles' dressing to be "non-masculine." First and foremost: Styles' fashion choices should be no concern of Owens or Shapiro. Fashion policing when it comes to gender identity exists as a way to perpetuate society's gender norms — to enforce stereotypical gender roles and notions

of "masculinity" and "femininity" onto the public as mutually exclusive.

Historically, especially in the Western World, fashion has divided gender into two binary sectors. However, as Styles shows us in his photoshoot, men can wear frills and still remain "manly."

Once a man puts on a dress, he does not become any less of a man. Once a woman wears a suit, she remains as much of a woman as she is when she wears a skirt. On the other end, Styles has acquired probably too much positive recognition when compared to the others who have done similar feats.

Though the landmark of having a male on the cover of *Vogue* magazine, that too in a dress, is worth celebrating, people have considered his wearing a dress as the landmark.

Styles is not the first to pioneer through the depths of gender fluidity; in reality, so many others have worked tirelessly to oppose gender fashion roles and have not been placed on the same pedestal as Styles — especially people of color. Prince performed on tour in Washington, D.C., while decked from head to toe in purple glitter.

Lil Nas X wore a gold-studded, fluorescent pink cowboy suit to the 2020 Grammy Awards. Male K-pop stars are often femi-

nine and many are androgynous. Billy Porter arrived at the 2019 Met Gala wearing a velvet, floor-length tuxedo gown.

None of these people were revered as much as Styles was. Needless to say, Styles wearing a dress is monumental in representing gender fluidity in the mainstream media.

Just because Styles' white maleness is palatable doesn't mean he should represent opposing gender norms

While no part of the recognition he received is his fault, it completely dwarfed the efforts of so many other people who are not put on the same pedestal as Styles was.

Simply because Styles' white maleness is palatable to society does not mean that he should represent opposing gender norms in the music industry.

Harry Styles did not create gender fluidity in mainstream media. We really need to stop pretending that he did. ♦

'Radio Silence' rings true for teens

BY Lily Zhang

"Being clever was, after all, my primary source of self-esteem. I'm a very sad person, in all senses of the word, but at least I was going to get into university."

It's rare to find a book that seems to understand you. The first time I read that passage in the outstanding young adult novel "Radio Silence," I had that feeling. "Radio Silence," released in 2016, is the second novel by Alice Oseman, and it's my best read of the fall by far.

The plot, split into sections by school terms, covers the senior year of 17-year-old Frances Janvier.

Frances has one goal in life: to get into Oxford and Cambridge. She's the head girl of her school, and she has no close friends.

Frances is secretly obsessed with a podcast called "Universe City," whose anonymous creator is called Radio Silence.

Frances and Radio Silence, who she learns is a boy named Aled Last, start working together on the podcast, and they quickly form an intense friendship.

After Aled's identity is revealed, Frances has to confront her past and explore what she really wants out of life to save her friendship.

This book is quiet, but it's not boring. Like J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," it brilliantly captures the angst and melancholy of being a teenager, and the pressures that come with it.

Both Frances and Aled feel pressured to succeed academically, and they eventually burn out because of it.

However, Oseman shows that this burnout isn't a tragic failure through her characterization of Aled's sister Carys, who runs away at 16 and still ends up quite happy with her new life and her friends.

A common misconception in our society is that the only way to make a living is to get a college degree. I like how this book shows that that's not always the case.

Additionally, the novel explores finding one's voice in a unique way. Frances isn't quite sure who she is, and she's afraid to talk about her real interests.

Like many teenagers, she lives inside her head most of the time. Aled is also afraid to be himself, as he pushes those he cares about away and keeps his world private. Eventually, they both gain the courage to express themselves.

The casual diversity in this book is also the best I've seen in young adult fiction in a while. Frances is half-Ethiopian and bisexual, Aled is demisexual, and Carys is lesbian.

I wouldn't say their identities are a main focus of the book, which is nice. Often it seems as if every mainstream queer novel is about the main character coming out or having a tragic romance (I'm looking at you, "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda").

However, my absolute favorite thing about this book has to be the realistic lack of romance.

As Oseman put it, most people's lives don't revolve around romance. That isn't to say this book isn't about soulmates. It's just about the platonic kind.

"Radio Silence" hits just right; it debunks the myth that getting a college degree is the only way to be happy, captures teenage life in a relatable, unique way and makes one feel understood. I highly recommend giving this book a try. ♦



Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

Sorry not sorry: Anime is better than Marvel

BY JonathanLi

Marvel has had quite the spectacular run. With 23 films, 12 television series and dozens of projects still in the works, it is one of the most consistent and widely-loved studios in the world.

Yet I am here to make a statement so controversial and unpopular I fear I will be forever shunned, left alone by my friends and forced into seclusion. Believe me when I say the writing of this story was done under immense stress and indecision.

Major animation studios in Japan like Kyoto Animation and Studio Ghibli are simply better than Marvel.

Don't get me wrong, the gap between Marvel and these top anime studios is a small one, but the ability of the relatively low-budget films and TV shows made by these anime studios to emotionally impact their audiences is incredible. If you shed a tear during "Avengers: Endgame," prepare to bawl your eyes out for a film like "Violet Evergarden" (it's on Netflix, but make sure to watch the TV series first).

If your search history is starting to fill up with the backstory of the Avengers, prepare to dive into the deep web for pirated light novels and mangas of the Naruto universe after watching the anime.

The ability of relatively low budget films and shows made by these studios to impact audiences is incredible.

The critique of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) I've long held is its lack of depth and somewhat cliché plots. What in the world was going on with the self-sacrificing thing between Black Widow and Hawkeye? It was emotional, but it felt like they were family members fighting over the restaurant bill.

The MCU has only consistently done well in two aspects: character development

and hiring the right guy to compose their soundtracks. Their characters, for the most part, are complex, dynamic and lovable, and Alan Silvestri's compositions do a great job of replicating John Williams' magic. Yet for every Captain America, you have a Naruto, and for every well-written villain in the MCU, you have the unrivaled Johan Liebert.

Don't sleep on soundtracks written for anime either — one could easily listen to Joe Hisashi's complex and original tunes during a particularly long car ride or while doing homework. His pieces are a goldmine for any music theory student.

However, the plots of great anime — incredibly diverse and complex narratives that weave together amazing characters — are what tip the tables for me. In the case of shows like "Naruto" and "One Piece," when you get 900 episodes of runtime, this tends to happen out of pure necessity.

But TV series like "Your Lie in April" and movies like "Your Name" and "I Want to Eat Your Pancreas" — with runtimes shorter than two hours — leave an impression that can change a lot about how a watcher perceives the world.

On a macro level, Marvel films are relatively predictable, with plots that aren't particularly engaging. Coupled with the fact that these characters are pretty much impossible to relate to (Spiderman's as close as it gets, but the dude literally swings on webs), it's going to be significantly more difficult to connect to audiences. With realistic settings, plots and characters, anime worlds become a second home for many devotees.

The biggest reason these anime studios' plots are so much better than Marvel's lies in the life lessons they teach. Walking away from something like "Your Lie in April" left me with a sudden desire to become the next Lang Lang, and "I Want to Eat Your Pancreas" taught me to be grateful for the time that is given to me. Marvel films are shallow and just don't quite leave me with that same feeling. ♦



Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

Older Disney movies reign over new remakes

BY AnjaliPai

My childhood radiated with Disney magic. With movies like "Beauty and the Beast," "Lilo and Stitch" and "Cinderella," my generation grew up with movies that exude charm, class and quality. However, young children nowadays are being fed mediocre movies with characters that look exactly the same in every movie.

I love the classics, but the new remakes, both animated or live-action productions such as "Christopher Robin" hurt my soul. Somehow, the movies have lost their charm in almost every way, from their art styles to their plots.

My biggest annoyance with the new Disney films are their repetitive and unrealistic depictions of characters. While most animated films are going to have stylistic simplifications of human bodies, the repetitive use of the same simplified features goes too far.

How hard is it to create a little diversity between characters from movie to movie? I don't mean to body-shame Disney's new animated characters, but when every Disney character from Anna and Elsa from "Frozen" to Van Helsing from "Wreck-it-Ralph" has abnormally large eyes, nonexistent noses and heads disproportionately large compared to their bodies, the movies get monotonous and harder to watch.

Around the time of Disney's Golden Age, lasting from the 1930s to the 1950s, each animator the characters and scenes. Every movie had different animators who would add their own touches to their work, giving each piece its own charm and warmth that has not yet been achieved with modern CGI. For example, Eyvind Earle, the illustrator of "Sleeping Beauty," structured everything with a distinctly thin, straight and geometrical pattern.

In CGI movies, the characters have little variety. Characters like Russel from "Up" to Riley from "Inside Out" could eas-

ily be from the same world and be interconnected due to the similarities between their facial structures, the style of setting and animation overall.

These days, every Disney princess has an overexaggerated hourglass figure, with bug eyes and a button nose. There is nothing wrong with transitioning into the modern world of CGI, but diversifying each character's features would be a good first step.

To make matters worse, Disney's recent live-action remakes do no justice to the classics; they have unnecessary variations that take away from the classic stories they are remaking.

A case in point: In the recent live remake of "Aladdin," Disney made several unnecessary changes to the main characters. Jafar's backstory is shown as a street rat and Jasmine is shown to be setting her sights on becoming the next sultan rather than marrying for love.

Marrying for love instead of becoming the next sultan would have made the plot of the remake far more wholesome, and revealing Jafar's backstory removes the mystery associated with his character. If you are going to remake something, then remake it as is instead of making changes that do more harm than good.

Since many of Disney's best films were charming and creatively animated — think of classics like "The Aristocats" or "Robin Hood" — they should just stick to creating movies like these with creative plots, rather than remakes and unique art styles that show diversity in animation.

In general, Disney needs to stop while they're ahead. Stop remaking old classics and instead dream up new classics that will be worthwhile for this generation. Otherwise, future generations will be stripped of the Disney magic that ours and earlier ones got to experience. For their sake at least, bring back the charm to the animated films and, above all, scrap the poorly made live-action remakes. ♦



Graphic by ANJALI PAI

Fellas, y'all need to stop hating on country music

BY ShreyaRallabandi

When people ask me about my music taste, I always respond with the despicable answer: "everything." When I say that, I mean it — I listen to everything (with the exception of NAV, of course).

And yes, that includes country music. Despite the profound mainstream hatred for it and all of the stereotypes that come along with it, I argue that country music is still so much fun to listen to.

These songs can be the perfect summer jams for blasting on beach trips and driving with the top down. They make you want to

be huddled next to a small campfire. They carry that classic, feel-good twang. Bottom line: There are lots of country bops.

Now, don't get me wrong — I'm not a die-hard country enthusiast, and my Spotify library is definitely not solely composed of country music. However, I do think it is criminally underrated and deserves an opportunity to show the world its true flexibility and charm.

You don't need to own a pair of cowboy boots or love sipping iced tea in the evenings to enjoy listening to it. The songs carry a fervor of life. You haven't experienced true joy until you have screamed the chorus

of "Leave the Night On" by Sam Hunt with no commitments in the back of your mind or belted "Tequila" by Dan + Shay in the car late at night. It is an easy pick-me-up of positive energy.

In order to gain a better understanding of my friends and foes on the other end of the country-music-loving spectrum, I put in the effort to ask Google, "Why do people hate country music?"

The main results I encountered talked about how country's classic twang, accents and pronunciation and unrelatable lyrics are all major turn-offs. I have to admit, it is very hard to refute these notions, as they are all

correct. I personally can't relate to almost all the lyrics I hear, either. I've never been infatuated with a red solo cup at a party, nor have I been caught a little catfish dinner after floating down the Flint River (I'm a vegetarian.)

But the vibe. Is so. Good. So for all those who feel newly inspired to open up Spotify and give it a try, here are some pop-country recommendations to help you realize country can be cool sometimes: "My Church" by Maren Morris, "Leave The Night On" by Sam Hunt and, of course, "Red Solo Cup" by Toby Keith. You might just discover your inner cowboy. ♦

LGBTQIA+ characters deserve happy endings

BY MinsuiTang
& LilyZhang

Editor's note: This story contains spoilers for the TV shows "Supernatural" and "The 100."

Getting emotionally attached to queer characters is always a bit of a gamble: Even if the writers manage to avoid harmful stereotypes, a happy ending is often unlikely.

LGBTQIA+(the I stands for intersex and the A stands for asexual) representation in media is rare, and entertainment companies that do include queer representation don't necessarily do it well. TV shows are particularly guilty of this — so much so that their habit of killing off queer characters has become a trope called "Bury Your Gays."

TV shows such as "Supernatural" and "The 100" have been guilty of this sin, with queer characters having disproportionately more deaths and often being used solely to advance the plot for the success of a heterosexual protagonist rather than having their own meaningful character arcs.

Writers also tend to define a queer char-

acter solely by their sexuality, which further supports the implication that they only appear in the work to fulfill the purpose of having a diversity of characters instead of showing actual dynamic growth within them.

Though the way TV shows kill off their queer characters has changed over the years, the ending and message delivered to the audience remain the same: Queer characters are expendable and

that to be queer is to struggle.

The most recent example of the trope occurred in the final season of "Supernatural." After 15 seasons of fans shipping Dean Winchester and Castiel, the writers finally made the ship canon in 2020 — in the worst way possible.

To save Dean's life, the angel Castiel agreed to die in his place. As per a deal he made earlier, he was forced to confess that he loved Dean before being dragged to what fans have called "su-

per hell."

This ending is a classic example of bad LGBTQIA+ representation and caused outrage from its fans: By outing a queer character and then immediately killing them off, "Supernatural" sent a message with a rather negative connotation to all of its queer followers.

Queerbaiting, a marketing technique in which creators hint at a queer character or a relationship without actually depicting it, is also present in the show. While the creators hinted at a romance between Castiel and Dean, they led viewers on for 15 seasons and eventually made the relationship one-sided.

The death of Lexa from "The 100," a sci-fi series, has also caused quite a commotion among its fans. Female leaders Clark and Lexa share a mutual liking for each other and share many ambig-

ous, affectionate moments. However, when the lovebirds finally decide they are ready to take on their relationship, Lexa unexpectedly dies from a bullet accidentally shot at her.

As most TV shows don't have many queer characters in the first place, it becomes even more disappointing to see the producers kill off some of the only positive representations of these characters.

Because this medium has such powerful potential impacts, TV writers need to be more conscious of what they are normalizing to their audience.

It also often seems as if queer characters in media are written for straight people: Writers will attempt to stir up feelings of pity in their straight audience by putting their LGBTQIA+ characters through traumatic situations.

While informing people about the struggles queer people face is important, it is also essential to show that they can live regular and happy lives just like the straight characters. Someone's identity should not be demonized as tragic, no matter how good the writers' intentions are. ♦



Chinese instruments should receive respect

BY SelinaChen

One time in eighth grade, a girl asked me a perfectly normal question: Do you play an instrument?

"Yeah, I play the Guzheng, the Chinese harp," I said. A few months before this conversation, I had demonstrated the Guzheng in class and she had seemed mildly impressed, so I was somewhat confused that she didn't remember.

After a moment of silence, the realization dawned on her face, and she replied, "Oh, I mean, do you play an actual instrument?"

I had studied the Guzheng for seven years by then, but it had always been something my parents forced me to do. Looking back, I realized that moment was what initiated my true passion for traditional Chinese music.

I take issue with the line between traditional Chinese instruments and "actual" instruments, because Chinese instruments and instruments from any non-Western cultures are not primitive artifacts, nor are they exotic displays for curiosity. They are just like any other musical instrument because of their complexity and the stories they carry.

I can't express how important the Guzheng is to me — after all, a miniature Guzheng was what I carried on my back five and a half years ago when I stepped into San Francisco airport.

Simplification of traditional instrument

The Guzheng originated 2,500 years ago and has a history long enough to rival any western instrument. While an instrument that old might belong in a museum exhibit, the Guzheng has evolved: Its size grew and its strings changed from silk to steel. The version we play today, with 21 strings and taller than I am, was re-designed in the 20th century.

As someone who's tried learning the piano and who teaches a Guzheng elective at a local Chinese school, I can tell you that the Guzheng is not easy. But I also understand where the misconception that the Guzheng is an easy instrument came from: If anyone drags their finger over random Guzheng strings, it doesn't sound bad.

That is because the Guzheng — and all Chinese instruments — is in the pentatonic scale. To put it simply, no matter how you pluck the Guzheng, the combination of notes guarantee that it can't sound horrible. That, coupled with the fact that the Guzheng doesn't make the appalling screech a violin novice might make, gives an illusion of easiness.

Another reason for the girl's dismissal of the the legitimacy of Guzheng is the perception that Chinese music equates to Zen music. If you search Chinese music on YouTube, you will find hour-long meditation soundtracks with tranquil nature scenes as thumbnails.

But while the Guzheng does produce slow and calming melodies, that's not all it can do. Especially after the 20th century, Guzheng composition shifted toward pieces that are stronger and livelier, with one of the most iconic piece being "Battling the Typhoon" — the title should be explanatory of its style.

Playing these fast and ferocious pieces requires years of practice to build up the necessary strength and speed. My left hand's fingers are calloused from pressing the glissandos, while with the technique tremolo, I can strike a string with my right thumb 18 times in one second.

The Guzheng is far from the only traditional Chinese instrument. There are countless others — Dizi (bamboo flute), Hulusi (gourd flute), Pipa (Chinese lute), Erhu (two-stringed fiddle) — each with their unique histories.

All of these instruments work together in Chinese symphonies, which are often divided into four sections: plucked strings, bow strings, wind and percussion. During the time I played for the California Youth Chinese Symphony, I was astonished by the wide range of music styles we could perform.

But as much as traditional Chinese instruments should be taken seriously, they should not be fetishized. Too often, Chinese and non-Chinese alike pose in front of my Guzheng to take pictures (sometimes without permission). This extends into cinema, such as in the movie "Our Shining Days," in which the iconic showdown between traditional and western instruments is portrayed far too dramatically.

Moving forward from dark history

The people marveling at Chinese instruments they had never seen before are unaware of the dark history behind America's fascination with them. In 1850, the first Chinese immigrant musicians were



In 1850, a family of Chinese musicians was exhibited in the P.T. Barnum's museum.

exhibited with their musical instruments in P.T. Barnum's museum as strange members of the human race and exotic attractions. The photo, titled "A Living Chinese Family," was of the exhibit that curious Americans paid to see.

Despite a racist past that has contributed to this current dichotomy, I still see hope for traditional Chinese instruments to become recognized as an equal to other western instruments.

In 1986, a New York Times article titled "Traditional Chinese Music May Be On The Way Back" defined ethnomusicology as "the study of any music unfortunate enough to

be non-Western." It reported that "we still don't have much idea how most of this music actually sounded."

Since then, immigrants and touring performers have made efforts to spread traditional Chinese music. In 1999, my Guzheng teacher Chiffon Fu held the "Love of Guzheng" concert in San Francisco. Then Governor Gray Davis called it "the most beautiful music ever brought to California" and set Sept. 23 as California's Chiffon Fu Day.

In 2012, the Guzheng appeared once again in The New York Times. In this interview, two traditional musicians who played for President Obama said that in the 1990s they thought "the more Western, the better." But "that kind of thinking is no longer dominant" because "the music of our ancient China is ... not at all inferior to Beethoven or Tchaikovsky."

I can't express how important the Guzheng is to me — after all, a miniature Guzheng was what I carried on my back five and a half years ago when I stepped into the San Francisco as an immigrant to America. Erasing the line between traditional Chinese instruments and "actual" ones helps to bring acceptance and legitimacy to Chinese culture and identity. ♦

COVID WORLDWIDE

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Israel tries to ride out third COVID-19 wave

BY Lih Shoshani

On May 16, while daily cases in the U.S. were in the 20,000s and on the rise, Israel reached its all-time daily low of just five COVID-19 infections. Israel was recognized as one of the only countries who had the pandemic under control.

According to The New York Times, the government was emboldened by the dropping infection rates on May 17 and allowed students to return to school for the first time since the first lockdown on March 11. Within days, however, infections spread from Gymnasia Rehavia High School in Jerusalem to other schools, infecting teachers, students and relatives.

"There was a general euphoria among the public, a sense that we had dealt with the first wave well and that it was behind us," Gymnasia's principal Dannie Leibovitch said. "Of course, that wasn't true."

The education ministry had issued instructions for masks to be worn by students in fourth grade and higher, windows be kept open, hands frequently washed and students to be six feet apart. However, when a heat wave hit, the government exempted students and teachers from wearing masks and opening windows, quickly creating a breeding ground for the disease.

Eighth- and ninth-grade teacher Vered Shoshani returned to school in May after Hadera Middle School in Hadera reopened. Once opened, however, three students contracted COVID-19, forcing the school to close again on June 20.

Although cases began spiking during the first reopening, Vered's son and my second cousin, Eyal Shoshani, who is in fourth grade, said he was sad to leave Ilay Ramon Elementary for the second time that year because he was thriving from the social interaction he had been missing for so long.

"I was able to learn more because I was surrounded by friends and teachers," he said. "I was much more engaged in in-person learning than I have ever been over Zoom."

Vered herself went into quarantine shortly after the school closed when she tested positive for COVID-19, missing Israel's New Year on Sept. 19. Although celebrations weren't in-person this year, missing the important holiday put a further damper on her already disheartened mood.

Schools didn't reopen until Sept. 1, however, the nation quickly closed schools on Sept. 18

after a huge spike of cases, sparking the second wave, which led to a three-week lockdown as well as a shelter-in-place restriction that confines people within 500 meters of their own homes.

On Oct. 28, the Israeli Cabinet decided to open schools for the third time, this time aiming to be much more cautious.

In K-12 grades, there are a total of 1.8 million students. Those in fifth grade and above remained in online school while half a million children in first to fourth grade returned to in-person school. First- and second-graders were divided into 20-student cohorts and required to wear a mask during recess.

These days, Eyal's school is running for five days a week instead of the normal six, and the school day ends 15 minutes earlier than usual. Although his cohort of 17 students wears masks indoors, recess and lunch are another story.

He said students play tag, soccer and on playgrounds, unconcerned about the spread of the virus. The principal has called home to warn parents of their kids touching one another during breaks and to stress the importance of students remaining responsible when with friends. Although they aren't strictly following safety procedures, the school won't shut down until someone contracts COVID-19.

Vered said she understands the difficulty for young children to control the urge of playing in close groups after not seeing each other for months instead of being concerned for their safety. She herself deeply dislikes remote learning and wishes the circumstances allowed her return to school as she has been encountering barriers with her students over Zoom.

"I feel distant and the students are very closed off," she said. "Most don't turn on their cameras while others mute their computers so they can't hear me teaching."

Vered believes in-person learning allows for a personal connection between a teacher and students that can't be replicated over a computer screen.

"In class, I watch over the students, I touch their shoulders, if someone's computer is off I help them turn it on, if a student hasn't written what's on the board I help write the title. I give them motivation and see in their eyes what they feel," Vered said. "But now, you're not in control. You don't really know what's happening behind the scenes."

*Direct and indirect quotes from Vered and Eyal are translated from Hebrew. ♦

Chinese schools reflect strict pandemic policies

BY Selina Chen

Every school morning at 1:30 a.m., Rayne Xue logs off her computer, having just finished yet another day of online learning. Despite being a sophomore at Tabor Academy, a boarding school in Marion, Mass., Xue now lives in Beijing, China.

While Xue's situation is unusual, other students and staff in China have also experienced drastic changes to their schools. The country's strict COVID-19 policies are reflected in schools, where infection prevention measures are still in place even though the country has seen few cases since April.

Since March, Tabor Academy has been giving students the choice between in-person classes and remote learning.

Students can choose to live in dormitories there or return home and take classes online.

In the beginning of April, Xue returned to China because coronavirus case counts were under control there, unlike the rapid increase in the U.S. Because of China's quarantine policy, Xue had to quarantine in a hotel room alone in rural Tianjin.

"I stayed there for 14 days and I couldn't leave my room," she said. "School was difficult there because the internet was not stable."

Afterward, Xue returned to her home in Beijing and started a routine of attending school over Zoom from 9:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. local time.

"For us 'Zoomers,' we log on with our computers, and the teacher will have our faces displayed up in front of the classroom," Xue said. "We can see all of the in-person students and participate in class."

"We can meet students from other boarding schools, do our school work and participate in activities."

SOPHOMORE Rayne Xue

After Thanksgiving, however, Tabor Academy moved to remote learning for all of its 500 students, a response to the surging cases in Massachusetts.

Unlike the tens of thousands U.S. schools, in-person classes

have continued in China. She is participating in Onboard+, a program founded by Tabor Academy and several other U.S. boarding schools for their students in Beijing and Shanghai.

"We can meet students from other boarding schools, do our school work and participate in activities," Xue said. "Every afternoon, I go there for musical practices and sports."

After schools in China moved back to in-person education in April and May, severe pandemic control measures went in place.

Junior Elena Yu attends the Yew Chung International School in Shanghai.

There students receive twice-daily temperature checks and must stay one meter with others while wearing face masks other than when they eat. In the cafeteria, dividers have been built in between tables.

Unlike metropolitan schools, rural schools seem to have more relaxed policies. Junior Siyao Xiong, who attends Nanjian No. 1 High School, a boarding school in Dali, Yunnan Province, said that although she is still required to wear a mask upon entering her school, she is no longer required to wear it in class. (For the majority of high schools in China, students are in the same classes while teachers rotate in and out).

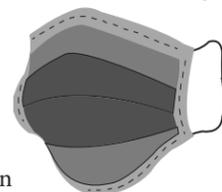
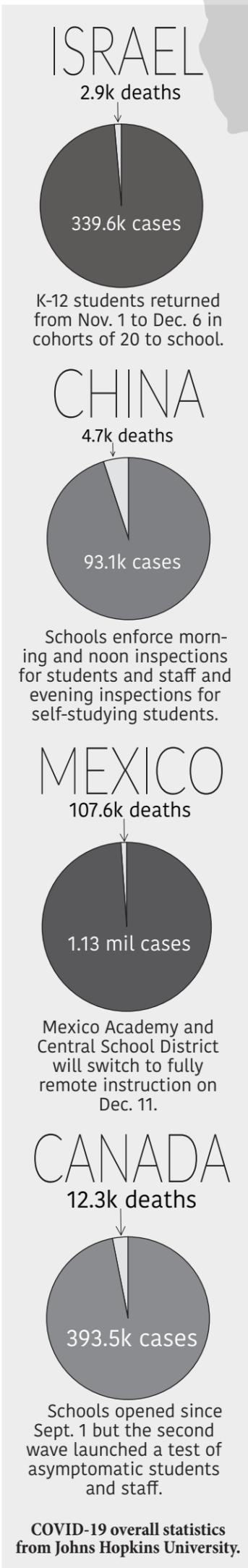
The same goes for Zhejiang Province's Luqiao No. 3 Middle School. This is where my uncle, Lingbing Chen, works as an assistant principal.

The staff are not allowed to leave the city unless there are special circumstances. Each morning, students' temperatures are taken before they are allowed to enter the campus, which is equipped with isolation tents at the ready. In addition, large-scale indoor activities have been banned.

These are only a fraction of the detailed instructions outlined in numerous documents and flowcharts from the education departments. The school ran a meticulous drill for every situation that could arise, including 11 different scenarios of finding a student with symptoms of COVID-19 and the appropriate responses to each.

"The most important thing we have is an optimistic attitude in face of challenges," Chen said in a speech to the school. "With it, the so-called problems are not big problems."

*Direct and indirect quotes from Yu, Xiong and Chen are translated from Chinese. ♦



Yearbook staff grapples with distance learning

BY Selina Chen

Every Tuesday and Friday morning, after announcement in Zoom, 22 students hop onto various Discord voice channels. But instead of gaming, they discuss stories and design pages for the school's 2020-2021 yearbook: Talisman 61.

This year's remote nature has posed several challenges for the yearbook staff, especially since they no longer have access to Adobe programs and fellow staff members in the journalism room.

One of the book's four editors-in-chief, senior Tiffany Huang, sees the biggest challenge as the process of signing off page layouts. In the past, editors would physically be at designers' computers to point out changes to correct. This year, however, they must set up a time on Discord after class to walk through the process before the designer sends the corrected layout to the editors for double checking.

"This has made the entire process so much longer than it would be in person," Huang said. "It can be pretty frustrating."

Another source of frustration for the yearbook staff has been getting the Adobe programs that had been available on school computers working on personal devices. Last spring, the school district decided to purchase the Adobe Creative Cloud license for students in programs such as journalism and MAP, allowing these students to use the Adobe apps at home for free this year. Sophomore Kiana Compeau found out that using these programs is no small task.

"The online class is considerably harder for new staff members," Compeau said. "We had to download all of the Adobe apps, fonts, templates and libraries onto our computers. If we needed help with the layouts or software, it was really hard to navigate through the issues."

This problem is especially significant because the yearbook staff consists of only 22 students, the fewest in the past two decades. To lessen the burden, newspaper staff members will be helping out with spreads (two pages that face each other); even so, many

yearbook students need to work individually instead of in their usual pairs.

But for yearbook adviser Michael Tyler, the foremost challenge is the lack of photos. Traditionally, the most compelling parts of the yearbook are the thousands of photos of school-wide events like Homecoming and football games.

"Those great photos that we'd often put on a divider page or the inside of the cover just don't exist this year," Tyler said. "Everything is a Zoom array, and it's not a lot of fun."

Junior Kavya Narayan, a photographer, is responsible for photographing the ins and outs of people's lives right now; however, getting photos of natural human interactions has been especially difficult this year.

"Our best bet in solving this problem is to go to new places and get as many photos of the city as possible," Narayan said. "This ranges from people waiting in line outside of Starbucks to students picking up their books from the textbook room."

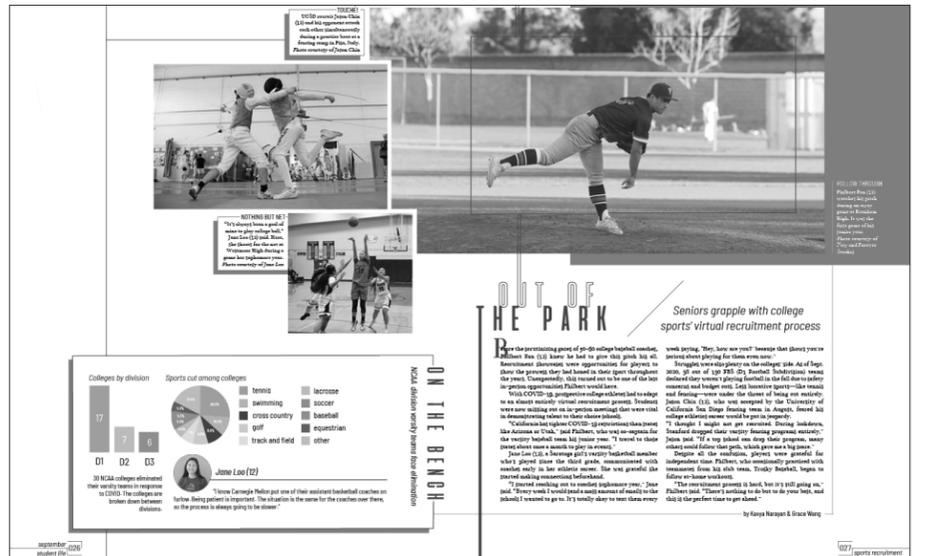
Tyler believes the lack of photos is the most difficult situation he's faced in 24 years of being an adviser. He hopes photo opportunities will arise in December with the start of sports, but nevertheless, he expects this yearbook to be less of a photography book and more of a content-based book.

"Those great photos that we'd often put on a divider page or on the inside of the cover just don't exist this year."

ADVISER Michael Tyler

In response to the lack of photos during online school, editor-in-chief Wilson Fung created a Talisman 61 Instagram account to promote the Yearbook Snap app, which allows students to share their own photos.

"When you log into the app, you would sign up to SHS, and then you can upload



Courtesy of KAVYA NARAYAN and GRACE WANG

As part of the first monthly cycle, junior Kavya Narayan and senior Grace Wang created a yearbook spread on seniors participating in college sports virtual recruitment process.

photos that we can use," Fung said. "It's helpful for us since we might need to rely on donated photos, and finding and accrediting those photos would be a lot easier with Yearbook Snap."

The Instagram account, which currently has 400 followers and is still growing, will also allow students to receive information they might miss on the school's Facebook page, which only has about 600 members.

Although a lot is being done by the Yearbook staff to obtain photos, Huang believes the book will rely a lot more on design, graphics and journalistic reporting.

"Reading the yearbook will be a very visual experience, even more so than previous years," Huang said.

Additionally, the book will be built chronologically by month, unlike its usual predetermined structure of putting spreads, such as senior portraits, at certain page numbers. Students may return to school later in the year, which will open up more opportunities for photos in the later parts of the book.

Despite the challenges, Huang said she has confidence in the book, especially after seeing some of the finalized spreads coming out the way she envisioned it.

She said she is especially proud of the theme she and her fellow editors-in-chief chose — staff members usually try to keep it a secret until the book debuts — since it allows the book to focus on individuals through a new lens.

Unfortunately, only 320 yearbooks have been sold so far compared to the 765 sold by this time last year, and over a 1,000 sold by this time of previous years. Without more sales, the length of the book will need to be cut, Tyler said.

But Tyler said he sees great value in this yearbook because it will contain the stories of people going through this historical year. He is working to push for more publicity.

"The pandemic doesn't change journalists," he said. "They are professional storytellers, so even in the worst of times — especially in the worst of times — there are interesting and compelling stories to tell." ♦

Yearbook's monthly cycle



Assign spread topics

1



Map out story and layout

2



Write, edit and revise stories

3



Design and polish layout

4



Export and package

5

Brotzman shifts from McAfee manager to Zoom guru

BY Alekha Vadlakonda

Before COVID-19 caused the school to close in-person schooling, Benjamin Brotzman oversaw the lighting, stage maintenance and set design, among other visual aspects of performances in the McAfee Center.

However, the shift to online learning was accompanied by a significant decrease in usage of the facility, which significantly impacted Brotzman's work.

"Drama as we know it is taking an unneeded vacation," Brotzman said. "We all want desperately to work on plays and musicals and we simply cannot do it the way we have been trained and the way we are used to."

This is Brotzman's fourth year working with the school. Prior to coming here in 2017, he worked at California Theatre Center from 2008-2012 where he met

former drama teacher Sarah Thermond and began helping out with the drama program.

For about 175 days of the year, Brotzman works with school programs like drama and Media Arts Program (MAP) to set up the theater according to their needs. He arranges the furniture on the stage, focuses lighting equipment and placement, sets up sound sources and cleans the stage.



Brotzman

In addition to working with drama, music, MAP, guidance, administrators and district personnel to help host events at the McAfee, Brotzman usually manages the renting of the theater to outside groups for events such as speakers, concerts and dance recitals like ar-angetrams.

As part of his job, he is also a member of the district's IT team, and as part of the group, Brotzman has now become the Zoom guru for the district, providing both students and teachers any technical support. He works behind-

the-scenes in school board meetings, special events, town halls, club and program presentations and other public meetings.

Brotzman hosts most of the webinars in the district, and works with Saratoga High, Los Gatos High and the school district. Students are unable to create Zoom meetings and webinars with teacher privileges like recording the meeting, which is where Brotzman steps in. For example, he is able to make meetings with out-of-district people, as is usually necessary for club and district webinars.

Brotzman is looking forward to the drama department's upcoming online film

festival in January and hopes a full spring musical can occur in the spring — in other words, a return to his usual duties.

"I am very much looking forward to these projects," he said. "For the spring musical and the film festival, I will be designing and building the set and lighting. I hope that the students and I will be able to return to campus to build the sets as a group."

Despite all the changes that have occurred and the shifts in Brotzman's role on campus, he is grateful to be able to help in any way he can.

"I look forward to helping any and all groups that can use my help to make their art come alive," Brotzman said. ♦

Off the beaten path

ALUMNI EMBARK ON UNIQUE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PATHS

Class of 2020



BY Selina Chen

Ava Boyce-Bender, an accomplished saddle seat rider who won five world championships, graduated from the school last May. In the following months, she moved to San Diego near a ranch called River Run Farms where her horses are stabled.

Boyce-Bender wakes up at 5 a.m. most days and rides until sunset, after which she returns to her apartment to study for her real estate license. Such a routine is drastically different from that of the majority of Saratoga alumni.

Saratoga has a graduation rate of 99 percent, with 97 percent of the Class of 2020 alumni deciding to attend community or four-year colleges immediately after graduation.

"Saratoga students live in an affluent community where education is important to the majority of the families," guidance counselor Monique Young said. "But students should not be laser-focused on the top-tier schools."

Young believes that students should be open-minded because they can be successful in any path. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education finds that within three years, 30 percent of undergraduates had changed their major at least once.

Young also acknowledges that, in general, having degrees and college units are going to positively affect graduates' future pay.

"So if you're aiming toward a non-traditional route, then you need to think about the pathways to get there," Young said. "Do you need a degree? What's the likelihood of success? We want to bring reality to you."

Horses and houses

Boyce-Bender started riding at the age of 3 and, as she became competitive in the sport, regularly attended around 10 shows or competitions each year. In her sophomore year, her horses were moved to a ranch in San Diego, launching her into a hectic schedule.

"I was running a crazy life with riding, cheerleading and going to school five days each week," she said. "Every Friday night after the football game, I would hurry in my cheer uniform to the airport where I jumped on a plane to San Diego."

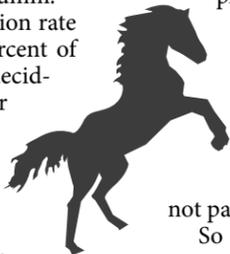
Despite seeing her close friends and teachers at school, Boyce-Bender always struggled to focus in class about topics she was not passionate about.

So when considering career paths, her mother encouraged her to find what makes her happy, even if it was not a typical college and career path. Boyce-Bender's family are property managers, and with her love for real-estate and helping people, everything fell into place, she said.

"Riding and studying for a real-estate license was just the natural thing to do," Boyce-Bender said. "Your career shapes you as a person, so don't go to a four-year school and get some top-paying job without truly loving it."

She plans to continue horseback riding and hopes to get her real-estate license in February to start selling houses in San Diego.

Boyce-Bender said that she can always go back to university and get a degree, but it would be harder to get back into horseback riding.



"Why not go out on a limb and try something different?" she said.

A gap year for language study

In the summer after his junior year of high school, class of 2020 alumnus Shivam Mani stayed with a host family in Guangzhou, China for six weeks as a part of the National Security Language Initiative for Youths (NSLI-Y) program.

"Don't go a four-year school and get some top-paying job without truly loving it."

ALUMNUS

Ava Boyce-Bender

Because of his summer experience, Mani applied to the NSLI-Y academic year program, in which students study a language abroad for eight months, fully funded by the U.S. government. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mani was already considering taking a gap year because he didn't want to pay full tuition for virtual college.

So when he got the scholarship in April, the decision was easy. To take this gap year, Mani deferred his admission to Duke Kunshan University, a Duke campus in Kunshan, China, where students can earn two degrees — one from Duke Kunshan and one from Duke.

Because of the pandemic, the NSLI-Y program is in a virtual format from September to December. Mani is currently taking classes every day with a teacher in Taiwan and classmates in other parts of

the U.S., but feels that he is missing out on the culture.

In January, Mani will travel to Taipei, Taiwan, where he will study at Tamkang University. He will be in a dormitory with a Taiwanese student and assigned a host family, with whom he will spend his weekends and holidays.

As for his plans after the year in NSLI-Y, Mani has not decided whether he'd like to attend the Duke campus in North Carolina or the Kunshan campus.

"I think going to an American institution in China is an interesting experience," Mani said. "I can be getting an American-style education from a great university like Duke, while also having the opportunity to be exposed to the Chinese language and the politics of the region."

With his interest in history, language and policy, Mani is planning to major in political science and Asian studies. He plans to go into a career in foreign service, international law or international business.

"You're going to have to deal with China," he said. "Understanding the Chinese language and the mindset of a Chinese person and the Chinese government is incredibly important."

Learning without textbooks

Upon her graduation, class of 2020 alumna Berdie Bailey joined AmeriCorps, a service program in which the government funds volunteers' living expenses. For one year, she and her fellow volunteers are assigned three stations across the country where they work for eight weeks before moving onto

the next.

"You never know what you're going to do next," Bailey said. "The organization would tell us a week or two before the move — it's literally a surprise. I know in December we are going to go to Montana to build houses, but nothing beyond that."

Currently, Bailey is working at a food bank in Santa Rosa, where she distributes food to sometimes as many as 400 families each day, for eight hours every weekday, with weekends off. Bailey said she enjoys working there because she can connect with people from all paths of life and learn their stories.

Bailey decided to join AmeriCorps because she didn't want to go straight to college after coming out of four years of high school. She said she believes college can wait because

there isn't a time in life when one becomes too old for college — in fact, 40 percent of college students are 25 or older. Bailey believes experiences outside of a traditional education can also provide valuable learning opportunities; she has learned about the history and culture of each community she works in, alongside the skills needed for each task, such as learning how to build houses.

However, after this year, Bailey plans to go to nursing school so she can continue helping people.

"I know Saratoga is all about colleges," she said. "But for people who don't want to go to college, I say don't be afraid. It's OK not to go if you really are willing to go out and help people. Just go for it!" ♦



Quarantine Fosters Self-Discovery

BY JunLee

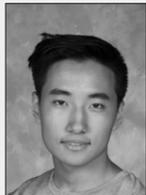
When I was in kindergarten in Korea, my teacher asked the class what we wanted to be when we grew up. I wrote down my answer: happy. When I got my paper back, my teacher told me I didn't understand the point of the assignment. I wondered, "How is wanting to be happy not a valid goal?"

One's extent of happiness is directly related to mental health, and many recently reported decreased satisfaction of their quality of life as the COVID-19 pandemic brought a wave of anxiety and increasing stress, worsening mental health problems. A recent survey of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 47 percent of people sheltering in place had negative mental health effects resulting from worry or stress related to coronavirus, compared to 37 percent of those not sheltering in place.

For me, it's been the opposite. While others shared how quarantine has negatively affected their self-identity and mental health status, my life conditions in quarantine have improved my perception of myself as well as of the world. I remember going into quarantine back in March, bored and stressed over AP testing and upcoming college applications. While there were countless tasks, I found no motivation to study because I felt like there was no need to study — if all the academic testing got postponed and I could

not leave the house until further notice, what was the point of having to endure and "grind" to prove I was quantitatively intelligent and beneficial to society?

Additionally, as a self-defined extrovert, I felt like I couldn't adjust to this new lifestyle: I had an urge to constantly keep in touch with people through social media because I was anxious about being alone. With my increased use of social media, I realized social media forces people to create a new identity where people portray only their best sides; scrolling through my Instagram feed forced me to compare myself to the unrealistic life others show.



Lee

Conscientiously managing my social life wasted my time and lowered my self-value. I realized there exists at least two versions of myself I know of: the social me and the isolated me. While I knew so much about my social me, I had almost forgotten my introverted side, which had just reappeared in quarantine. Social isolation has pushed me to wonder who I really am, aside from all social responsibilities of being a student or an athlete.

Observing my behavior in terms of different social responsibilities, I realized I changed to respond to different environments. For example, my identity as a student is vastly different from my identity when I'm around my friends. Then, I thought: "What's my real identity when isolated from the outer environment?"

I couldn't come up with a clear answer. I felt lost, and the positive qualities of my

extroverted identity disappeared — leaving me feeling empty inside.

Trying to find meaning in my life, I came across a novel called "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, and I was intrigued by his theory of *Übermensch* (German for Superman). The idea of Superman is closely tied to his claim of "God's death," meaning the worldly values "God" represents are "dead." Instead, we must strive to achieve the Superman versions of ourselves — by creating independent values to guide our own lives.

Although we often equate happiness with material goods or wealth, we forget happiness is not a physical matter we can grasp, instilling the "Chase the bag" (slang for hustling to get rich to become happy) mentality in people.

Reading Nietzsche inspired me to search for my own values to be the Superman version of myself. In hopes of transforming into the ideal version of myself, I deleted my social media apps in an effort to quit comparing myself to my friends. Then, I started working out every other day and improved my nutrition.

For instance, I fixed my nocturnal sleep schedule of going to bed around 3 a.m., instead sleeping before 1 a.m. and waking up early to go for a run. I also began doing yoga for 30 minutes in the morning and at night to calm my mind and body. Seeing the physical change I made over the two months of summer, I motivated myself to change my old habits: procrastination, rationalization and fear of exploring things I've never done.

Outside of my house, exploring unknown places that I've never been to gave me a thrill of discovering hidden treasures. Once, I found an abandoned tunnel near a hollow in Almaden — opening up my mind to be welcoming of new ideas and loving the outdoors.

Social isolation has pushed me to wonder who I really am, aside from all social responsibilities.

A lot of the changes I made to my lifestyle shifted my mentality, and here's a list of the major things I did over quarantine:

1. Quit comparing myself to my friends and find what makes me happy.
2. Do yoga for at least 30 minutes before sleeping to calm my mind and body.
3. Wake up early to create a daily morning routine. My beginning-of-the-day mindset lasts throughout the day.
4. Explore nature and discover new places. Nature heals my spirit.
5. Work out regularly and get good nutrition for my health.

There's no definite answer to find a way out of the norm or one's current life. However, once people stop looking for answers and learn to live and love with their present conditions by taking action to view reality in a refined perspective I believe that everyone can find peace in their inner self. ♦

Debunking diet misconceptions

DIETICIAN WEIGHS IN ON TEEN NUTRITION AND DANGERS OF DIET CULTURE

BY Nidhi Mathihalli
& Shreya Rallabandi

The grapefruit diet, the cotton ball diet, apple cider vinegar and wrapping yourself in plastic wrap — these are just a few of the popular trends advertising weight loss among teenagers that have spread across social media platforms.

The Falcon spoke with Aparna Ramadurai, a registered dietitian who primarily works with teenagers with eating disorders in the Bay Area, to learn more about these diet trends. Ramadurai also is the director of nutrition at the Healthy Teen Project in Los Altos, a day program for supporting teens with eating disorders and dieting problems through recovery.

Food trends: apple cider vinegar, overnight oats and seeds

Apple cider vinegar's popularity skyrocketed over the past couple of years after being promoted as a weight-loss hack. Users mix it into salad dressings, dilute and drink it as a beverage or utilize it in cocktails tailored to accelerate weight loss.

"I know people have claimed that it's helpful in losing weight," Ramadurai said. "But there is no research or scientific evidence that it is helpful in the general population."

Apple cider vinegar is also commonly said to kill harmful bacteria, lower blood sugar levels and boost skin health, but she said there have been no studies to support the first two claims. Likewise, Ramadurai encourages people to use apple cider vinegar in small amounts, as misusing or overusing the ingredient can impact the pH of the blood.

Overnight oats, another trend, gained popularity as TikTok and Instagram content creators shared their own home-made overnight oats.

Oats, which contain fiber and B vitamins, are a great breakfast food to start the day, Ramadurai said; however, people can go too far.

"You could be obsessed with it, and not eat anything else but the overnight oats for breakfast every day," Ramadurai said. "As long as it's a normal lifestyle where you're including it as a part of a variety of things that you're eating, I think its effects will be beneficial."

Ramadurai also noted that people who make low-calorie versions of oats, with just water, for example, end up missing out on a lot of fulfilling nutrients that they could get if they

added other ingredients, such as nuts, milk and fruit.

The last rising trend we discussed was the trend of incorporating seeds such as hemp and flax into meals. They are often seen mixed into smoothies, sautéed with vegetables, or sprinkled on just about everything, and according to Ramadurai, rightfully so. She says seeds are a great way to get fat, as long as they're used in moderation with other healthy fats, such as olive oil, avocados or nuts.



Fad diets aren't always what they promise

During the interview, The Falcon also consulted Ramadurai about her opinion on different trendy diets.

Although she believes a few of these diets can be effective tools for weight-loss, Ramadurai recommends against restrictive dieting, especially with her younger clients. Children between 12 to 17 are in a period of rapid growth and it's important for them to get the nutrients they need. Instead of thinking about restrictive behaviors, she said, teens should prioritize their nutritional intake, as their teenage years monumentally influence their health for years to come.

As a general rule, Ramadurai believes that a majority of extreme diets fail over the long term, as people often regain weight after they cease their diet, which leads them to resort to self-blame for not following it properly, throwing them into a vicious cycle of guilt. However, Ramadurai also said that there are healthy ways to diet.



Ramadurai

The most popular version of intermittent fasting is the 16-8 method, where one only eats during an eight hour time period during the day and fasts for the remaining 16 hours.

According to Ramadurai, under the supervision of a family member or friend who ensures that the user is getting the right nutrition and eating a sustainable amount of food, intermittent fasting can provide health benefits such as improving metabolism and reducing insulin resistance, an abnormal response to insulin that can eventually lead to Type 2 Diabetes.

However, Ramadurai said that issues arise when users choose to not eat all day or just eat one meal under the premise of intermittent fasting. Since it is a less drastic diet, Ramadurai feels that it is still doable as long as they are still able to meet their nutritional needs.

When

compared to intermittent fasting, Ramadurai said that vegan and vegetarian diets are not the best choice if the participant's prime motive to diet has to do with looking a certain way or losing weight. However, she believes it may be justified if somebody chooses to be cautious of carbon footprints or animal welfare.

Instead of thinking about restrictive behaviors, teens should prioritize their nutritional intake.

Conversely, Ramadurai discourages diets that promote cutting out specific food groups or restrictive eating, such as the Paleo diet, which involves eating foods that early humans ate, such as lean meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds.

"Paleo diets tend to drive me crazy because we are pretty advanced in every aspect of our lives, and it's annoying when people say: I'm doing what our ancestors did," Ramadurai said. "You choose to be advanced with other stuff, yet you decide to choose to eat the food that the cavemen did a long, long time ago."

Additionally, she believes a majority of people participating in Paleo diets have a higher risk of illness since they're cutting out most of the dairy and carb products that their bodies are used to digesting on a regular basis.

Ramadurai said she also disapproves of the Keto diet, which cuts out carbohydrates and instead opts to increase intake of healthy fats, as carbs are the brain's primary sources of energy and provide key nutrients for bones and muscles.

"I know a lot of people are trying the Keto diet [during quarantine] because they aren't very active and are eating too many carbohydrates," Ramadurai said. "But what people don't realize is even when we are quarantining, we are still doing a lot of the things we do in our everyday lives that require energy, a lot of which we get from carbs."

Ramadurai said her philosophy is to eat a balanced meal consisting of fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins and dairy. Even when a person is trying to lose weight,

she recommends still having a balanced diet while also exercising and adjusting portion sizes as needed per person.

Social media's harmful influence

With hundreds of weight-loss tips and products promoted by celebrities and social media influencers, The Falcon also conversed with Ramadurai to learn more about the authenticity of these weight loss aides.

Kim Kardashian's appetite-suppressing lollipops post is a prime example of this. Ramadurai said this example shows why teens should choose the influencers they follow wisely. She said that although some promote weight loss in an unhealthy way, other influencers help their followers create a better connection with their food.

"My older daughter once pointed out how, in her movie 'Miss Americana,' Taylor Swift openly talks about her eating disorder and her relationship with food," she said. "She could be a really good person to emulate when you look at people that you could be influenced by, versus somebody like the Kardashian sisters."

Diet culture and its deleterious effects

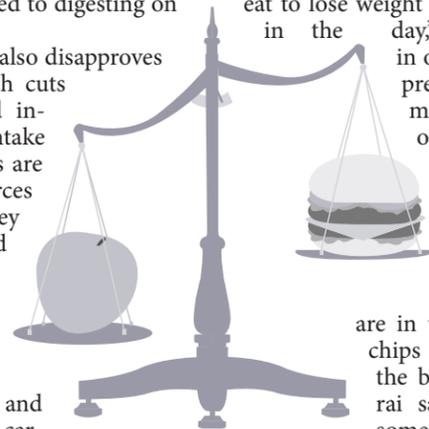
Ramadurai said that dieting fads contribute to a toxic and overhyped diet culture whose effects can be detrimental upon the bodies and mental health of many teenagers. She says that labeling foods as "good" or "bad," or "healthy" or "unhealthy," constitutes a major part of this issue.

Whether it is a "what to or what not to eat to lose weight" video or a "what I eat in the day," teens get a notion that in order to be as thin or as pretty as influencers, they must follow what they eat or reduce their portion sizes to match.

"As soon as you label food good or bad, it puts a price tag on it almost, where fruits and vegetables are in the good category and chips and other things are in the bad category," Ramadurai said. "When you label something like that, it makes it formidable. When you start avoiding foods like that, it gives rise to disordered eating thoughts and behaviors."

Ramadurai also said that students should be aware of the drawbacks of certain diets and aim to personalize their diet rather than base it strictly off of those popularized by influencers.

"Healthy should be incorporating all the different food groups that we have available to us. It should be being able to eat pizza when you feel like it, being able to eat candy when you feel like it." ♦



Diets that seek to eliminate a food group, like the Keto Diet, can often lead to binge eating and can turn into a binge-restrict cycle.

For teens, iron-rich foods like lentils, tofu, and nuts are essential, because rapid growth, coupled with lifestyle and poor dietary choices, can result in anemia.

According to dietitians, the most balanced diet is based on fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean sources of protein.

Statistics from BBC.COM and NORTHWESTERNMEDICINE.ORG

2020: virus upends sports



GRAPHIC BY VIRAAJ REDDI

Once back in pool, water polo retains key starters

BY Isaac Le
& Jonathan Li**Head Coach:** Jerome Chung**Last Year's Record:** 12-2**Recap:** The boys water polo team found success in 2019 with their young starting lineup and new coach by winning a league championship and a chance at CCS.**Key Additions:** Freshman goalie Rick Li, junior wing Jonathan Li**Key Matchups:** Monta Vista, Harker, and Cupertino**Star Players:** Junior wing Marcus Kuo, junior wholeset Kendal Jarvis, and senior goalie Dylan Overby**Key Losses to Graduation:** Goalie Nima Aminzadeh, sprinter Grant Chen, driver Eng Kwa, wing Bryan Chu**League:** El Camino League**Prognosis:** The team ended its 2019-2020 season with a record of 12-2, winning the league championship and reaching CCS, where they lost in the first round against Stevenson High School. Following this stellar season — the best in five years — they look to continue their dominance despite the holes left by graduating seniors.

Unlike league opponents, sophomores primarily composed last year's starting lineup after then-senior Grant Chen's season-ending concussion.

"A lot of our opponents were led by seniors, which wasn't the case for us," junior

wholeset Kendal Jarvis said. "We had lots of young talent in our previous season that will be showcased even more this season."

Jarvis, former sophomores Marcus Kuo and Jaime Fernandez de Ponte and seniors Nima Aminzadeh, Eng Kwa and Bryan Chu composed last year's main starting lineup.

Though Aminzadeh, Kwa, and Chu were integral pieces, plenty of players are ready to step up, such as juniors Andrew Hong, Kian Kwa, Daniel Jiang and Jonathan Li stepping up to varsity. Still, Chen believes they can improve.

"We need more skill training like 1 on 1 defending and also shooting," Chen said.

Chen says players must be more creative with shots and recommends isolation plays for Kuo and Jarvis.

"The junior class is very good with talented players coming up from JV such as Kian and Jonathan," Chen said.

However, following Santa Clara's re-entrance to the purple tier, the season is at risk. Practices were canceled until 2021.

Kuo said it seems more and more unlikely they can compete this year given that the season continues to be postponed.

Whatever the case, Jarvis said the team is ready if the season restarts.

"I definitely think that the confidence and momentum following our success last year will bring us another very successful season this year," Jarvis said. ♦

SPORTS

continued from pg. 1

"The frustrating thing for us is we cannot redo a sports calendar until we know what the sports guidelines are," said athletics director Tim Lugo. "It's disappointing because the governor originally planned to release those guidelines after the 2020 election to prevent political interference. But now that the election is over, COVID-19 cases have exploded."

"I really do believe that they will be playing again in 2021. We're going to do what's best for the kids, and we're going to do it safely."

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR Tim Lugo

All sports that were previously meeting in person, including water polo, football, boys and girls basketball, girls lacrosse, cheer, dance and softball, have now been barred from in-person practices.

Instead of the regular three seasons, the school had initially planned to have two seasons, with fall and some winter sports merged into Season 1 and the rest of the winter sports and spring sports merged into Season 2. There had been hope that season one would begin during December, but the original two-season calendar will likely be pushed back with the length of

season one or both getting cut short.

Junior Chris Liu, who plays for the boys basketball team, doesn't think it was too unexpected of a change.

"Initially, I was pretty disappointed, especially for our seniors, having their final year be postponed and possibly canceled is devastating," Liu said. "However, considering our county's recent shift into the purple tier, I am not surprised that sports are postponed."

Especially problematic are high-risk, close-contact sports such as wrestling and football. So far, it appears as though the less-dangerous sports such as tennis will be played sooner than high-risk sports. Regulations regarding how to handle each sport depend upon each county's color-coded tier.

The ever-changing restrictions have not only been difficult for student-athletes, but hard on organizers and administrators as well.

"I can probably write an entire handbook on how to be an athletic director during a pandemic now," Lugo said. "I think we should probably write one so we could at least give people advice, because there will be another pandemic in the future."

At the moment, the school hopes to keep Season 2 sports, which consists mostly of spring sports that were canceled last year, as whole as possible, but it is still too early to tell.

Lugo, however, is optimistic that a restart will happen with vaccines on the verge of being delivered to high-risk groups.

"I really do believe that they will be playing again in 2021," Lugo said. "We're going to do what's best for the kids, and we're going to do it safely." ♦

Volleyball athletes face conflicting school, club seasons

BY Selina Chen
& Oliver Ye

Before the spinning volleyball could hit the ground, junior Jordyn Sin dove down and saved the ball in a move she had practiced for years — but with a face mask on, it felt different and uncomfortable. Since July, her club, City Beach, has requested all players to wear masks during practices.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, athletes who play in club volleyball have seen drastic changes in their clubs. Many players must make a difficult choice due to overlap between their club and school seasons, which have been rescheduled from August through November to December through March.

Sin is the libero, or defensive player, on the 17s one's team — the highest-level team — for City Beach. But with health regulations preventing traditional large-scale tryouts, City Beach gave rollover offers to all players on the previous 16s one's team to play for 17s one's.

In fact, most of the clubs in the area are doing rollover offers, Sin said.

"No club is really broadcasting themselves for tryouts," Sin said. "It's not worth the hassle to get new people in the gym while following health restrictions when they already have the majority of their team."

Not only is Sin an avid club volleyball player, but she has also played on the school's varsity team since her freshman year.

Normally, the school season would end before club tryouts, and the tournament season would go from January to June. However, with the school season postponed to December through March, there will be a

three-month overlap.

"It's a tough decision for many volleyball players," Sin said. "I don't think players will be able to go back and forth. It will also be hard for coaches to balance their duties." Sin said that she would play club instead of school volleyball, largely as she is unfamiliar with the new school coach, Brendan Wang.

She also knows that if she plays for Saratoga, she would need to organize the team's senior night as the only junior on the team for two years. Despite her love for SHS volleyball, Sin couldn't commit to this on top of academics and club volleyball.

Another factor is that Sin sees school volleyball as preparation for club volleyball since the former's practices aren't as hard.

"It really comes down to figuring out your priorities," Sin said. "You need to know the capacity of what you can sign up for and how many hours you have in a day."

Unlike Sin, senior Hermione Bossolina, who has played setter for SHS since freshman year, plans to choose school volleyball.

"My club, Stingray, hasn't decided what they would do this year because of COVID-19," Bossolina said. "I can only do one of the two because of my senior year workload, so I'd rather play school volleyball."

Coach Wang predicts a polarized outcome: the majority of athletes will choose either club or school.

"Playing the same sport for two teams in the same season will create conflicts and will wear the body over time," Wang said. "Hopefully my kids will just focus on one thing so I won't have to deal with scheduling or attendance conflicts."



Sin



Courtesy of JORDYN SIN

Junior Jordyn Sin and her teammates on City Beach's 17s one's team attended practice on Oct. 14. Sin chose to continue with City Beach over playing SHS volleyball this season.

The overlapping seasons not only affect the girls' season but also boys' season, which usually runs from August to January.

Senior Dylan Li plays as setter for Mountain View Volleyball Club's (MVVC) 18s one's team. His team is mostly carried over from last year, with a few additional teammates who are acquainted with the coach.

Li plans to play for both club and school due to MVVC's decision to hold one practice every weekend once the school season starts, instead of the current three times a week on weekdays, to avoid conflicts.

Despite the regular practices, Li still finds it difficult to stay in shape through this long period of time, not knowing when he will be able to return to playing at tournaments.

"I now realize how much I enjoy the sport," Li said. "Not being able to go to tournaments made me appreciate everything I had before."

Another adverse impact of the pandemic is on the college recruitment process.

Li said the summer after junior year is the biggest opportunity for recruitment because clubs compete at nationals, where college coaches scout rising seniors. But without nationals or other tournaments, recruiting is getting pushed into the spring.

"I was hoping to get recruited so I would be able to skip the college application process for a lot of schools," said Li, who is hoping to play Division 1. "Instead, I now have to write all my essays, and hope that I can get recruited online."

Sin began reaching out to colleges last summer. However, the majority of responses she got are automatic questionnaires as colleges lack a solid recruiting plan, she said.

Even though the situation is difficult, Sin said she completely respects the decisions made by her club and other organizations.

"It's an unprecedented territory," Sin said. "No one's been in a global pandemic, so I'm going to accommodate anything to keep the spreading of the virus to a minimum." ♦

No-cut sports see high levels of students seeking credit

BY Nitya Marimuthu

Twenty minutes after the majority of the team returned from their daily run at the girls' cross country practice in October 2020, then-junior captain Jessie Zhou began to worry. Along with the other two captains, she set out on a search party to find three missing runners.

An hour later, after scouring the whole path for the lost runners, they were found in the tutoring center. They had appeared more 40 minutes later than the rest of the team, and their whereabouts in the time that passed was unclear, according to Zhou. For committed members who count on the motivation of the team to push them forward, seeing the girls disappear to avoid running was both disappointing and concerning.

Zhou attributes the lack of motivation in new members to the number of runners enrolling in sports like cross country just to fulfill PE credits. Sports most vulnerable to this tendency are ones viewed as low effort or commitment.

In order to fulfill the 20-credit requirement for graduation, many students enroll in uncut sports. There are two common reasons for this — students want to take as many academic classes as possible or they believe that sports are less of a time commitment than the PE class.

In reality, sports average more than seven hours of practice a week while PE classes require between three to four and a half hours. This time commitment does not include hours that athletes put in on their own, combined with the increased physical strain in most sports.

The number of unexpected enrollees has mixed effects on sports teams. For some teams, this means the culture of practices changes based on overall effort, while others see no effect from the rise in participation.

Zhou said some newcomers to cross country have had negative impacts on the team because of their questionable motivation.

"It's super frustrating when we get a lot of girls coming in sophomore or junior or even senior year because they're thinking, 'Ok, I need PE credit ... why not cross country, I've heard it's the easiest sport,'" Zhou said. "And when they come in with that mindset, you start to see people hiding in Starbucks or quitting halfway through the run, and it's so discouraging as a captain to see that people aren't taking this sport that you love seriously."

As a result, Zhou said that the captains were forced to change the culture of practices last year, docking points from overall grades or setting time limits for runners. While their coach, Danny Moon, tries to let athletes naturally push themselves out of passion, Zhou said this approach does not work when newcomers take it as a sign that they can slack off.

"There's a certain point where the captains realized this was not going to work," she said. "Over time, cross country transitioned from a positive and supporting environment into one where we eventually needed to remind them daily of their commitment."

"There was definitely a split between those who were taking the conditioning seriously and the majority who weren't."

JUNIOR Evan Oaklander

Swimming, another virtually non-cut sport, also sees a number of students taking it largely for PE credits, according to senior Taesu Yim.

For his part, Yim does not believe the intention for taking the sport matters, given that all participants swim the same sets



Graphic by NITYA MARIMUTHU

and attend the meets together. "I suppose that people who take it purely for the credit might be less enthusiastic or energetic during practice, but I haven't noticed anyone being too vocal about it," Yim said.

Since the reasons for an athlete taking the sport do not affect the team culture, Yim said a student's motive for joining does not matter as they end up bonding the same way as they cheer each other on.

"If someone ends up unintentionally experiencing all of that, I'm all for it," Yim said.

Badminton also attracts a large number of students who seem to join to avoid taking PE or to be with friends, according to junior Evan Oaklander.

Still, Oaklander does not feel these members affect the motivation of the more serious players.

"There was definitely a split between those who were taking the running/conditioning seriously and the majority who weren't," Oaklander said. "I don't think this was exclusive to those who joined just for

credits though, since a lot of people just don't like running in general."

Oaklander said he often sees people walking on the track or not trying that hard during practice. Although he tries not to let those who do not care affect his performance, Oaklander said that at times he feels annoyed, but he assumes best intent as it is "not reasonable to expect everyone to put in 100% effort."

Oaklander does not feel those enrolling to complete PE credit is a bad thing, since "everyone has to start somewhere." The bigger problem is that people underestimate the training involved in badminton; those who join are often unaware that badminton is not an easy way to fulfill credits.

"It's completely possible for someone who joins on a whim to get invested in the sport," he said. "I just think that people should be more aware that badminton, just like most other sports, does require some level of effort and that it will be hard to get much out of it with a low-effort mindset." ♦

Concurrently playing on two teams allowed in new sports seasons

BY Christina Chang

If sports happen this school year, athletes will be able to participate in multiple teams during a single season this year.

Right now, all school sports have been delayed until 2021, and the standard three seasons of sports — fall, winter and spring — have been condensed into two seasons — Season 1 and Season 2.

These guidelines, along with other current procedures involving sports, will depend heavily on the county's current safety level and color tier system. The California COVID-19 color coded tracking system is divided into four color tiers: purple (widespread risk level), red (substantial), orange (moderate) and yellow (minimal). As of Nov. 16, Santa Clara County has moved back into the purple tier, which means that sports will be heavily restricted.

According to a press release sent out on Dec. 1 by the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF), the governing body of sports in California, all school sports will be postponed until Jan. 1 at the earliest.

With all sports pushed into the new year, these condensed seasons will cause some sports to overlap. Students will only be allowed to play multiple sports in a single season as long as they are sports that don't overlap in the standard three seasons, and will not be allowed to participate in more than two sports in a single season.

Sophomore Mika Tippetts, who would have participated in color guard, a fall sport; basketball, a winter sport; and track and field, a spring sport, now hopes to play these all simultaneously during Season 2, which was originally scheduled to run from Feb. 22 to May 29.

"I don't think I could pick between my sports if I were only [allowed] to play one," Tippetts said.

Tippetts has played basketball since she

was 5, making it her first sport.

"For me, basketball is a never ending journey, something that is constantly changing and evolving, and that is all part of the fun," Tippetts said.

After watching her older brother, SHS Class of 2020 alumnus Kole Tippetts, compete in track meets, she began also throwing shot put and discus in sixth grade.

In the same year, Tippetts recreationally started Color Guard, but began taking the activity more seriously when students from the Music Education with Saratoga High program (MESH) from SHS sparked her interest. With strong backgrounds in each of these sports, Tippetts' passion is distributed evenly between the three. She appreciates that the school will be allowing students to participate in multiple sports in a season.

"I wouldn't be able to pick between the sports that I play," Tippetts said. "I feel that I have a duty to my teammates, and picking one over the other just seems wrong to me."

However, athletes who want to play two sports will need permission from coaches of both sports to play, and must then work out a practice schedule. The league has always allowed students to play two sports in a season, but coaches usually don't allow their players to do so. Due to the condensed seasons and the pandemic, coaches this year have been asked to be more flexible with this. Still, athletes must designate a primary and secondary sport in the case that conflicts do occur so they can determine which sport to prioritize.

With sports practices often five days a week, Tippetts says each sport can be a big time commitment. Trying to juggle the standard schoolwork and extracurriculars along with multiple sports in a season may be incredibly time consuming, she said.

Sophomore Lisa Fung will also face this challenge of balancing out her activities, as

she too hopes to play two sports in Season 2: basketball and track and field. Fung started participating in both sports in sixth grade on the Redwood Middle School teams.

"I enjoy playing these sports to push myself, learn new skills, and to be around and work together with friends that are motivated and supportive as well," Fung said. Fung hopes she will be able to juggle both sports during the season considering she participated in both for a similar amount of time.

"I don't want to miss either basketball or track," Fung said. "I think that [the option to participate in multiple sports in a season] is fair for the students who planned on playing more than one sport, but it will probably be a little difficult to schedule and plan everything out."

Athletic director Tim Lugo also acknowledges the difficulty in managing a student's schedule, and said if a student has a heavy course load and wants to take two sports in addition to it, they would have to have a long talk about the time commitment to juggle all the activities.

"Can you do it on paper? Sure. But physically, can you handle that?" Lugo said. "Those are the types of conversations we have to have with kids to make sure they're not biting off more than they can chew."

According to Lugo, the CIF says that students cannot exceed over 18 hours of athletics in a week consisting of practices and games. The school will have a form for students to fill out in order to ensure that they understand this 18 hour time limit.

"A lot of this will have to do with kids balancing everything out, because I think playing two sports is going to be really, really hard," Lugo said. "But we want to give people the opportunity to do that because it's unfair that some of these seasons are going to overlap, and traditionally students are able to fit everything in."

In addition to making scheduling more difficult for students, the condensed seasons will pose several problems for the school as well. Lugo says that with some students feel-

ing like they may have to choose only one sport this year, on top of the fact that some will be uncomfortable returning to play, numbers will become an issue.

"At a school that's our size, we are dependent on those multiple sport athletes to survive," Lugo said. "We might have some sports where we can't field teams anymore, so that's why we're really going to do everything we can to allow kids to play multiple sports." Another problem condensed schedules pose is with facilities. Some teams will have to practice at night, which interferes with academics as well.

"We're going to have games pretty much Monday through Saturday if we can do this," Lugo said. "I don't care if I have to work six days a week, I'm just going to be happy to see kids on campus playing again." ♦



Tippetts

Season 1



Season 2



Graphic by BILL YUAN

Cutting of college sports sidelines athletes for good

BY Nidhi Mathihalli

In June, Brown University sophomore Esha Lakhota, a 2019 alumna, joined a Zoom call and immediately noticed the disappointed faces of her fellow squash players as well as players from other sports. Fifteen minutes earlier, the team had gotten an email from the university's president informing them that several sports, including squash, would be cut this year.

The reason: Many of the funds they would normally get are being cut, student fees were waived and fan attendance had significantly decreased.

“Recruitment is happening entirely online this year and because of it, there are much fewer people getting offers.”

SENIOR Dylan Li

In an article for ESPN, Patrick Rische, director of the sports business program at Washington University in St. Louis, said that in football alone, each Power 5 school would see at least an average loss of \$62 million in football revenue, including at least \$18.6 million in football ticket sales.

According to the Associated Press, 51 Division I sports, 56 Division II sports, and 52 Division III sports have been cut, with thousands of students losing their spot in the sports, and possibly even their scholarships, that they have worked hard for.

“I was really upset when I heard the news because playing squash at Brown and being a part of such an amazing and fun team was the best part of my freshman year,” Lakhota said. “I felt like it came out of nowhere and we were all really shocked.”

This decision from colleges not only affected college students but also high schoolers who hope to play some of these sports.

Many student-athletes get admitted to their desired colleges through recruitment and sports scholarships. However, when colleges cut sports teams, they also reduced the number of students that can be recruited for a particular sport.

Senior Dylan Li has been playing volleyball for five years and is looking to get recruited for college this year in men's volleyball.

“Recruitment is happening entirely online this year and because of it, there are much fewer people getting offers,” Li said. “I'm not sure if it's because of less seats or if coaches are holding off to see players play at tournaments in the future before making the offers, but it's upsetting.”

Currently, two Division I universities have cut men's volleyball, leaving just 23 Division I schools with the sport.

Taking into account that the average college men's volleyball team has 16 members, only around 370 men get recruited for Division I.

According to Li, Stanford, one of the top schools he was hoping to get recruited at, cut its volleyball program.

“It's especially upsetting to see colleges such as Stanford cut its volleyball program because it was a place I hoped to play at,” Li said. “But I can understand why these



Courtesy of DYLAN LI

Senior Dylan Li sets the volleyball in a club match last summer. Li, a prospective college recruit, has played volleyball for five years as a part of the Mountain View Volleyball Club.

schools would have to cut programs and there is not much I can do about it.”

Although the decisions were made out of financial necessity, the increased competition and loss of recruitment opportunities disappointed several aspiring athletes.

“I wish they would have been both considerate to the players and gave them more time to adjust,” Lakhota said. “Compromises like giving players one last season or maybe allowing teams to fundraise would make everyone much happier.” ♦

New girls' volleyball coach tries to bring team together

BY Carolyn Wang

Bringing the girls' volleyball team together is going to be tough this year for the new coach Brendan Wang, especially with COVID-19 restrictions and the uncertainty about whether or how the sports seasons will play out.

In high school, Wang played varsity volleyball, coached various volleyball clubs and helped out in the school team.

After graduating from Homestead High School in 2017, he decided to continue coaching. Two years later, he was given an opportunity to coach boys' volleyball at Saratoga High.

Had there not been COVID-19, the fall of 2020 would have been the second season that Wang coaches boys' volleyball. After the former girls' volleyball coach left due to a busy schedule, Wang took over their team as well. He, along with an assistant coach, will be coaching Varsity and Junior Varsity teams for both boys and girls, with Wang fo-

cus on Varsity.

Originally, Wang's plan for the girls' team was to develop the younger players, set a strict standard for what he wanted from the players on the team and begin formulating strategies for winning competitions. However, the pandemic brought forth massive changes in his plans.

“Because of COVID-19, this year is going to be less of winning and going to CSS or getting a title,” Wang said. “It's going to be more about just playing, having fun, and experiencing what it's like to grow in volleyball within a school team.”

Even with those standards, bringing together a team, especially one under COVID-19 restrictions, is not going to be easy, he said.

Wang believes there are two types of coaches: the strategic coach and the personality coach. The strategic coach tells players the actual “arithmetics” and strategies of the game, while the personality coach directs the team on a more personal level such as

offering encouragement or advice beyond the sport.

“Personally, I'm not quite good at being the personality coach,” Wang said. “My strength is being a strategic coach, so in my opinion, the best way to gain their trust is to let them know ‘Hey, I know what I'm doing. I've played the sport for many years, so hopefully, I can explain to you guys why my strategies are the best.’”

“In my opinion, the best way to gain their trust is to let them know ‘Hey, I know what I'm doing.’”

COACH Brendan Wang

Wang is also unsure how practices will run under COVID-19 restrictions, but he

plans for them to not be very intensive on skills or conditioning. Instead, they would be more about learning how to play and enjoy the sport again after months of inactivity.

Additionally, Wang said he feels that professional, college and even high school teams all play the same version of volleyball, and there usually is not much “out of the box thinking.”

He hopes that by coaching at Saratoga High or even college later on, he can expand those boundaries and introduce new experimental plays that go beyond standard strategy.

Although he foresees a few bumps in the road in terms of getting rusty players back into shape, Wang said he is hopeful about the team and the upcoming sports season.

“You just got to be patient. Being out of shape is pretty common,” he said. “I haven't touched a volleyball in a couple of months, so I'll be out of shape too. It'll be a learning experience for all of us.” ♦

European soccer fans cry foul at new club team proposal

BY Jason Cheng & Vinay Gollamudi

Millions of soccer fans worldwide support household-name clubs like Manchester United, FC Barcelona and Real Madrid. Millions more, however, support smaller, often local clubs.

A proposal to institute a European Super League — an 18-team basketball-style league among the biggest clubs in Europe — was recently brought up again by FIFA, but while this idea has popped up several times over the last few decades, it has never come to fruition.

The proposal has received criticism for a number of reasons, including its negative effects on smaller clubs and its prioritization of money over tradition.

Real Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos is one of a number of high-profile figures who recently denounced the Super League.

Kroos expressed frustration at the lack of a role players had in decisions made by soccer's largest governing bodies: UEFA and FIFA. He said the UEFA Champions League, an annual competition held among the top European clubs, provided enough international soccer matches, which traditionally generate more revenue than local matches do.

“These competitions try to absorb everything financially, and also try to squeeze everything out of the players physically,” Kroos said. “I am a big fan of leaving things as they are when they are going well.”

The European Super League would make European soccer similar to American sports leagues such as the NFL, NBA and MLB in that it would not feature a relegation system in which teams are demoted from or promoted to a league based on their level of play. In other words, the Super League would include only the same clubs year after

year.

The money-prioritized mentality of these already wealthy clubs has led to outrage among fans of smaller clubs.

“These competitions try to absorb everything financially and try to squeeze everything out of the players physically.”

MIDFIELDER Toni Kroos

For example, Bury FC, a historic English club founded in 1885, was forced out of the English Football League (EFL) after financial issues later heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many feel that the EFL has been turning a blind eye to the financial

difficulties of smaller clubs, all the while allowing bigger clubs to consistently rake in more and more money.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted smaller and bigger soccer clubs differently.

For bigger clubs, the lack of fans in stadiums has been an annoyance driving them to seek more money and power — and has undoubtedly been a reason for the talks of creating a Super League. For smaller clubs, however, the lack of an audience could force them to fold.

While the European Super League is not particularly close to being a reality and was recently denounced by UEFA, the discussion of it during the pandemic is a brutal reminder to small soccer clubs of their circumstances.

The results remain unclear, but ultimately, this decision may impact the world of professional European soccer for years to come. ♦

Issue Highlights

“Erasing the line between traditional Chinese instruments and ‘actual’ ones helps bring acceptance and legitimacy to Chinese culture and identity.”

-reporter Selina Chen on page 16

“But for people who don’t want to go to college, I say don’t be afraid. It’s OK not to go if you really are willing to go out and help people. Just go for it.”

-Class of 2020 alumna Berdie Bailey on page 19

In the SHS senior vote on president,
85% voted for Biden, 10% for Trump,
3% for Hawkins and 2% for Jorgenson.

-data from page 4

Graphic by EILEEN BUI

Kanye loses presidency by millions

new pair of shus



Howard Shu

With the election finished, the media and general public have been constantly talking about Biden’s victory over Trump and Trump’s refusal to concede. But for some reason, no one mentions Kanye West.

In the election, the popular 43-year-old rapper received a whopping grand total of 0 electoral votes before he conceded early Nov. 4. In fact, he did not even show up on enough state ballots to have a chance of winning the election, and instead relied on voters writing him in.

I had some hope that West would get at least some electoral votes from Nevada when the results were coming in, since I figured he might have won and the media simply didn’t know how to tell us. This was obviously proven wrong, however, when Nevada announced Biden’s victory after giving millions of people anxiety for several days.

Before West’s concession, he received about 0.0375 percent of the estimated 160 million total votes cast. This totaled about 60,000 voters.

This was a substantially worse outing than independent candidate Deez Nuts in the 2016 election. Nuts, who was actually a 15-year-old boy from Iowa, polled at 9 percent in North Carolina.

However, West seems not to be deterred by this electoral setback. With his 2020 presidential campaign over, West set his sights on the 2024 election. ♦



Graphic by HOWARD SHU

MEMES OF THE MONTH: DECEMBER

2020: California take some wildfire!!!! Australia, here’s some bushfire!!! Amazon forest, fire!!!!

Me: You done?

2020:



Left: meme courtesy of senior Rohan Kumar

Right: meme courtesy of senior Manasi Garg

Submit your school appropriate memes to eileen.bui@saratogafalcon.org and justin.guo@saratogafalcon.org for a chance to be featured.

Breaking up with Snap

needy mathohalic



Nidhi Mathihalli

In my second week of freshman year, I got Snapchat.

Until then, I had no social media: no Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, VSCO, nada. Yup, if you wanted to talk to me, you had to track down my number.

So, when I got Snapchat, it’s no surprise that I was obsessed with it — I took filtered photos all the time and binge-watched the second season of the Snap original show “Solve.”

In the intervening months, though, I’ve come to realize I have been in a toxic relationship with it, constantly re-downloading then deleting it.

When I got Snapchat, my potential addiction to it was not obvious. Sure, I would pick up my phone every now and then to explore the cool filters and games the app offered, but my small number of friends didn’t Snap or post a lot. But as the number of people I friended increased, the more Snaps I got.

My daily screen time slowly, yet steadily, increased from 30 minutes to almost three hours. Due to Snapchat’s well-curated “For You Page,” I had become addicted to the app, watching all types of short videos, from celebrity dra-

ma to how-to recipes.

To solve this problem, I deleted Snapchat. And it worked— for 72 whole hours. But my curiosity overwhelmed me, so I reinstalled Snapchat and reignited my on and off relationship with the popular social media app.

But a couple months ago, when sophomore year started, I had an epiphany. The longer I was on the app, the more addicted I got. After comparing my 18,317 Snapscore to my brother’s 1,299 despite having it for only a couple months more than him, I decided to do something about my out-of-control relationship with the app. So I broke up with Snapchat, for real this time.

Despite the temptations to re-download it, I told myself that not everyone has Snapchat, and that I really don’t need to watch “Keeping Up With The Kardashians Katch Up” in order to relax.

Separating myself from social media also helped me focus more. By getting rid of Snapchat, I was able to focus on activities for a longer period of time without wanting to check my phone for a short-Snapchat-video-turned-1-hour-long-distraction.

I have more time to do other things now, like accidentally baking brownies with salt instead of sugar because quite frankly, they look exactly the same. So it’s really not my fault that I spend my free time baking salty brownies, Mom. Blame my breakup with Snapchat instead. ♦

topten

THINGS TO GIVE TO SANTA

- 10 Coal. Give him a taste of his own medicine.
- 9 Your college application. Wait, do college even do mail in apps anymore?
- 8 A therapy session. It’s always “Where’s Santa?” but never “How is Santa?”
- 7 New reindeer. The average lifetime of a reindeer is only around 15 to 18 years. How is Rudolph still alive?
- 6 A search warrant. You know, to prevent future breaking and entering charges.
- 5 An unpaid high school intern. They’ll do anything as long as it goes on their college resume
- 4 A GPS. I mean, he can’t seem to find my house every year.
- 3 Something. It’s a Secret, Santa.
- 2 Nothing. Maybe the real gift was the friends we made along the way.
- 1 Coronavirus. That is, if he doesn’t already get it from visiting every house in the World

- Eileen Bui and Justin Guo