



Letter to the Editor: Football captain refutes Falcon article.



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THE saratogafalcon

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Saratoga High School Saratoga, CA

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BY ApurvaChakravarthy & NilayMishra

This season, the football team had three Thursday games on its schedule, which were played against Willow Glen, Westmont and Los Altos, the last of which took place on Oct. 14.

The reason for Thursday games is a nationwide lack of available referees that has trickled down to impact local Bay Area teams. According to athletic director Rick Ellis, the school uses a sports activities management system called ArbiterSports to find referees for games. After inputting the school's schedule, the system locates available referees — football requires five for each game — but the system has failed to find enough for traditional Friday games this fall.

"It's been affecting every school," Ellis said. "Everybody's been asked to do their part and reschedule their games."

Ellis believes that the lack of referees has to do with the tradeoff of traveling to distant games and spending evenings in a part-time job for a relatively low pay. Referees are paid about \$70-\$90 for Bay Area high school games that last about two hours.

"If you live in San Jose and have to travel to San Mateo for a game, you spend two hours traveling there and back, so you are effectively paid \$45 an hour," Ellis said. "That doesn't look so attractive anymore."

The sports most affected by the lack of properly trained referees are football and volleyball, Ellis said. Head football coach Tim Lugo believes the nationwide shortage of referees stems primarily from the effects of a recovering economy.

Additionally, many referees from previous years have retired, and are being replaced with newer, less-experienced referees who are still learning how to do the job effectively, Lugo said.

Since referees were not available for Friday night games, the football team was given a choice between playing on Saturday nights or Thursday nights. Lugo and the team preferred playing on Thursday nights, despite it being a weekday. This is a sentiment shared by the majority of the rest of the teams in the league as well, and has led to the team playing on Thursday nights instead of Saturday evenings.

"It's a choice between two bad options," Lugo said. "If you play on Saturday night, there's no time to rest your body before practices resume on Monday — we tried this in the spring,

>> REFEREE on pg. 5

THURSDAY NIGHT lights?

NATIONWIDE REFEREE SHORTAGE PUSHED THREE GAMES EARLIER



Ethnic studies forges new path

BY NidhiMathihalli & MinsuiTang

An NPR news broadcast featuring current events played when freshman Aakanksh Gurnani walked into room 703 for 5th-period Ethnic Studies on Sep. 24. When the bell rang for the start of fifth period, social studies teacher Michael Davey enthusiastically greeted the students and then launched into the fast-paced lesson on the recent history of Afghanistan.



Davey

In early 2021, California began working through a highly contentious bill requiring an ethnic studies course for high school gradu-

ation. Newsom signed this bill into law earlier this month, making California the first to mandate an ethnic studies course for a high school diploma.

The bill states that public high schools in California are required to offer an ethnic studies course starting in 2025, although high school students will not be required to take the course to graduate until 2029.

Schools will have the freedom to plan the curriculum under Assembly Bill 101, which allows schools to develop their own format for courses if approved by the local school board subject to public

>> ETHNIC STUDIES on pg. 3

Anti-vaxxers: an inside look

BY SaraBright & CarolynWang

A crowd of anti-vaccination protestors lined the streets near the Saratoga Farmers Market at West Valley College on Sept. 18. They held signs with slogans reading "Prove There Is A Sars2 Covid Virus," "You're Not Your Lab Rats" and "Make Choice Free Again."

"They marched up and down the street next to the farmers market disrupting customers and vendors from shopping," wrote Jill Jackneu, a resident of Los Gatos Woods, on the NextDoor platform. "I have no problem with peaceful protesting, but the folks interrupting the farmers market had bull horns and it was impossible to talk to the vendors."

>> VACCINE on pg. 4

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Junior named chess grandmaster HONG'S GAMBIT

BY ChristinaChang & JonathanSi

Nine years ago, 7-year-old Andrew Hong stumbled upon his older brother's chess homework, a worksheet that asked him to solve six positions. After noticing each piece's unique shape and distinct position, he soon became curious about the board game.

>> HONG on pg. 6

All graphics by SELINA CHEN

 **newsbriefs**

Winter formal to be held on Dec. 4 at Gilroy Gardens

Winter Formal, themed "City of Stars," will take place at Gilroy Gardens on Dec. 4 from 7-10:30 p.m. Attendees will be able to go on rides and guests are permitted.

Although there had been debate between the administration and students on admission of outside guests, the district's COVID-19 Task Force ultimately decided that guests would be permitted entry if they provide proof of full vaccination; a negative COVID-19 test is not enough to be accepted. Guest prices will be the same as ticket prices without ASB.

Because the dance only allows a maximum of 545 people, the first day of sales on Oct. 25 will only be open to the senior class so that all who want to attend will be able to.

The ticket prices for the weeks of Oct. 25, Nov. 1 and Nov. 8 will be \$120 with ASB and \$130 without. For the weeks of Nov. 15, Nov. 22 and Nov. 29-30, the price will increase to \$130 with ASB and \$140 without.

Tickets will not be sold at the door and, unlike the Homecoming Dance, tickets will also not be sold on the SHS website.

— Apurva Chakravarthy and Jason Cheng

ASB considers an unofficial outreach commission

ASB is considering the creation of an updated version of the outreach commission after cutting the group last year with their realization of the difficulty in replacing its functions.

ASB vice president Alex Yang was delegated the commission's tasks and planned to pass some of its other responsibilities to other commissions, "but I don't think we realized the sheer number of activities outreach did last year," Yang said.

Therefore, this school year has become a transition period for the commission to make a smaller, unofficial group with two or three leaders compared to the original five.

Leadership students still don't know what the outreach commission will look like next year but Yang is working through logistics with senior Catherine Kan, who was previously part of the commission and is a strong advocate for bringing it back.

Kan said she is in favor of outreach having students dedicated specifically to the outreach commission because its role is especially important right now when students may be struggling with anxiety and other mental health issues after returning to in-person learning after a year online.

— Lihi Shoshani and Sarah Thomas

Leadership hosted spirit week during week of Oct. 25

During the week of Oct. 25, the Spirit Commission hosted a Halloween spirit week with different themes for each weekday: Matching Monday, Throwback Tuesday ('80s), Dress to Impress Wednesday, West Coast (freshmen and juniors) vs. Wild West (sophomores and seniors) Thursday and Halloween Costume Friday.

"In the past, we've often used themes which are fun but very overdone," Senior Spirit Head Commissioner Sadaf Sobhani said. "This year's themes are pretty innovative, and I hope a lot more students will dress up and commit."

The commissioners also hosted a social media competition on their Instagram account @togaspirit where students sent their submissions from each Spirit Day. The commission voted on the best costume for each day and gave the winners a \$20 Starbucks gift card.

Additionally, a Halloween Bash with games and lunch will be hosted by the Rally Commission during lunch on Friday. Lunch has been extended on Oct. 28 and 29 to 45 minutes. There will be a runway leading from the quad steps to the middle of the quad, where teacher judges will evaluate each costume.

— Apurva Chakravarthy and Jason Cheng

picturethis



FALCON // ATREY DESAI

Center Stage | Senior dance officer Maya Cranz strikes a pose as the team practices their routine "Tap in" in preparation for their upcoming performance during the football team's Senior Night game on Oct. 29.

All-female speech and debate officer team fosters inclusivity

by Nidhi Mathihalli & Kavya Patel

Senior speech and debate president Harshini Velchamy walked into English teacher Erick Rector's room in early September for the first practice of the year. As she scanned the room, she saw some familiar faces, a few completely new ones and many she vaguely recalled from the year on Zoom.

Velchamy is one of four officers for the speech and debate team this year; other officers include senior vice president Selina Chen, junior treasurer Shreya Rallabandi and senior secretary Anouk Yeh. The team also has two captains: junior debate captain Anushka Sankaran and senior Limited Prep captain Shivali Kattumadam.

The team's debate coach is Steve Clemmons, who has been helping coach the school's debate team since 2009. He is also serving as the adult liaison for entering tournaments and other logistics. The program has a new speech coach, Kiana Young, who began on Oct. 1.

Rector, who stepped aside from coaching and advising the team this year, said the officers are all females for the first time in eight years. This year, the debate team is about 20 percent female compared to 60 percent female in speech.

Traditionally, the team has more often been led by male officers and captains but is becoming more inclusive with the male proportion of the officer team changing from 100 percent in 2018 to 83 percent in 2019 and to 50 percent in 2020.

"The team has always been very male dominated, which definitely made the energy a bit more competitive and intimidating," Velchamy said. "We're a lot more focused on bettering the team than self-betterment. It's a huge difference from two years ago."

Chen, who competed in both speech and public forum debate in her freshman year, said she and her partner were the only two girls on a team of over 20 people; this made it difficult to find role models. Chen said one of the captains at the time even gave her and her partner sexist feedback regarding a mock debate they had just finished.

"He said we are lucky to be a pair of female debaters, so we should be as aggressive as we could because judges are less likely to penalize female debaters for being aggressive," Chen said. "The way he said that made me feel like, even though he's in the majority, the minority has the advantage."

Chen also said she encountered instances that year in which male debaters were condescending and patronizing toward her at a tournament and subsequently ignored her and her partner after they achieved better results. This uncomfortable atmosphere contributed to her decision to drop debate sophomore year and solely compete in speech.

Freshman Timothy Leung is one of the few new male students doing speech. Leung has competed at the national level and has been doing speech and debate since middle school.

"Personally, I don't feel pressured to debate, but I definitely can see why other people would," Leung said. "Speech seems a lot like acting, which is something that guys wouldn't usually be expected to do. I know guys who want to do speech, but are inclined to do debate; there's definitely a stigma surrounding speech and its female dominance."

This year, the team officers are learning from mistakes made by previous officers by focusing on being more open and friendly with the underclassmen as they prepare for competitions that will be online for the first semester.

Sankaran, who has participated in debate since freshman year, saw the effects of a male-dominated team, which caused her to be somewhat intimidated by those officers. This year, however, she said that the freshmen seem more comfortable asking for help from the officers.

"It's really easy for me to ask the officers any questions that I have this year," freshman Aneri Shah said. "They are really inviting and aren't judgmental or dominating, which makes me more comfortable around them."

Although the team is still slightly struggling to regain students who dropped out last year during online practices, the officers believe that the work and effort put into this year's speech and debate team as well as the all-female officer team has had a positive impact on the team.

According to Sankaran, the inclusive environment has also empowered many people on the speech and debate team to pursue what they are passionate about rather than choose the event that most of their peers do.

The team is noticing a spike in interest among underclassmen, and the officers are being more open with these younger members. "I'm definitely happy about the increased female presence in officer positions," Velchamy said. "It's empowering because seeing ourselves in the positions that we have really validates the amount of effort and energy we've put into the team. Specifically, the effort we've put in to do well despite it being harder for females to be respected in the speech and debate community is starting to pay off." ♦

By the numbers

Year	# of female officers
2018	0/5
2019	1/6
2020	2/4
2021	4/4

Graphic by LIHI SHOSHANI

ETHNIC STUDIES

continued from pg. 1

hearings. Prior to Newsom's approval of the mandate, previous state legislators have proposed similar bills and been rejected.

This year, freshmen are given a choice between a semester of either ethnic studies, offered only during 5th period, or world geography to take along with health and driver's education.

The course, created by Davey, focuses on perspectives of minority groups, as many current social studies classes mostly concentrate on European history with a Eurocentric point of view. The major units explore Native Americans, Black Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and LGBTQ+ history.

"The class explores a lot of history that is often not taught or is normally glossed over," Davey said.

Specifically, the class focuses on these marginalized groups' past experiences and their fight for rights in current-day society, Davey said. The course ends with students choosing an issue that they're passionate about and creating a social impact project, which revolves around that topic.

"They have to pick a topic that speaks to them," Davey said. "Throughout the year, we've heard about some of the problems that different groups have faced in American history. Now, their job is to find a solution. Either identifying the problem, taking a stand for certain groups or something to that effect. It's really open ended, they get to choose what they're going to do, and then they have to present it to me to make sure it's constructive."

This course has recently been in the spot-

light due to a group of Los Gatos High parents claiming that this course teaches Critical Race Theory — an academic movement of US civil rights activists who seek to examine the relation of race and the US law code as well as focus on racial justice — which, in their opinion, elicits low self-esteem from white students, as well as teaching Marxist ideology to students. They are upset at the proposal by the school board for this course to be offered at LGHS, arguing that the nature of the class is racist.

However, at SHS, ethnic studies and its curriculum seem to be well-received by the students. Gurnani feels that the class is a fresh take on history because it is unlike any course he has taken in the past due to its emphasis on the points of views from minorities.

"I think the most valuable thing I've learned so far was the idea that history is not defined by the actions or one-dimensional story from a single party, but rather should be looked at from all of those affected," Gurnani said. "Most classes mainly focused on the dominant narrative, which is usually white people."

Through learning about various minority groups, he is looking forward to being able to further understand and analyze key events in American history from all perspectives.

These events are not just limited to the past, however.

Due to the class's emphasis on current events, the students are able to connect historical events to today's social issues, such as COVID-19 cases and its relation with the rising xenophobia in the United States as well as what the American government is doing in response to global events. For example, students in the Ethnic Studies class



FALCON // NIDHI MATHIHALLI

Social Studies teacher Mike Davey engages in a conversation on the widely covered Afghanistan immigrant situation with his group of freshmen in his fifth period Ethnic Studies class.

discussed Afghanistan's current situation with the Taliban and what the U.S. government is doing to help.

However, the majority of freshmen turned down ethnic studies for world geography, which is a class devoted to raising awareness of climate change and becoming familiar with the regions around the globe.

Freshman Eunice Ching said she didn't take ethnic studies because she wasn't well informed of this class in general. Since the course was offered for the first time this semester, many current freshmen were not aware of its existence.

"I didn't even know what ethnic studies was, so I just chose world geography," she said. "Although I now know about it, my friend in that class [said that she] receives more work than I do in world geography, so

I'm not sure I would switch into that class even now."

Freshman Lucie Le Toquin agrees that there is a lot more coursework associated with the ethnic studies course, which she is taking this semester. She said that this class is much faster paced than her other classes; however, Le Toquin believes that the tradeoff is worth it.

"I've learned so many things that I didn't know before and that I can use in the future," she said. "I feel like if something ever happens in the future, we would have more knowledge about it or if someone makes a joke that's not okay I can tell them 'Hey, that's not okay.' Because of what we learned in ethnic studies, I can use my knowledge for good, and speak up if I see something that's not fair." ♦

Daveyland introduces students to many 'isms'

by Tara Natarajan & Sarah Thomas

In early October, various spots around campus were bedecked with propaganda flyers featuring Photoshopped images of students, original logos and attention-grabbing slogans like "Be your own ruler" and "Canahuati for conservatism."

Less visible to the public eye was the excitement in the Media Arts Program Annex on Oct. 7 as students donning regalia such as tattoo sleeves, aprons and peasant gowns with toy babies in their arms filed into the large room. They were about to reach the culmination of multiple weeks of preparation — speechwriting, presentations, poster design and research — for their biggest assignment so far.

These seemingly peculiar activities were part of the major creative project in social studies teacher Mike Davey's World History MAP class: Daveyland, which utilizes aspects of all three of the MAP courses including World History MAP, English 10 MAP (taught by Marcos Cortez) and Media Arts 1 (taught by Alex Hemmerich). Davey and other sophomore-level MAP teachers have done the project for several years, and it's always a highlight of the first semester.

The premise of the project was that the former king of Daveyland was stepping down, and the groups were instructed to create an interactive presentation promoting their form of government for the kingdom. The objective was to get the most votes, and have their "ism," a social or economic philosophy prevalent during the nineteenth century, replace the previous monarchy.

Sophomore Lena Aribi said that for the project, students from both periods of World History MAP were divided into 10 groups of seven to eight people. Each group was assigned an "ism" such as social darwinism, scientific socialism, conservatism and anarchism to represent.

Because the project spans all three MAP courses, its components include a digitally designed flyer and logo for their "ism" using skills from Media Arts, historically relevant

research from World History MAP and a presentation with a speech by each group member written in English 10 MAP using techniques such as persuasion, propaganda and rhetoric, Aribi said.

She added that to win the election, students had to come up with creative costumes and introductions to draw voters in.

"Some groups performed a song while others danced to hype the audience up," she said. "Once each group presented their speech, it was followed by a really interesting hot-seat discussion with questions from the audience."

"The whole project was so creative and engaging, I enjoyed it thoroughly"

SOPHOMORE Lena Aribi

After the introduction came the speeches, which, according to sophomore Tashi Vasudev, were difficult to memorize, in addition to the fact that each group had to figure out how to combine their individual essays together.

Even though they only had two weeks to prepare for the final project, Vasudev's group found time to meet after school and were able to finish in time. Despite the intimidating nature of the presentation, Vasudev said the feedback and interaction between presenters and audience was encouraging and "got [them] going."

Aribi felt the project gave the class a more in-depth understanding of different political beliefs at the time, and quashed some misconceptions about generally misunderstood groups like the anarchists, which, "aren't just about destroying things."

"I'm happy we got to have Daveyland as our first big project of the year," Aribi said. "It really helped me understand all the different 'isms' in such an interesting way, and I think the level of engagement is what MAP is all about." ♦

New Chinese teachers step into Fan's position

by Cici Xu

When Chinese teacher Mariam Fan left the language department to become a Teacher On Special Assignment (TOSA) for the district in September, the school scrambled to find someone to fill in her shoes.

Recently, a new face appeared in Room 403 with short hair and round glasses: Chenhui Wu, the new part-time Chinese 3, 4 and AP teacher.

Wu is teaching Chinese with Sara Tseng, the long-time teacher of Chinese 1 and 2, and Rita Yeh, a newly hired part-time teacher for 7th period Chinese 2.

Although new to the language department, Wu is confident that she can handle the responsibility of teaching five Chinese classes due to her past experience.

For the past 15 years, she taught at the Mandarin Language and Cultural Center, a Chinese Saturday School that uses Saratoga High facilities. Wu also has an undergraduate and master's degree in education from National Taiwan Normal University.

"It's important to shape a class community through teaching."



CHINESE TEACHER Chenhui Wu

"I know the stakes for being a Chinese teacher at a public school are high because not only do you have to speak fluent Chinese, but also be able to teach this intricate language in a way where students will understand," Wu said. "I solely believe it is my background in education that allowed me to get this job."

Both Wu and Yeh have implemented changes to the Chinese curriculum based on their teaching philosophy of "laying a solid foundation before doing anything

else," Wu said.

Wu decided to make the best use of the textbook passages and exercises, materials that were not heavily emphasized by Fan, who adopted a more project-heavy teaching style.

Recently, Wu's students read simplified versions of classic ancient Chinese legends like "Oath of the Peach Garden" in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms."

Yeh, on the other hand, uses the "fishing" vocabulary-learning strategy with her students, which involves memorizing a Chinese word, writing the character on paper from memory and checking for the missing strokes.

Students have responded to this more structured teaching style with mostly positive reactions.

Freshman Richard Chung, who is taking Chinese 3, said he enjoys learning new vocabulary from textbook readings. Moreover, Wu's classroom norms have prompted him to engage more actively with Chinese inside and outside of the classroom in his daily communications, he said.

Freshman Hayden Fu, who is also taking Chinese 3, said the biggest change he noticed in the curriculum has been the larger emphasis on speaking solely Chinese in class, a departure from Fan, who was relatively lax on the necessity to speak solely in Chinese.

"Right now we have to always speak Chinese in class, whereas before we could slip in some English if we were struggling to express a point," Fu said. "It's definitely more work."

In addition to implementing changes in the curriculum, both new teachers are determined to establish a close-knit community with their students, strengthening the presence of Chinese culture on campus.

Along with Tseng, they are hoping to host Chinese holidays' celebrations later on in the school year while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions.

"I definitely would like to start thinking about how to invite our community into our culture," Yeh said, "because Chinese is not only about the language." ♦

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A group of anti-vaccine protesters gather outside the West Valley Farmers' Market on Sept. 18 to rally against vaccine mandates
COURTESY OF SARAVANAN SANJAY



ANTI-VACCINE

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Saratoga resident refuses vaccination

According to the Santa Clara County Department of Public Health, 84.6 percent of Santa Clara County's eligible population is vaccinated as of Oct. 17; however, a vocal minority of anti-vaccination residents continues to resist vaccination efforts.

One of them is a 60-year-old Saratoga resident who spoke to The Falcon about her opposition to COVID-19 vaccines on the condition that her name not be used.

The woman works for a local real estate firm and grew up in Los Gatos.

Her children went through the Saratoga public education system, and she stayed a housewife for 24 years until her youngest child went to college.

In her free time, she enjoys gardening, exercising, cooking and throwing parties.

However, she and her husband, who also grew up in Saratoga, still harbor strong opposition against the COVID-19 vaccine despite both being infected with COVID 19 earlier this year.

"Based on the research I have done, I feel there's not enough data to prove the effectiveness nor the long-term effects of the vaccine," the woman said. "There's too much government intervention. Mandating these vaccines for our first responders like nurses, doctors and armed forces is making our country weak to enemy [nations]."

The sources she cited for her research include American physician Simone Melissa Gold, the founder of the anti-vaccine and pro-hydroxychloroquine group America's Frontline Doctors.

In fact, people are more likely to get myocarditis from COVID-19 than from the vaccines.

The group is responsible for spreading dangerous COVID-19 misinformation. The resident also cited Robert F. Kennedy Jr, an American lawyer and ardent anti-vaccine advocate.

Besides voicing discontent with the government's role in vaccine distribution and mandates, the resident also claimed that side effects of the vaccine include changes in women's menstrual cycles and cardiovascular inflammation among younger men.

According to the CDC, possible side effects of the vaccines include redness and swelling on the arm injection site, as well as possibilities for dizziness, nausea or fever, but no effects related to heart risks or changes in menstrual cycles.

Recently, a study in Israel has shown that the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine may be associated with a slightly increased risk of myocarditis, an inflammation of the heart muscle, as reported by The New York Times.

However, studies have shown these side effects are rare. In fact, people are more likely to get myocarditis from COVID-19 than from the vaccines.

According to Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Moderna and the Food and Drug Administration, they have all not seen any evidence of health problems related to fertility or menstruation either, according to NPR.

Employers implement vaccine mandates

Dana Henderson, a 52-year-old Westmont resident and SHS Class of 1984 alumni who is pro-vaccine, said he has encountered the arguments of several unvaccinated individuals while working in the construction industry as a senior project manager.

"They don't want to get the vaccine because they believe it causes heart attacks, blood pressure problems, sterility or things of that nature," Henderson said. "Ninety nine percent of doctors in the country will tell you to get the vaccine, and now people are out there saying they don't believe their own doctors, which is a very sad state of affairs."

Because of the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a set of safety regulations for those working in the construction industry, unvaccinated people in the construction industry who refuse to get the vaccine or follow mask mandates while working are no longer permitted to enter these construction sites.

"Those people cannot come to our job site," Henderson said. "We are one of those industries where we just cannot bend the rules, unless someone comes to me with an actual medical exemption like allergies or blood clotting problems."

The construction industry is not the only one that has implemented restrictions for the unvaccinated.

Recently, businesses such as Google and Facebook started requiring their employees to be vaccinated or undergo frequent testing.

Santa Clara County advises mandatory vaccination requirements for all personnel in government and business entities.

Certain professions like health workers in the state of California must agree to be vaccinated or risk losing their jobs.

For example, teachers and state workers who are not vaccinated must submit to weekly testing.

Statistics disprove vaccine skeptics

On Oct. 1, Gov. Gavin Newsom also announced the first statewide vaccine mandate for students in private and public schools. This mandate will go into effect one semester after the FDA approves the vaccination, depending on students' age

groups.

Ramifications for the unvaccinated have not only been limited to employment restrictions, however.

Because of the high vaccination rate in Saratoga and neighboring cities, the Saratoga anti-vaxxer said she has received backlash from the community.

"I have a very close friend who said that she's concerned about me," the Saratoga anti-vaxxer said. "She doesn't want to stand with my daughter one day when she marries because I died from COVID-19 and can't be there. I also have a book club member who doesn't want to come and sit in my family room because I haven't been vaccinated."

Despite this and other negative feedback, she continues to maintain her stance against the COVID-19 vaccines and recommendations made by credible medical experts.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical advisor to the president.

"People are out there saying they don't believe their own doctors, which is a very sad state of affairs."

ALUMNUS Dana Henderson

She believes that rather than advocating for "injecting a synthetic mRNA thing into your system," Fauci should be telling people the ways to keep their bodies healthy.

She believes people can be healthier by "going to the farmers market to buy the big, fat blueberries full of vitamin C and exercising."

As of Oct. 15, roughly 218.3 million Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine and 188.7 million are fully vaccinated.

Current data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that the U.S. currently averages just under 2,000 COVID-related deaths per day.

Up to 99 percent of people experiencing severe illness are the unvaccinated, said Arnab Mukherjee, the chair of the Department of Public Health at California State University, East Bay in an interview with Healthline.

Between April and June, 92 percent of COVID-related deaths were from the unvaccinated populations, many of whom are harder to reach in the nation's vaccination efforts.

"I know that the anti-vaxxers are more like a cult," said Henderson, the resident who worked in construction. "So, breaking people out of it is extremely difficult, which can only be done by people that are very close to that individual." ♦

Senior wins prestigious medical AI recognition

by SerenaLi & DanielWu

After senior Vignav Ramesh presented his research, "COVID-19 Lung Lesion Segmentation Using a Sparsely Supervised Mask R-CNN on Chest X-rays Automatically Computed from Volumetric CTs," at the Society for Imaging Informatics in Medicine 2021 (SIIM21) Annual Meeting in May, he prepared for the questioning round from scientists attending the Zoom conference.

To his surprise, many asked Vignav about how his research could be applied in their own projects — a recognition of its utility in multiple areas of medical artificial intelligence (AI). As a result of his work, Vignav received the 2021 Helen and Paul Chang Foundation New Investigator Travel Award during that conference. He became the first high schooler to ever receive the award in a pool of graduate students and PhD students competitors.



Ramesh

His winning research was guided by Stanford University Biomedical Informatics Professor Dr. Daniel Rubin and focused on measuring the severity of COVID-19 through segmentation of X-rays on patients' chests. The project involved research in artificial intelligence and the medical field, two of Vignav's passions.

"I got into artificial intelligence through gaming because I thought it was really cool to use this technology to create automatic solutions to games like checkers, chess and more," he said.

He learned the basics of AI through Stanford University's Machine Learning course on Coursera. He then deepened his knowledge through participating in multiple hackathons and programming contests, creating medical-related projects involving artificial intelligence. His older sister, Saratoga High Class of 2016 alumna Ashvita Ramesh, is now a medical student studying at the Feinberg Medical School in Northwestern University. She showed Vignav the projects she created in medical school and got Vignav interested in how AI can be used to facilitate medical work.

"I noticed that a lot of things that she was doing could be streamlined with AI and deep learning," Vignav said. "I reached out to a couple of different professors at various universities, and Dr. Rubin responded to me. That's how I started working in his lab."

Vignav and Rubin developed the idea for this project upon realizing that, although computed tomography (CT) scans are effective data for COVID-19 severity quantification, they are not affordable for most patients. Instead, they found that such quantification could be achieved through X-rays, which are more cost effective and conducive to lung lesion identification.

Historically, this competition is hosted yearly by the Math Club in late January or early February, often garnering around 75-100 students. This year, however, the test is being offered on Nov. 10 and Nov. 16.

High scorers on both exams are invited to take the American Invitational Mathematics Exam (AIME), a 3-hour-long contest, typically in March. However, the MAA often takes the majority of February and early March to grade the test papers of the approximately 30,000 people who take the AMC. This results in students not knowing the cutoff scores or whether or not they made the AIME until mere days before the actual test. The MAA has moved the dates to fight this historically tight turnaround.

Sophomore Advait Avadhanam has been qualifying for the AIME since 7th grade. In 2019, he had a borderline score and was not sure if he would actually be able

to take the exam.

"It was definitely not a pleasant experience," Avadhanam said. "I think the MAA is making the right decision [in moving the test to an earlier date] because it is really difficult to just find out they made it the day before the test."

Avadhanam supports the test date being moved earlier because it allows seniors another chance to put AIME qualification on their college applications and lowers the risk of the winter storms that have plagued schools in the East Coast, which have disqualified entire schools in the past.

According to Avadhanam, "[the earlier testing date] gives contestants more time to prepare for harder contests [AIME and USA-MO]."

However, the November competition date has caused significant stress to many test takers, such as Lee, since it causes the same amount of competition prep to be done in a smaller time period.

"I didn't really start studying until recently," Lee said. "I don't think I've had as much time as I usually would."

Although MAA had released to competition managers in 2018 that the change would take effect starting the 2021-22 competition cycle, they didn't release a public statement until about a year ago. Redwood Middle School's competition manager at the time, PJ Yim, had informed contestants of the planned change.

Despite this, Lee believes that the MAA should have been more transparent about the change and released the information publicly, rather than just to individual competition managers.

OVERHEARD BOMB THREAT AFTER FOOTBALL GAME LED TO EVACUATION

By ShaanSridhar

While a student was waiting for their parents outside the gates of the lower field at the end of the Oct. 14 football game, they made a remark that posed a security concern, according to principal Greg Louie, and administrators evacuated the school.

The student told The Falcon that their remark was considered a bomb threat by the administrators present.

Sheriff's deputies were also called in to assess the situation and found no credible threat.

Earlier, the Falcons had forfeited the game against Los Altos during half-time because the team did not have enough players after the injury of a defensive lineman. The bomb threat incident occurred while people were in the process of leaving the school.

Louie said disciplinary action was taken against the student.

"Everyone was safe; there was no actual credible threat," Louie said. "If a comment is made that makes people concerned that there might be something on campus that could harm them, it's our responsibility to do our due diligence." ♦

togatalks

How do you feel about Thursday night football games?

"I don't like Thursday games because if there's a test the next day, a lot of people can't attend."



junior Ela Machiroutu

"They kill the energy; students have other priorities like studying and don't have time to attend."



senior Benjamin Bray

"Thursday night football games just aren't as hype. There's just not enough spirit."



junior Allison Tan

American Math Competition dates moved earlier

by NidhiMathihalli & NilayMishra

Math competitors like junior Dyne Lee are feeling extra pressure this fall. The reason: The AMC 10 and 12 dates have been moved to November from their traditional late January and February time frame.

The AMC is a competition for high school and middle school students that assesses their knowledge of math and is used to rank students nationally and internationally. It is hosted by the non-profit organization Mathematical Association of America (MAA). There are two tests: the AMC 10, which can be taken by those in 10th grade or below, and the AMC 12, which can be taken by those in 12th grade or below.

Historically, this competition is hosted yearly by the Math Club in late January or early February, often garnering around 75-100 students. This year, however, the test is being offered on Nov. 10 and Nov. 16.

High scorers on both exams are invited to take the American Invitational Mathematics Exam (AIME), a 3-hour-long contest, typically in March. However, the MAA often takes the majority of February and early March to grade the test papers of the approximately 30,000 people who take the AMC. This results in students not knowing the cutoff scores or whether or not they made the AIME until mere days before the actual test. The MAA has moved the dates to fight this historically tight turnaround.

Sophomore Advait Avadhanam has been qualifying for the AIME since 7th grade. In 2019, he had a borderline score and was not sure if he would actually be able

to take the exam.

"It was definitely not a pleasant experience," Avadhanam said. "I think the MAA is making the right decision [in moving the test to an earlier date] because it is really difficult to just find out they made it the day before the test."

Avadhanam supports the test date being moved earlier because it allows seniors another chance to put AIME qualification on their college applications and lowers the risk of the winter storms that have plagued schools in the East Coast, which have disqualified entire schools in the past.

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However, the November competition date has caused significant stress to many test takers, such as Lee, since it causes the same amount of competition prep to be done in a smaller time period.

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REFEREE

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and it didn't work out well." With Thursday nights' games, however, the team would simply cancel Friday's practice.

Lugo believes that Thursday night football was harder for schools such as Saratoga, Monta Vista and Lynbrook because they are highly academic. Students often returned from the games late at night and scrambled to finish their demanding schoolwork and other activities.

"Having to play with a dead silent audience really puts a damper on the whole night."

SENIOR Parsa Hashemi

The varsity team must be ready for the pregame stretch at 5:45 p.m., and many arrive as early as 4:30 pm. With the game itself lasting several hours, it consumes the majority of the day for most players. The players come home at 10 p.m. and still need to eat dinner and finish their homework before school the next day.

This problem was exacerbated with away games, such as the match against Westmont on Sept.

9, as the team needed to take a bus to and from the opposing school.

"When we only planned for the Westmont game to be on Thursday, we thought we would just ride it out," Lugo said. "With Willow Glen and Los Altos also moving to Thursday, it became tough."

However, the football players are not the only ones affected by Thursday night games. Members of the cheer team, dance team and marching band have had to readjust their schedules to fit the new timeline, and they too faced the challenge of having homework or tests to think about even as they performed.

Senior drum major Ryan Lee said one of the main adjustments the marching band had to make was the removal of Thursday night rehearsals, which traditionally happen every week from 6-9 p.m. Instead, on the weeks with Thursday night games, the band hosted their long rehearsals on Friday evenings.

According to Lee, the band pushed through the Thursday games, but seniors specifically found the schedule to be irritating, especially with the stress of college applications.

Even though band members are used to already committing a large part of their Thursday night to the band, performing at games posed a larger time commitment.

"Flipping the time commitments where the larger time is on



Courtesy of NOW AND FOREVER STUDIOS

The football team played against Los Altos High School on Thursday Oct. 14, and the game drew fewer fans than Fridays have in the past.

Thursday was hard because if you were not finished with all your Friday work, [the workload] became tedious when you got home, which was a hard transition," Lee said.

Playing on Thursday nights also has meant that a significantly smaller crowd showing up to watch the games, which has hurt the team's performance, senior team captain and wide receiver Parsa Hashemi said. For Thursday games, the team has not felt the energy and excitement that they would normally feel on Friday night football.

The Falcons lost all three of the Thursday night games: 48-14 to Westmont, 14-0 to Willow Glen

and forfeiting to Los Altos at half-time with a score of 28-0 because of an injury and the possibility of more injuries to a small team already beset by injuries.

Junior lineman Lonnie Gaskin broke both bones in his left leg and went to the hospital in an ambulance. Hashemi was also unable to play due to his hamstring injury. In general, the team was out-matched for the Los Altos team.

"It's really demoralizing to play Thursday night games because the crowd wasn't there to cheer you on," Hashemi said. "After having such an electric crowd at Homecoming, having to play with a dead silent audience really puts a damper on the whole night." ♦

Senior drum major Ryan Lee said one of the main adjustments the marching band had to make was the removal of Thursday night rehearsals, which traditionally happen every week from 6-9 p.m. Instead, on the weeks with Thursday night games, the band hosted their long rehearsals on Friday evenings.

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"Flipping the time commitments where the larger time is on

AMC Competition

A Early Bird Registration Deadline	Sept. 24
B Early Bird Registration Deadline	Oct. 1
A Regular Registration Deadline	Oct. 15
A Late Registration Deadline	Oct. 22
B Regular Registration Deadline	Oct. 22
B Late Registration Deadline	Oct. 29
A Competition Date	Nov. 10
B Competition Date	Nov. 16

"We only have about five lessons before the exam and are cramming each subject into only one week."

JUNIOR Anthony Wang

Another concern that the Toga Junior Math Club has faced is choosing which middle schoolers will be given the opportunity to take the AMC 10. While there are no official restrictions on who can take the AMC 10, the club has historically only allowed top scorers on the AMC 8 to take the AMC 10 due space constraints.

As the AMC 8 takes place in January after the AMC 10/12, the club cannot only invite AMC 8 top scorers anymore. The club is still searching for solutions as to how many and where students will take the AMC 10.

HONG

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2020 alumnus Jason Hong, Andrew's brother, then decided to teach him some of the basics of the game, including piece movements and checkmating patterns.

A few months later, the young player joined the same chess club as his brother. The club's teacher taught him more skills like opening positions.

"Everyone has something about chess that they love," Hong said. "I was captivated by the freedom and the ability to create my own masterpiece."

In the years since, Hong's initial interest has blossomed into some of the most coveted achievements imaginable.

Among his biggest is being nationally ranked No. 1 for his age group and, as of Sept. 7, earning the status of grandmaster.

The grandmaster title, awarded by the de-facto World Chess Federation, Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE), is the highest title a chess player can attain.

There are 1,357 active grandmasters in the world, with about 100 from the U.S.

To earn the title, the player must score three norms, which can be earned through achieving a high level of performance in norm-eligible tournaments.

Norm tournaments are highly competitive, characterized by having at least three grandmasters from different countries in the competition.

They consist of nine rounds, requiring a minimum of 120 minutes per round and having an international arbiter present.

To qualify as a grandmaster candidate, chess players under the Elo system — a system that calculates relative skill level of a player in comparison to others using the player's stats and overall performance — must have at least a 2,600 Elo rating at norm tournaments and cross a 2,500 FIDE rating on the universal rating system.

Hong became a grandmaster after earning his third and final grandmaster norm at the Charlotte Chess Center & Scholastic Academy Labor Day Norm Invitational in North Carolina.

"The immediate aftermath was that I was just really shocked," Hong said.

Some notable victories Hong has had include the PRO Chess League Arena Royale in September 2021 against Ian Nepomniatchi and Wesley So, who are ranked as the 4th and

6th top players in the world as of October 2021.

The game against Nepomniatchi went well until he let Nepomniatchi back into it; however, Hong was able to turn it around in the end.

He said his game against So was more complex up until So made a wrong move. Although Hong said his conversion "wasn't the smoothest," it ended up being enough to win.

"[The victories] felt good, but honestly it wasn't that special and didn't feel different or unexpected," he said. "Still, it was nice to have the opportunity to play some big names."

"I had a bad mindset because when I lost, I felt like I had to really try to win the next game and come back."

JUNIOR Andrew Hong

However, his journey toward his monumental achievements hasn't always been easy: He recently suffered a five-loss streak in the 2021 U.S. Junior Championship tournament.

"During that period, I couldn't sleep at night, I didn't have much energy and I just wasn't feeling well in general," he said.

He attributed the losing streak to a spiral in which one loss led to the next.

"After I lost one game, I was just totally out of it and stopped playing well," Hong said.

It wasn't until after he had a rest day after the fifth game of the tournament that he was able to break his losing streak and get back to his normal playing style with a win in his sixth game.

After that tournament, he said he learned the importance of a positive mindset — and sleep.

"I had a bad mindset because when I lost, I felt like I had to really try to win the next game and come back," Hong said. "The position was initially equal, so it probably would've been a better strategy to be fine with the draw and first stabilize my situation."

Despite the higher stakes, Hong said he

still enjoys playing chess as much as he did nine years ago because of the creativity that can be expressed through different scenarios on the board and because of the thrill of playing other skilled players in challenging competitions.

"Chess challenges me to think critically and solve challenges — there's nothing like finally finding the brilliant solution to a complex position after deep thought," he said. "But most of all, I play chess because it encourages me to be better and fight through hardships."

Although his ideal tournament schedule would be monthly, he is now attending them once every two months due to the demands of in-person school.

Tournaments typically host nine rounds, with ones in the U.S. running for five days with two rounds per day and tournaments in Europe scheduling one round per day and lasting nine days on average.

Hong said he usually participates in domestic tournaments, missing an average of five school days for each tournament.

As a result, he has to catch up on a lot of class material and assignments, an issue that he notes is challenging and time-consuming.

Although he knows that he should practice regularly to prepare for tournaments, he said following a set schedule doesn't work for him, so he usually practices whenever he has time or is in the mood.

Hong utilizes many training methods, such as analyzing clips, coming up with different gameplay scenarios and playing training games, sometimes online with people from all over the world and other times with friends who are at his level or stronger.

He usually comes up with hypotheticals on the board and thinks of different ways to counter the opponent's moves.

Beginning the game with a strong starting position makes the game much easier and smoother, he said.

"When starting, there's already 20 legal moves for each side, so obviously you can't analyze everything," Andrew said. "I just try to cover the main openings and theorize what moves usually plays."

In addition to his international achievements, Hong is president of the school's chess club, which meets every Thursday in Room 506 with the club's adviser, history teacher Michael Betz.

Junior Lisa Fung is the chess club's vice



Courtesy of ST. LOUIS CHESS CLUB

Hong contemplates his next move during the Junior Chess Championship in July of 2021.

president, junior Kunal Singh is the secretary and senior Soorya Kuppam is the treasurer.

Meetings typically start with a short lesson in which Hong teaches members about various aspects of the game before transitioning into a period of free time where members can play against each other and socialize.

Even though he now stands near the top of the chess world, Hong said that he still has significant room for improvement.

His ultimate goal is to become the chess world champion, though it's "a long way away and very difficult" to achieve.

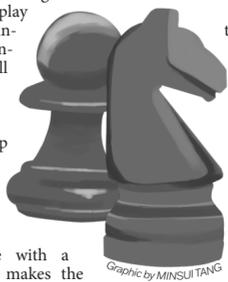
For the time being, he is working to further improve his skills and ratings.

As advice to his younger self and aspiring chess players, he emphasizes the importance of having a strong foundation and a mastery of the basics.

He also stresses the maintenance of patience and resilience, which he believes are crucial for building up to more complex skills.

"You'll face a lot of challenges; you'll lose tough games — games you're supposed to win, and games you aren't supposed to lose," Hong said.

"And bad things will happen to you. You just have to look past that and keep going forward." ♦



Graphic by MINSUI TANG

FOURTH PERIOD

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

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Give students a 5-minute break each class

It's 2 p.m. on a Tuesday, and after three consecutive 90-minute blocks of learning, the impending doom of incomplete homework assignments looms ahead — a harsh common reality for many students.

After over a year of online learning, students have had to adapt quickly this year to the in-person school environment, sitting in class for longer periods of time without distractions; this year, periods last 90 minutes, a 15-minute increase from last year's online length and twice as long as what freshmen experienced last year at Redwood Middle School.

As such, the sharp transition has been difficult — just several weeks into the school year, many students are already feeling the weight of overwhelming course loads and seemingly endless school days.

That's where the need for a 5-minute break comes in: Rather than hold class from bell to bell, every teacher should adopt a short break about half way in.

Spanish teacher Stephany Marks is one of many teachers who have already utilized this strategy to full effect. Each period, she incorporates a 5-minute "descanso" where students can socialize with each other and step outside for fresh air, taking a much-needed break from lessons.

"I've noticed that kids this year need a boost after being at home for an entire year," Marks said. "I start losing students in the middle of classes, so the

break lets them clear their heads to sit back down and focus for the remainder of the period."

According to Brain Balance, the average attention span of a high school student ranges from approximately 30 to 45 minutes. This works out perfectly, as a newly improved schedule would involve two 40-45 minute chunks of learning — separated by a 5-minute break — resulting in the ideal learning environment.

Furthermore, in an article from CIPHR, researcher Barry Chignell said that "our brains have two functioning modes: focused and 'diffused.' Some studies have shown that we solve our most difficult problems when we're in this diffused state."

In essence, the 5-minute break allows students to process new information without being overwhelmed. Rather than cram all the material into students' minds at once, teachers can spread class activities out, potentially garnering more student participation as well.

Both teachers and students benefit from 5-minute breaks. Teachers can ensure that students won't lose focus, and even if the class got sidetracked the first half of class, the second half of class is practically a whole new period.

The American Psychological Association recommends frequent breaks of exercise or meditation in order to mental-ly destress. Too much stress can have serious health consequences, including heart diseases or



MINSUI TANG

depression. Such breaks should also consist of guided stretches or meditation rather than cell phone usage. Taking students' minds off strenuous activities and screens will allow for meaningful recovery to carry on with the rest of the material.

Productivity in school — and in life, in general — doesn't just revolve around working constantly. Breaks are just as important to a healthy well-being and rich learning environment, and we'd all benefit from the addition of 5-minute breaks scattered throughout the day. ♦

Opinion of the Falcon Editorial Board

Editors-in-chief
Anjali Nugggehalli
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Opinion Editors
Apurva Chakravathy
Preston Fu

Reporter
Jason Cheng

The Saratoga Falcon staff voted 30-4 in favor of this article.

It's time to rethink on-campus police presence

By Benjamin Li

With the job description of "handling situations involving fights, theft, criminal bullying, truancy, trespassers, psychiatric detentions, identification of gang members and school policy violations," it is more apt to call a school resource officer (SRO) a rule enforcer.

In theory, SROs are supposed to benefit a school by making it a safer environment, but their presence too often intimidates and frightens students. The actual consequences of having SROs as a constant presence in high schools has too many downsides.

Instead of employing SROs, schools should look to hire additional staff that specialize in helping students with mental health issues. For students suffering from stress and anxiety, counselors can offer support that an SRO would not be able to. By having additional counselors, the environment on campuses would be safer overall.

Typically, SROs are utilized by schools dealing with violence, fighting, bullying or gang activity among students. The common belief when hiring a SRO is that by implementing someone trained to subdue criminal activity, juvenile crime would decrease on campus. However, this is not always the case.

These issues are most common in poor neighborhoods. According to the The Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights survey (CLCCR) of SROs have shown that arrests by SROs disproportionately target black and brown

students, causing fear and anxiety in these groups to spike. More generally, critics say SROs contribute to more criminalization and arrests of students and less safe environment.

Another SRO duty is searching and confiscating drugs. While this may seem like an important responsibility, it actually comes with more costs than benefits. In order to search for illegal substances, overzealous SROs can ignore basic privacy rights, citing terms that allow them to bypass them. In a broad study of 19 anonymous high schools, an SRO was caught peeking into student cars, but was defended since his contract gave him permission to do so. Again, many of these searches excessively targeted black and brown students.

Combined with the many zero-tolerance policies schools implement, an SRO's presence on campus can lead to a pipeline between high schools and juvenile detention. Students caught by the SRO for one offence would be severely punished, and may even face consequences in the criminal justice system. If students do end up in these situations, they may not receive the help they need to better themselves in the future, resulting in them continuing to seek the activity that got them in trouble in the first place.

Generally, a student population suffering from the effects of a SRO sees a decrease in productivity and academic performance. In particular, a case-study of African American students showed a significant drop in test scores when in the presence of an SRO. Faced with this fact, schools need to realize that hiring an SRO is not worth lowering their student's quality of education.

While the fear of school shootings rightfully has a place in school security measures, administrators should still be careful not to jump to the most obvious and surface-level solution. This is the case with SROs, which can be more harmful than they first appear.

Considering the environment of a school like Saratoga, the position of an omnipresent on-site officer is unnecessary. However, the implementation of an SRO as an only occasional part of campus life has shown benefits, such as directing run, hide, and defend drills as well as representing a direct relationship to law enforcement if needed. In addition, because the SRO is not always present on a campus like ours, there is no negative impact on the learning environment.

However, in schools riddled by periodic violence, students often find themselves the victims of not bullying, but instead other factors such as familial conflict, degrading mental health and academic anxiety. In this sense, it makes more sense to allocate more resources to counselors who know how to help students rather than staffing them with intimidating SROs. ♦



Graphic by SERENA LI

New clubs cater to a myriad of student interests

DearAsianYouth

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, hate crimes against Asian-American and Pacific Islander skyrocketed.

Seeing the seriousness of this issue, juniors Jasmine Ispasoiu, Alex Pak, Vivian Wang and Ally Tan founded an on-campus chapter of a club called DearAsianYouth as a response.

The school's DearAsianYouth is one of many chapters of an organization by the same name founded by a Southern Californian high school student in 2020 looking for a platform to publish her poetry.

The school's DearAsianYouth club looks to uplift all Asian people across the school, Ispasoiu said. Through engaging with Asian creators, with activities like reading books written by Asian writers, they hope to increase social and political engagement within the Asian community. With over 20 members meeting in Ms. Battey's room, they started off the year with a discussion about the mental health stigma in the AAPI community.

Ispasoiu also hopes to collaborate with the SHS Book Club in order to donate books to underprivileged Asian communities, as well as advocating for a section in the library where Asian authors are highlighted.

"Our goal is to create a safe space for all Asians," Tan said. "It really inspired us to involve all our creative outlets into this club."



Tan

Females for Finance

Females for Finance is also a chapter of a larger organization founded in Yale University this past summer that aims to close the gender gaps in the financial world starting at the high school level.

Created by juniors Samantha Stoiber, Elizabeth Stoiber, Eva Ruemmler, Shreya Rallabandi, Noor Khan and Rosie Kline, Females for Finance focuses on cultivating financial literacy among students and closing the gap in participation in finance between men and women.

Through teaching lessons about taxes, interest rates, loans and debt, they look to provide students practical and fundamental knowledge on personal finance.

"Even though the club is mainly targeted towards female students, we encourage everyone to attend our meetings," Stoiber said. "I hope this club is a place where people feel comfortable [learning] about finance."



Stoiber

Garden Club

Inspired by the pre-existing Garden Club at Redwood Middle School, freshmen Manlin Zhang, Shradha Raghunath, Arthur Gabilovich and Connie Chen founded the Garden Club.

The club provides a place for students to socialize while maintaining the school's garden, which is located next to the 200 wing.

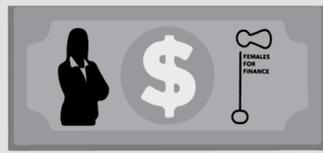
Along with growing plants and vegetables, the officers' goal is to bring more greenery to campus with a variety of flowers and herbs.

"The garden club is a place where you and your friends can go and relax and reconnect with nature," Chen said. "It's really satisfying to see what once was a small seed transform into a blooming flower." ♦

— Mitchell Chen and Jonathan Li



Chen



Graphic by VIRAJ REDDI



Graphic by ANOUK YEH

Disruptive protests can change hearts and minds

BY Lih Shoshani

As models strutted down the catwalk during the final event of Louis Vuitton's Paris Fashion Week show on Oct. 5, activist Marie Cohuet, who is part of the environmental group "Extinction Rebellion," disrupted the event by joining them onstage with a large banner stating "Overconsumption=Extinction."

Although security was eventually able to sweep her away, Cohuet's action points to a reality that some find hard to accept: The nature of confrontational activism can direct desperately needed public attention to prominent issues.

Outside the show, 30 activists from different environmental organizations lined the street. Their protest highlighted the contrast between the fashion industry's impact on the environment and the extravagance of the brand and influential audience members; this form of activism is most beneficial as it spotlights the organization's core causes.

While some may argue that it was not the right time or place, interrupting the fashion show was necessary because the place for protests has never been chosen based on convenience — protests are set in popular settings in order to gain more publicity. By getting the attention of wealthy people who can support their cause and the CEOs of these brands, these organizations ensure that the public, these brands and the affluent audience cannot turn a blind eye.

In the fashion industry, many companies use countless environmentally harmful practices such as high fashion — brands such as Louis Vuitton — and fast fashion —

brands such as Shein. While consumers may be aware of fast fashion's damaging impact on the environment, its cheap prices appeal to many and encourage them to spend large amounts at stores like Shein and get five times the amount of clothes that they could buy at a sustainable store.

The nature of confrontational activism can direct desperately needed public attention to prominent issues.

However, a less talked about, but equally important, feature of the fashion industry is high fashion's impact on the environment.

Many consumers are enchanted by expensive brands like Louis Vuitton because they believe their high costs signify higher quality goods and environmental sustainability. This logic is not backed by these brands' practices. Louis Vuitton has shown no evidence of taking meaningful action to reduce hazardous chemicals, minimize textile waste, treat its workers fairly or enforce an animal welfare policy.

While it is easy enough to look into Louis Vuitton's lack of sustainability, many would not think to do so because of the brand's influence on the fashion industry. Only through the activism of consumers do these issues come to light and force people to question the companies they are supporting.

The best form of activism is one that



THE NEW YORK TIMES // VALERIO MEZZANOTI

gains the most attention from the public who can actually make an impact by boycotting these companies. The protestors were able to nonviolently overshadow the show and change the topic of discussion to how overconsumption and brands like Louis Vuitton are leading us to extinction.

While some may argue that science-based advocacy is more effective because it presents the information to the intended audience with evidence, it depends more on the topic of advocacy rather than one form of activism. In the case of Cohuet, her form of activism was most effective because it targeted Louis Vuitton consumers and took the attention of the many photographers

and wealthy attendants away from the show and to overconsumption, as she intended. Consumers can research the issue on their own, but this type of activism implanted the issue in their minds and made the banner the focus rather than the clothes.

In the instance of protesting the fashion industry, the environmental activists grabbed the attention of millions and pushed the discussion into an environmental issue in the most effective method possible. This protest sets a precedent for future activism, encouraging bold actions and finding new ways to start conversations about the topic at hand. Sometimes you just have to be rude to be heard. ♦

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SENIOR PARSA HASHEMI RESPONDS TO ARTICLE CRITICIZING FOOTBALL TEAM'S HIGH POPULARITY

The following letter has been lightly edited by The Falcon for clarity and brevity.

On October 15, the Saratoga Falcon published an opinion article titled "Hot Take: Let's take the hype away from the football team," written by Opinion Editor Harshini Velchamy. This depiction of such opinion completely disregarded the practicality of the team's situation and traditional values of this school.

For reference, the Los Gatos Football varsity program has a roster of 60 players. Their JV has 40 players. Their Freshmen team has 52 players, making for a total of 152 players in the program. By contrast, the Saratoga program has 16 players on its JV team and 25 players on the varsity roster, 3 of whom are sophomores with almost no previous playing experience.

Football at Saratoga is in the midst of its reckoning; countless genuine factors play a role in why we perform so poorly.

First of all, let me address how our school's small population contributes to our losses. With class sizes continuously getting smaller and smaller, the number of underclassmen wanting to play football decreases annually.

Although we do have a JV team right now, they are often unable to play because they don't have enough players. If you look at all these successful programs, you will also see the correlation between student population and football roster size.

Having a small team plays a detrimental role: As the season goes on, players get tired and their quality of play diminishes, while other teams can easily replace their players with fresh substitutes, who continue with high-quality play. This is a situation that can and has resulted in mass injury.

As our team continues to get hurt throughout this season, we are left with

barely enough players to field a team, let alone win games.

Hopefully, you do not think we should pack up our bags and fold the season just so that other programs get a chance at this apparently exclusive level of stardom.

Secondly, I feel I have to address the cultural shift our school has experienced over the past decade.

Parents do not bring their children here in order to pursue a balanced athletic and academic school career, but rather to

blindly indulge their children in a toxic, competitive environment just because some website tells them to.

As the years move forward, the Saratoga community will naturally increase its exclusiveness within its demographic. Parents have played an enormous role in the lack of players in our program as more and more families despise the thought of their child possibly injuring themselves (even though reports show that you are more likely to hurt yourself in sports such as basketball, an extremely popular program at our school).

To be quite honest, I do not think that football has any relative "hype" or "limelight" around it at all.

Students have shown no interest in our actual performance but rather use this game on Friday nights as a social gathering to sit around with friends while having some random action in the background.

For example, we had a Thursday night football game and had a completely empty bleacher section relative to what we generally get. What does that tell you?

With this Thursday night game, we experienced the same level of student participation as other sports.

The problem is not with football itself, but rather the lack of interest from the student body in events that do not pertain to their own self-interest.

This program is a safe haven for students of this school who feel as if they do not have a place here. To take what is left of that small light shining on them would be a shame.

Football has served as an outside force that helps these students push themselves to reach their academic potential while also providing them with a social group

they feel like they are a part of.

Our team has gone door to door selling coupons in order to obtain the money we need for the equipment that keeps us safe. Personally, I have raised \$2,000+ using these methods, and it goes to show the extent to which we have to go just to stay afloat.

Football brings that desired sense of community within Saratoga. Through the pandemic, as we have seen that togetherness diminish, events like these are crucial. How could a Homecoming game that resulted in a great win for the team, an extremely spirited crowd of students we haven't seen in years and the incorporation of a spotlight for all other sports at halftime be "morally damaging"?

Sports teams can have bad seasons without being ridiculed and embarrassed further than whatever they are experiencing already. We will make sure to try harder for you guys! ♦



Courtesy of NOW & FOREVER STUDIOS

The football team triumphed over Monta Vista during the Sept. 25 Homecoming game.

One thing I want students to understand is that the football team is not representative of the majority. If you look at the team, you would notice that most of the kids are academically weaker students than what would be validated at Saratoga.

The problem is not with football itself, but rather the lack of interest from the student body in events that do not pertain to their own self-interest.

This program is a safe haven for students of this school who feel as if they do not have a place here. To take what is left of that small light shining on them would be a shame.

Football has served as an outside force that helps these students push themselves to reach their academic potential while also providing them with a social group

— Parsa Hashemi



All Graphics by APURVA CHAKRAVARTHY

Cafeteria lunch: too pricey

\$5 — baked potato, the school lunch menu read.

Beneath the aluminum foil, I expected — at the very least — a fluffy, golden potato topped with an assortment of toppings like sour cream, bacon, butter and cheese.

As I removed the foil, my high hopes for potato nirvana were crushed.

It was just a potato — a plain, unseasoned potato.

For \$5, I could've bought a grapefruit green tea with crushed ice, coconut jelly and red bean from TeaTop, or at least 0.083333 grams of gold to help my ego.

But instead, I'm left feeling like an Irish pirate in the dim basement of a merchant ship eating my last meal.

So no, definitely not worth it. ♦

— Vicky Bai



Please fix the air dryers

Picture this: You're in the bathroom, and your freshly washed hands are dripping wet.

You put your hands under the air dryer, expecting a warm, refreshing blast of air to dry off all the water drops sticking to your hand.

One second passes. Now, two. Three.

You start wondering, "Why isn't this working?"

You frantically shake your hands back and forth, hoping that the sensor will respond to your panic.

It doesn't. Only one option remains: You have to subject your poor hands to the cold air outside.

You shake them vigorously in a failed attempt to dry them off. If you've ever used the school bathrooms before, you're familiar with this horrible experience.

We shouldn't have to complete an entire upper body workout in an attempt to dry our hands.

Please fix the air dryers. ♦

— Allen Luo

Make security questions usable for immigrants

BY SelinaChen

Ninety-nine percent of online accounts I set up require me to choose and answer security questions in case I forget my password or get logged out of my account.

Usually, I immediately look for the question "In what city were you born?" because that's easy to answer: Shanghai.

My dilemma arises when the system requires more than one question, but only offers a limited selection.

What is your mother's maiden name? What is your father's middle name?

Sorry, we don't have such concepts in Chinese. Plus, it's also culturally disrespectful to write out your parents' name, though I've long been forced to ignore that bit of cultural taboo.

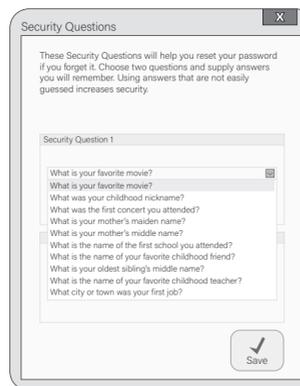
I implore you, tech companies, please stop tailoring your security questions to American customs and instead make them answerable for all.

What is the name of your elementary school?

No thanks, I don't want to type out "WuDaoKou No. 2 Primary School."

I won't remember whether I spelled it as the above or "Wu Dao Kou" or "Wudaokou" or used the full transliteration "Wu Dao Kou Er Xiao."

What is the name of your childhood street?



Same problem. Did I write "Ke Hui" or "Kehui"?

What is the name of your childhood best friend?

I again run into the same problem as before.

Did I use her full Chinese name "Sun Miao" or nickname "Miao" or English name "Clarisse"?

So really, the security questions are a malicious Eurocentric scheme designed to torture anyone who grew up with another culture.

I implore you, tech companies, please stop tailoring your security questions to American customs and instead make them answerable for all.

Note: Kindly refrain from attempting to hack my accounts with the above answers because, duh, I'm not publishing the real ones. ♦

Flies are useless creatures

You're sitting in class and trying to pay attention. It's 90 degrees outside and nearly as hot inside with classroom doors always open for COVID-19 prevention.

You sweat in your seat as a swarm of black monsters begins to circle your head. You try to ignore the droning of their wings until your head jerks back and your arms flail.

They have begun their attack. Flies are the most annoying creatures to ever

exist, and are practically impossible to kill. They have no benefit to nature whatsoever; they're supposed to be pollinators, but the only things they seem to try to pollinate are the heads of unsuspecting students.

Unfortunately, flies are nowhere near endangered. The solution: Please, please install flytraps in each classroom. ♦

— George Huang

TikTok drains your energy

Imagine this situation. "I'll start my homework in 10 minutes," a student says. Then, they open the TikTok app on their phone and start scrolling through dozens of mind-numbingly pointless videos.

Understandably, they quickly become hooked onto TikTok's irresistibly fast-paced, personalized algorithms.

Now, without even realizing, this poor student has stretched their allocated "10 minutes" of free time into an hour or two or three of wasted time.

If you feel attacked, don't worry. I used to

be this person. I would spend hours on the app, looking at new trends or dances.

But all it took was two clicks. As soon as I deleted the app, I was forced to stay on task and increased productivity.

This one simple action has reduced my stress tremendously.

With TikTok distractions eliminated from my day, gone are the days of staying up for homework past midnight.

Save your sanity. Pull the plug and "Delete App." ♦

— Zachary Zinman

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Nicki Minaj's Met Gala tweets and reasoning for her lack of vaccination were irresponsible and extremely harmful.

@Colleges: Stop making us write "why this college" supplements. You can't learn anything about us from them.



Coalition Schools: Move to the Common App. There is no use in having more than one college application platform.



Halloween does not count as a real holiday

BY Jason Cheng

When we think of the word “holiday,” we imagine festivities. We imagine tranquility. We imagine hitting the brakes on the tedious cycle of school-related stress in order to regroup, rejuvenate and, most importantly, celebrate.

These thoughts align fairly well with the Merriam-Webster definition of “holiday” as “a day marked by a general suspension of work in commemoration of an event.”

Yet Halloween falls short of this definition. Where exactly is the “general suspension of work” that holidays supposedly promise?

The reason we don’t get a day off of school for Halloween is that it isn’t a real holiday.

It’s just a glorified meet-up with friends in the evening, dramatized through silly costumes and short-lived sugar-highs. Making matters worse is the looming pile of work left to complete if it falls on the eve of a school day. To say the least, Halloween isn’t what it used to be for most teens.

Candy doesn’t have its glistening appeal anymore, our lives are packed with too much stress from school and ultimately, the pandemic really was the straw that broke the camel’s back.

The social bubble of Halloween was popped by COVID-19, with quarantine canceling in-person interactions. Even now, we’ve grown so paranoid about hygiene that post-pandemic trick-or-treating still holds doubts in our minds.

What made Halloween remotely a holiday was the social interaction in receiving candy from strangers, and even this aspect has faded and may never return.

Since 7-9 year olds are still unvaccinated, the people who enjoy trick-or-treating most can’t even participate.

Furthermore, the sheer unsustainability of Halloween needs to be addressed.

Children scour the streets and beg for bucketloads of candy, only for it to either be consumed in unhealthy amounts or thrown in the garbage with the plastic wrappers they’re contained in.

Candy itself is a detriment to society, and getting kids hooked on these toxic pellets at such a young age is pretty damaging if you think about it.

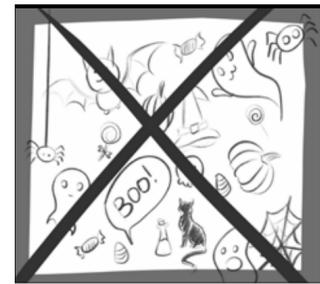
That isn’t to say Halloween isn’t enjoyable, but it’s still relatively mundane.

I understand that it’s a fun little social escape in the midst of hundreds of school assignments, but in reality, it’s just another excuse to procrastinate on that APUSH project you haven’t even started.

Compare it to, say, Christmas, for example. We get an entire two-week break, and combine it with a New Year’s Day celebration — I’m getting excited just thinking about it.

Even Thanksgiving has its perks: three full days off of school, followed by a glorious weekend of complete relaxation.

What makes the aforementioned holidays even more significant is that we’re truly celebrating something: the everlasting tradition of gift-giving on Christmas, and the reunion of families through a Thanksgiving feast.



Graphic by MINSUI TANG

The origin of Halloween isn’t well known enough in our generation, and it practically evolved into a superficial “holiday” of trick-or-treating rather than a commemoration of a certain historical event.

Ultimately, it’s a grim reality.

Halloween is levels below what we traditionally define as true holidays, and it isn’t Spooky Season — it’s Poopy Season. ♦



Graphic by ARIEL ZHOU

This Halloween, avoid these 10 group costumes

BY Sarah Thomas & Ariel Zhou

It’s hard to find someone who doesn’t like the fun costumes, copious amounts of candy and good vibes of Halloween. But, when choosing a group costume, the decision is usually a last-minute endeavor.

Picture this: It’s the night before Halloween, and a friend group is exhausted and out of ideas. Desperately, they search for Best Halloween Costumes on Buzzfeed, narrowing it down to Pixar characters or nurses, which are two painfully basic ideas. Here’s an easy way to guarantee you won’t accidentally match with at least five other groups.

Disclaimer: this article is meant to be satirical, and these costumes have potential to be done well. If you’re planning on doing these, we’re sure it’ll be great!

“Retro”
“Decades.” “Vintage.” “Retro.”

These costumes are the same with only a few variations. The flare jeans, headbands and round glasses. The floral dresses and gogo boots. The aerobics outfits with neon leg warmers. These have the potential to be fun — it’s extremely funny when people wear over-the-top sideburns straight out of the seventies, but it’s annoying when the costume is polyester from Party City.

There are tons of ways to find actual vintage clothing, from buying second-hand to just asking to borrow clothes from your parents. Vintage costumes look best when they’re authentic!

Disney Princesses

One Cinderella, one Ariel and one Jasmine. Now, there’s no actual issue with these Disney princesses themselves, but the costumes that people choose are often interchangeable.

If you’re planning on doing this, accessorize so people can at least tell which princess you are. Besides, overlooked Disney princesses — Esmeralda from The Hunchback of Notre Dame or Merida from Brave — all deserve more Halloween love.

Candy

Here’s the standard recipe for an M&M: A tutu, knee-high socks and a \$4 T-shirt with a big white “M.” Change that “M” to an “S,” and you’re a Skittle.

No matter what candy, what color or what year, the cherry on top is the beat-up pair of Air Forces that have been worn to death for the past year. Even though this costume is easy to organize and works for large groups, its repetition makes the entire look overdone and tiring.

Sports players

This isn’t even a Halloween costume if you wear jerseys regularly. It’s even more awkward when the people doing the costume aren’t even wearing jerseys from the same team — or worse, sport. But please, if you do decide to wear them, at least decide on one team. And for basketball costume wearers: Get your armpit

hair out of my face, and keep those sweaty spaghetti arms covered.

Rappers

Saggy pants. No. White tank top. No. Plastic chains. No. No. No.

What do these three things have in common? A dollar store rapper! These costumes can often look like they lacked planning — not to mention the frequent racial stereotyping. If you’re planning on dressing up as a rapper for Halloween, recreate an iconic outfit from your favorite rapper instead of dressing up as a rapper cliché.

Space cowboys

Whoever decided that neon green, holographic silver, pink and purple go together needs to get their eyes checked. Aliens and cowboys on their own are fine. But why mix the two? The holographic pattern only makes for an overwhelming group photo.

Inflatable Costumes

These Amazon purchases are incredibly expensive and super inconvenient. Wearing these costumes to school makes just walking around and getting to your classes unnecessarily difficult.

These costumes also tend to be low quality and break quickly; it’s hard to have fun when you’re constantly worrying that your suit is going to pop.

Tourists

Floral patterned button ups, sunglasses and puka shell necklaces are pretty boring. If the only thing that distinguishes you as a tourist is your Costco button-up, I can guarantee that there are dozens of people who are planning on doing it already.

Frat boys

Nothing about dressing up as a college student with no personality besides partying makes any sense to us. What do you gain from dressing up as a 20-year-old on the verge of dropping out?

Again, the beat-up Air Forces make another appearance in this costume, and what is that in their hand? It’s a red solo cup, the perfect accessory to top off the whole Chad outfit.

Powerpuff girls

The same pink, blue and green costumes, whether in the form of a dress, tennis skirts or an oversized T-shirt, are cute, but people who do this costume often put no effort into the costume or under-accessorize so that the only resemblance to the Powerpuff girls is the color.

It’s often hard to tell what your costume is if you’re not standing with your friends, too.

With Halloween almost upon us, the time to start planning your costume is now. We’ve worn almost all of these 10 group costumes and regret some of them. This Halloween, you’ll stand out if your costume is truly individual, funny or meaningful. ♦



Graphic by SARAH THOMAS

My wisdom tooth extraction was gruesome

Seli- chewing

Selina Chen



My misery was caused by a tiny hard speck on the top left region of my gums in the very back of my mouth. When I first noticed it, I shrugged and dismissed it as a bit of food.

A few days later, when it was still there and had gotten bigger, I had a realization: An unruly wisdom tooth was growing crookedly from the side of my gum. A visit to the dentist confirmed my suspicion and I scheduled an extraction surgery. Any wise person would probably contemplate: How exactly would a mostly-buried tooth be pulled out from one’s gum?

I was not wise. I adopted my post-Calculus test strategy: If I didn’t think about it, it didn’t exist.

On the day of the surgery, my attempts at

denial were thwarted by my mom’s concern. As I lay down on the dental chair, my cheek half-numb, my mom decided to ask Dr. Kim about the procedure in excruciating detail. I was informed of how exactly he would slice open my gum into “flaps,” a mental image that made bile rise from my stomach.

Worse, my mom decided to make small talk by fact-dropping how King Louis XIV had bits of his jawbone pulled out by careless dentists. Shut up, mom!

Likely sensing my horror, an assistant shoved a rubber duck into my hand. “Squeeze it if you get nervous,” she said soothingly.

Excuse me, I’m 17 years old. Awkwardly holding the stupid, stupid duck and glaring at her turned back — I never knew scrubs could radiate such condescension — I surrendered my oral cavity to the dentists’ schemes.

In retrospect, I should have done my research and known that a normal surgery to extract all four wisdom teeth is done under general anesthesia and with stitching afterward, so there’s minimal trauma and

bleeding. This was not the case for my single-tooth extraction (I couldn’t have all four pulled out because of insurance policies) as it only required local anesthesia.

Fully awake, I watched as Dr. Kim lowered a fiendish scalpel into my mouth, its razor sharp edging glistening under the bright light. Then, there was pressure.

I was informed of how exactly he would slice open my gum into “flaps,” a mental image that made bile rise from my stomach.

I felt no pain, but the horrendous scraping noise was enough to tell me exactly how the scalpel was slicing open my gum, its tip dragging over the hard tooth underneath.

Once my gum was flayed open, Dr. Kim and his assistant burst into a flurry of movement.

Clamps and other dubious instruments entered and exited my mouth at remarkable speeds. Within 30 seconds, it was over, and I

was told to bite down on a gauze pad. Disoriented, I turned and found my wisdom tooth lying limply in a small puddle of blood with its three long roots. Oh goodness, I thought faintly, I have a hole of that size in my cheek.

I made it home in a haze and, because I unwisely chose a Tuesday for the surgery, started to study for the next day’s AP Lang test. Feeling doxy because of anesthetics and with the confounding philosophies of Russell, Plato and Descartes swirling around my head, I somewhat registered the sweet taste in my mouth but attributed it to a flavored gauze pad. Two hours later, when I removed the gauze pad as instructed, I discovered the source of the strange taste: my blood.

I really shouldn’t be surprised — of course a gaping, unstitched hole in my flesh would keep on bleeding.

So, for the entire night I pored over convoluted philosophical texts while tasting my own blood, my jaw aching as it oozed not-so-slowly from my gum.

Despite what Descartes might think, I know a certain truth: Dressing up as a vampire for Halloween is forever crossed off my list — tasting blood for hours is not fun at all. ♦

Workaholics, I've got a bold idea for you: Just work less

Mi-chill more

Michael Fok



In 2017, a seventh grader logged on to Twitter after school to waste his homework time on social media. He’d gotten used to this over the past few months, and it was becoming a habit he didn’t care to change.

He stumbled across a retweeted image of a statue with a likely piped quote from a Greek philosopher that went something like this:

“Don’t worry about what you can change. You can change it, you can handle it. Don’t worry about what you can’t change. It’s out of your hands; what happens happens and you can just take it from there.”

This seventh grader read that quote and took the mindset as an excuse to start doing less in a few too many aspects of his life.

He quickly went from worrying about every minor assignment to entirely disregarding his less-than-fantastic grades.

You might not be surprised to learn that that seventh grader was me.

As a junior now, I can say that this attitude has gotten me into more trouble than I care to detail, but I’ve enjoyed my life in ways that other harder working teens might not have.

It’s certainly more fun than being overly stressed like many other students I know, and I think doing a little less should be a mindset more of us adopt, especially in a pressure-cooker school like ours.

All too often I hear people say things like: “I have to get an A on this or I’m dead,” “I can’t mess up this test, dude. I just can’t” or “If I don’t even get a B+ on this test, what’s even the point?”

Thinking like that simply isn’t a sustainable way to live.

People here often look at their high school grades as the ultimate determinant of their quality of life, present and future. In reality, this isn’t the case.

A project isn’t a life-or-death matter, a class isn’t worth studying for during another and a homework assignment isn’t worth the 2 a.m. grind session. My advice: Relax and let yourself take a step back for once.

I’m not here to say that everyone should give up on everything all the time — far from it.

I mean that people need to let themselves rest for a moment.

If someone tries to give a dozen or more pursuits 100 percent, they’ll burn out, and their efforts will fall from 100 percent to 0 percent or something pretty close faster than a Twitter user blocking an opinion they don’t like.

Nobody, no matter how much they insist on doing so, can work nonstop. Humans have evolved to be masterful multitools, so maybe try giving some more things 70 percent, 60 percent or even 55 percent.

If something is worth doing with all your effort, it is worth doing with less.

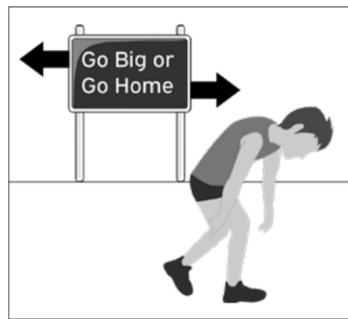
Doing less can be extremely beneficial; it means more breaks for both the mind and body, more sleeping time and more

time to spend with people you care about, and the things you wish to enjoy.

While you’re sleeping more and feeling better, you can keep up with about 80 percent of everything that’s going on in classes, extracurriculars and whatever else may demand your time.

Many can agree that high school is not the best time to take your foot off the gas pedal, but try to enjoy yourself.

In other words, take a break from your work for your own sake; you’ll thank me (and maybe that inspirational Greek philosopher) later. ♦



Graphic by SERENALI and CICI XU

EATING like the ROCK

Graphic by JOANN ZHANG

Chen-ging diets

Mitchell Chen



Actor Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, standing at 6 feet 5 and weighing 260 pounds, eats over 5,000 calories per day throughout his five meals to maintain his legendary physique. By contrast, I stand at 5 feet 7 and weigh 145. At the request of this paper’s Lifestyles editors, I challenged myself to replicate his diet for a day. Foolishly, I didn’t think it would be too hard.

The diet, which is detailed on Opera News, contains over 10 pounds of food per day, almost all of which is high in protein and nutrients such as iron and calcium. Each meal is as follows:

Meal 1: 10 oz steak, three egg whites, one whole egg, two cups oatmeal and a glass of watermelon juice.

Meal 2: two servings of chicken, two bell peppers, three cups mushrooms, three cups broccoli and one protein shake.

Meal 3: 8 oz salmon, eight asparagus tips, two whole eggs and two cups of rice.

Meal 4: 10 oz steak, three baked potatoes, eight asparagus tips and one glass of orange juice.

Meal 5: 20 grams casein protein and 10 egg whites.

After seeing all the food laid out on the table, my hesitation began settling in. When the total weight of all the food came in at 9.7 pounds, I knew I would need to call a plumber by the end of the day.

You may question why I agreed to put myself through such pain. First of all, I love food. Second of all, pretending that I live like The Rock is just epic. Lastly, I wanted to see if I was cut out for the challenge, so here is my log of a full day of eating.

Meal 1, 5:30 a.m.: I’m feeling pretty good, and the eggs went down easily. With a fresh glass of watermelon juice, it was a pretty good way to start the day. After the eggs came the steak. I think I did a pretty good job with the seasoning, but I still found it nearly impossible to consume all the steak without steak sauce. Next I gagged down the oatmeal, one of the worst dishes out of the meals. Slowly but surely, I managed

to force myself to eat every last bite of that glop.

Meal 2, 8 a.m.: This meal as a whole was hands down the worst one, with three full plates of vegetables. Every bite was painful. After half a pound of broccoli it became difficult to swallow, but thankfully a pinch of salt and pepper eased the process.

Meal 3, noon: Compared with the other meals, this one was pretty manageable to eat. I think I’m starting to like asparagus (it goes surprisingly well with eggs). The salmon was a bit dry, but overall it was easier on my overwhelmed stomach.

Meal 4, 5 p.m.: After running for about an hour to give my digestive system a rest, my stomach was ready to take on meal number four. This meal was extremely difficult: The steak and asparagus were alright, but I almost had a near-death experience with the potatoes. I usually like potatoes, but after shoveling three whole potatoes down in a single setting, I could hardly breathe. I doubt I’ll be eating them again for quite a while.

Meal 5, 11 p.m.: Still overwhelmingly full from the past four meals, I was somehow able to chug all 20 grams of casein protein. When it came to the eggs, the white clumps sitting on my plate were almost indigestible. But after half a bottle of ketchup and an hour-long staring contest with the eggs for about an hour, I was able to shovel down every last bite. I have never been so relieved to see an empty plate in my life, and I mean it.

Conclusion: Even though I may need to see a doctor in the near future, I am proud to say that I completed the challenge. I didn’t bail halfway through, or even vomit (I have no idea how). This will definitely go down as one of my greatest accomplishments.

However, all of The Rock’s meals won’t win any culinary awards. Simply put, they all taste like cardboard. In addition, I overestimated the size of my stomach, and regretted my life choices for a day. In the end, I gained 5 pounds, hugged a trash can for a night and endured stomach aches for a week.

The Rock weighs almost double my body weight, so there is no way eating this diet would be sustainable for me or my wallet in the long run. I mean, the steaks alone cost me \$30.

I won’t ever eat The Rock’s diet ever again. My advice: No one else should either. ♦

My first autumn living in America

Count Tara-cula

Tara Natarajan



Red and golden leaves, crisp air, coziness and an abundance of pumpkin spice aren't the only things that make autumn my favorite season. Fall brings back a unique nostalgia because it is the season that welcomed me to the United States when I moved from India three years ago.

Having lived in India for the first dozen years of my life, I had never experienced fall before 2018: Warm summers quickly turned into damp monsoons, leaving no space in between for autumn.

When my family moved to Saratoga in September 2018, we caught the last month of summer before the chill of autumn set in. As the air began to get colder, the leaves started to fall and Bobby Picket's Halloween classic "Monster Mash" began playing on repeat in various places, people began excitedly

talking about things I had never heard of, rituals like pumpkin spice lattes, Thanksgiving traditions and Halloween decorations.

Sure, I had eaten pumpkin before, but never in a dessert or a drink. And while my apartment building in Bangalore had attempted to create a Halloween experience for kids, it mostly consisted of a group of four or five kids dressing in the same stale costumes every year and ringing the doorbells of disgruntled old people. The mood in the air wasn't one of the excitement and thrill of the Halloween spirit, but rather one of reluctance.

Halloween in the U.S. was nothing like what I had known. Never before had I felt so foreign, like an outsider to such irrefutably American traditions like decorating one's house for trick-or-treaters, carving pumpkins, obsessing over candy or creating elaborate costumes. While I found myself enthralled by the fall traditions that surrounded me, the uncomfortable feeling of otherness felt nearly impossible to overcome.

Things didn't feel like they would change until one day, about a month after I moved here, my parents took me and my sister to Queens Pumpkin Patch on Saratoga Avenue.

I must have been the oldest kid there, since most 7th graders had already exhausted their childhood fall fantasies of pumpkin patch-



Sophomore Tara Natarajan enjoys her third Halloween in the United States.

es, cotton candy and petting zoos when they were 4 or 5.

Looking at the diverse array of pumpkins and taking hesitant bites of cotton candy, I felt the excitement of fall envelop me. Sensing warmth despite the cold air was a magical feeling. I realized that this was the first truly "American" experience I had had since moving.

Autumn in the pumpkin patch was the first connection I felt to the strange new world I was now a part of, the first thing I had experienced that made me feel American. I understood that it wasn't as monumental for most people, but it felt like I was living a small part of an American childhood I had never experienced. I was surrounded by such indistinguishable symbols of Americana, enjoying something

most kids my age were well over. That evening, I felt a strange sense of peace as I allowed myself to enjoy all the quintessential elements of fall. Before I knew it, fall quickly became my favorite season. I was excited, and a little more prepared, to settle into my new life.

I am now entering my fourth autumn in America now, and the fondness I have for this wonderful season has not diminished. I look forward to foggy mornings, vanilla candles, warm Thanksgiving meals, beautiful orange leaves and Halloween spirit.

But most of all, fall is truly special to me because it gives me a sense of comfort and belonging born from a time of uncertainty and loneliness when I was new to this country. ♦

Halloween: a never-ending disaster

Catastro-Vita

Kavita Sundaram



When I moved from India to America in second grade, I learned about Halloween: a holiday where kids dressed up as fictional characters and traveled across dark neighborhoods in hordes, receiving free candy from even the most ominous-looking houses. For the Harry Potter and dark chocolate enthusiast that I've always been, this should've been the ultimate paradise.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. As much as I tried to enjoy Halloween, the holiday was plagued by different disasters every year that left me disappointed, embarrassed or both.

My first Halloween started deceptively well: When I was only 6 years old, my mom took me and my friends trick-or-treating around my un-spirited and lonely neighborhood. Since we were virtually the only kids there, every house gave us all of its candy, and we left with Trader Joe's bags filled to the brim with sweets.

However, when we returned



Senior Kavita Sundaram at one of the few Halloweens that wasn't a disaster.

home (at around 5 p.m. when the sun had barely set), my mom realized she didn't have any candy to give to trick-or-treaters herself, so my entire stash was donated to the other greedy neighborhood kids who swarmed our house. By the end of the night, I was left sad and empty-handed.

My second Halloween went no better: That year, my mom decided that she was morally against distributing cavity-inducing candy to unsuspecting children. So when the kids came around begging for candy, I was assigned the gloomy task of rejecting every desperate child. At some point, I began pretending no one was home, in order to avoid

the dejected and hateful stares I received. (Closing the blinds and hiding under the dining table while kids repeatedly rang the doorbell was definitely one of my lowest moments.)

By the third year, I didn't expect much from Halloween. But, while I was wallowing in the misery that would be another tragic Halloween, everything changed for the better. A friend decided to celebrate her birthday on Halloween, and we were all going to spend the day together trick-or-treating and then sleeping over. As an added bonus, the celebration was going to be held at The American Girl store, a version of heaven that my 9-year-

old self had never had a chance to go to myself. I was ecstatic, but I should've known it was too good to be true.

Disaster struck once more the evening before Halloween, this time in the form of pink eye.

I couldn't go to the party, so I was left, once more, friend-less, lonely and disappointed on Halloween.

Luckily, my mother crafted what she believed to be an ingenious solution: neon orange swim goggles.

Decked out in my armor of orange goggles and a hand-me-down witch costume, I paraded around the neighborhood in embarrassment and received pity-candy from every person that was unlucky enough to witness the scene.

Looking back, I'm impressed by my Halloween bravery.

After three consecutive years of disappointment, I learned to give up on Halloween.

Through most of middle and high school, nothing has really changed, so here's to hoping that this year's Halloween might be marginally better than the past ones have been.

I don't think it could get any worse. ♦

A haunted night at Great America

Shaan-tered house

Shaan Sridhar



The devil almost got me during Halloween in 2019.

Seven of my friends and I decided to test our fears and go to Great America's Halloween Haunt in early October. But what we ended up experiencing was far more than what we had signed up for, permanently changing my outlook on the holiday.

My friends and I had been looking forward to the event, taunting each other about how scared we'd get and arguing over who would be the most terrified. Admittedly, parts of the theme park's Halloween makeover were quite frightening.

I particularly remember a jump scare from a zombie in one of the haunted houses that provoked my friend to turn around, trip and fall down, taking me down with him in the process. I also remember eating funnel cakes and waiting in long lines for roller coasters — which we considered our "breaks" between haunted mansions — as we saw others jump Great America's fences to get in without paying.

But most frightening of all was the false alarm of a shooter.

My group was walking toward a candy shop when a voice near-

by shouted, "Everybody get down! SHOOTER!"

I had never been in a situation like this. That night was the closest I've ever gotten to a traumatizing experience.

In the blurry moments after the stranger shouted "SHOOTER," my flight senses sent me running toward a nearby shop and into the employees' storage room, where I found two of my friends — the others got stuck outside in the mayhem.

Two employees inside told us they heard rumors that a gang was planning attacks on the theme park that night, and that they had been worried about coming to work. One employee grabbed a metal bar from the rack, preparing to use it as a weapon. We all called our parents and family, as if it could be our last chance to talk to our loved ones.

But after nearly 30 minutes passed, the supposed danger seemingly posed no more risks to our safety. We exited the closet and were greeted by a swarm of Santa Clara police officers who questioned where we had come from and led us to a huddle of others, including our other friends. The threat turned out to be a false alarm — there was no shooter and nobody had been shot.

After a long wait, we eventually got out of the theme park. As we left, we saw the desperate measures others had taken to find safety: jumping into water features, hiding in bushes and overrunning the park's barricades. Floods of others, with genuine fear and grief in their faces, rushed to get as far away from the park as possible.

Afterward, one of my friends' dads drove us to In-N-Out, where we got some much-needed fried food and decompressed while we discussed what had just happened.

Rumors swirled that there was a gang member who shouted about a shooter, creating a mayhem in which his fellow members

tased some people and stole their wallets. I'm sure the police report would prove that theory false too — though, in all honesty, I couldn't care less about what actually happened.

The fact is that there could have easily been a shooter in Great America that day. People could easily have died and gotten hurt the way they had at the Gilroy Garlic Festival in July of that year, where four people were killed and 17 were injured.

When I heard the first shout of a shooter, I didn't even think to question whether there was a shooter

or not. I knew that shootings at events like these had happened before and the frequency of shootings in America led me to believe that there in fact had been a shooting.

I was almost trained for the moment when I ran into the storage room. Due to the frequency of shootings in America, I knew exactly what I had to do if there was a shooter nearby; I knew that I would need to get away as soon as possible and find as many barriers to bullets as I could — multiple walls and metal racks make great protection against a potential bullet.

My friends and I had attended an event known for bloody zombies laden with bullet holes, but that doesn't mean we were asking for the event to come to real life. We went to Halloween Haunt to have fun. We wanted to get scared of zombies. We didn't want to worry for our lives.

I'm planning on going back to Halloween Haunt this year. At first, I was hesitant because of my past experience. But I want redemption. I want to be able to go to Halloween Haunt and have fun with my friends as I was originally supposed to.

Our experience is not something one should have to worry about when going to an amusement park.

Nobody should have to be afraid of getting shot while having fun. Hopefully this next time, I won't have to run for my life. ♦

SPOOKY SEASON AT 545

Ranking candies that I can't eat

Jas-olantem

Jason Cheng



It's that time of year again. The season of trick-or-treating into the depths of the night, searching for boatloads of candy dressed in outlandish costumes sounds like a whole lot of fun — for everyone except me, at least.

I hope someone out there can relate to my plight — I'm severely limited by my gluten-dairy allergy combo in addition to my extremely health-conscious diet.

So how exactly am I able to rank candy?

Let's start by taking a look at Thrillist's top 30 candy choices ever. Say goodbye to milk chocolate (thanks, allergies): no Reese's, no Snickers, no KitKats, no Butterfingers, no Hershey's bars, no Skittles,

no M&Ms — you get the point.

Luckily, our list is significantly more manageable now. Off the top, Laffy Taffy is out of the running: It takes longer for the sticky debris to detach from your teeth than it takes for your body to digest a five-course meal.

Furthermore, Twizzlers apparently contain gluten — something I had to learn the hard way — so I'm tossing them out too.

Hint: Read the ingredient labels, kids with food allergies.

On a similar note, Tootsie Pops are another security threat for my body.

It's an appealing lollipop on the outside, but the unnecessary addition of a chocolate core makes for a risky ride only to be attempted when I'm feeling adventurous, which is never.

So what's left?

We still haven't mentioned Starbursts, Nerds, Sour Patch Kids, Jolly Ranchers or Airheads: This lineup isn't too alluring, and it doesn't help that we've already sunk to the very bottom of the list without really judging the taste of any candy.

To begin with, Airheads are budget ripoffs of Laffy Taffy, and I really can't seem to enjoy Sour Patch Kids. Candy is meant to be sweet — not sour — and I'll stand by this unpopular opinion for anyone who wants to argue.

I don't mind Nerds, to be honest, although I'm still not fond of shoving flavored pebbles into my mouth for pleasure.

That brings us to our final two contenders: Starbursts and Jolly Ranchers, which are essentially my entire Halloween diet. The fact that yellow and orange Starbursts exist

is a crime, but we'll let it go for now. On the other hand, Jolly Ranchers have so many unnecessarily average flavors (why grape?), and they're another example of teeth-sticking candies.

The final verdict? By the finest of margins, I'm going with — drumroll please ... Starbursts as my candy winner.

While I usually end up wasting half of the Starbursts I receive (we can't be friends if you like orange or lemon), cherry and strawberry are so good that I hoard hundreds of these little squares every Halloween.

I understand that almost no one else thinks of Starbursts as the go-to Halloween candy, but hear me out: Actually try a gluten and dairy-free Halloween once, and you'll see where I'm coming from — it's rough out here in the restricted zone where food allergy-inflicted people like me live. ♦



EXCLUSIVE CONSPIRACY

Hagrid is a death eater



BY Nilay Mishra

Editor's note: This story has been modified for print. The complete version can be found online at saratogafalcon.org.

In the "Harry Potter" series, Rubeus Hagrid is a half-giant who acts as a friend and mentor to Harry. His character adds a sense of loyalty, friendship, kindness and wildness into the books through his various exploits with Harry.

Fans have noticed, however, that there is an abundance of evidence in the books that points to Hagrid being a Death Eater, a follower of the Dark Lord Voldemort. Indeed, while the books characterize Hagrid as a kind man who unintentionally endangers young schoolchildren because of his affinity for dangerous magical creatures, Hagrid might in fact be an evil spy, acting as a confidant to Voldemort for decades.

Here are 17 of the sketchiest instances, in chronological order, that hint at how Hagrid is actually far more powerful than he lets on, purposefully endangering Harry and his friends and working undercover for Lord Voldemort for more than half a century.

Hagrid arrives at Godric's Hollow before Dumbledore, Sirius or the Aurors

There are two underlying issues here: How does Hagrid get there so quickly, and how does Hagrid know that Lily and James Potter, Harry's parents, have just been murdered?

First off, Hagrid is expelled from school in his third year, after being framed for a murder. As a result, his wand is snapped in half and he is banned from using magical transportation. The only way he can reach Godric's Hollow so quickly is through apparition, a difficult magical teleportation method taught in the sixth year.

Additionally, Lily and James are protected under a Fidelius charm. Wormtail, James's secret keeper, is the only person to know their location. Wormtail's betrayal led to the death of Harry's parents.

It can be inferred that the first person to find out that Lily and James had died, however, was Hagrid, as he arrived at their cottage first. The only reasonable explanation for this is if Wormtail spilled the news ahead of time to Voldemort and Hagrid. This would enable Hagrid to reach there before Dumbledore did.

Hagrid flies across a sea unaided

Vernon Dursley, Harry's abusive uncle who raised him after his parents died, decides to move his entire family into a small cabin on an island in the middle of the sea to evade the constant barrage of letters from Hogwarts.

Hagrid manages to casually cross the extremely stormy ocean, without a boat or any aid. While wizards traditionally use broomsticks, thestrals, portkeys and apparition for traveling, Hagrid is unable to use any of these as he is too heavy for the first two and is banned from using the latter two.

Additionally, when asked how he arrived, he states that he flew. The fact that he did not bring anything with him besides some mice in his pocket implies that the flight was unaided.

There are only two other characters who flew unaided in the entire series: Voldemort and Snape (it is implied that Snape learned flying directly from Voldemort).

Therefore, the only people that Hagrid could have learned unaided flight from were Voldemort and Snape. If Voldemort taught it to him, this suggests that Hagrid is a high-ranking Death Eater, as most are not privy to one of the Dark Lord's most prized tricks. It is unlikely that Snape taught it to him, as they rarely interact throughout the series and are not close enough to share such secret knowledge.

Hagrid is the only wizard to know that Voldemort is still alive, and hints at Horcruxes

Early on in the series, Hagrid tells Harry about the latter's origin, and how Harry's parents were brutally murdered by Lord Voldemort.

In fact, Hagrid specifically said, "Some say he [Lord Voldemort] died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die... he's still out there somewhere but lost his powers. Too weak to carry on."

This shows that Hagrid believes Voldemort is alive, an opinion the rest of the Wizarding Community fails to acknowledge until the end of "The Order of the Phoenix." Additionally, Hagrid is eerily specific in his prediction. It is later revealed that after Voldemort is destroyed, he is left as a powerless spirit without a body and is abandoned by most of his followers.

He also alludes to the existence of Horcruxes, physical containers that store pieces of Voldemort's soul and allow him to achieve immortality as long as the containers remain intact. In particular, Hagrid recognizes that Voldemort "did not have enough human in him to die," which refers to the fact that his soul was not intact.

Hagrid sets the stage for young Harry to face Voldemort on his own

Hagrid sets off a lengthy chain of events that eventually lead to young Harry having his second encounter with the most feared dark wizard known.

First, he piques Harry's interest in a package that he stores in a vault at Gringotts. This package contains the Sorcerer's Stone, a source of immortality and never-ending wealth. Hagrid deliberately points out its confidentiality, exclusivity and need for secrecy and concealment — as if a confidential and exclusive stone would never peak a child's interest.

Additionally, after Harry and his friends encounter the three-headed dog Fluffy guarding the Sorcerer's Stone in a forbidden corridor, Hagrid "accidentally" lets them know that the only people who should be concerned with what's there are Nicholas Flamel and Dumb-

ledore. Because Flamel is the alchemist who created the stone, Harry and his friends are able to connect the dots and discover what was hidden.

Not content yet, Hagrid invites them to his home and spells everything out for them, not overly concerned with the fact that they unearthed such a top-secret fact.

Finally, Hagrid explicitly tells Harry how to get past the three-headed-dog, his own magical safeguard, enabling Harry and his friends to end up face-to-face with none other than Lord Voldemort.

Hagrid is caught shopping in Knockturn Alley

Knockturn Alley is essentially the shady ghetto area of magical London, where dark wizards, hags and goblins buy artifacts and conduct illegal trade and business. When Harry accidentally ends up there after mispronouncing the name of his destination, he is visibly distressed and scared.

Soon, however, he finds Rubeus Hagrid, who had been shopping there earlier in the day.

Why was Hagrid shopping at the sketchiest place explicitly mentioned in the books? Apparently, he was buying gardening supplies that help grow his cabbages on the grounds at Hogwarts. However, those items are relatively mundane and can be found in many places other than Knockturn Alley.

More likely, Hagrid, a Death Eater himself, was there for the reason that all the other shifty characters frequent the place: its unparalleled repertoire of books, artifacts and

contraptions that make it a haven for dark magic practitioners.

Voldemort never harmed Hagrid

In "The Deathly Hallows," Hagrid is supposedly brought to Voldemort's headquarters directly by deadly acromantulas. As a member of the Order, Hagrid would be tortured by Voldemort for information under reasonable circumstances. At the very least, he would face attack and insults from the rest of the Death Eaters.

Instead, he was relatively unharmed when Harry surrendered himself to Voldemort. Hagrid barely had any scratches, and had done almost no fighting at all. This was peculiar as he had landed right next to Voldemort, who would have little use of a professor so loyal to Dumbledore.

However, if Hagrid was a Death Eater who was actually supposed to be there, the headquarters would be a retreat for him rather than a warzone. It would explain the lack of hostilities and the lack of violence that the acromantulas had toward him.

The only Death Eater that Hagrid harms is Walden Macnair, whom he had a personal grudge against

The first and only time in the series where Hagrid directly fights Death Eaters occurs at the end of the last book, where he throws a Death Eater named Macnair against a wall, knocking the latter unconscious.

The catch is that Hagrid had been angry at Macnair for four years, as Macnair was going to execute one of Hagrid's beloved pets, a hippogriff named Buckbeak. While Buckbeak was eventually saved, the resentment and anger remained.

It is noteworthy that Hagrid did not harm even one of the other Death Eaters. Despite being in a full-on battle, he is unwilling or unable to harm other Death Eaters.

The most likely explanation for this is, once again, that Hagrid himself was a Death Eater and in a precarious position. He was able to maintain appearances that he was fighting them off, while in reality he had no intention of hurting any of them.

There is overwhelming evidence throughout all seven of the Harry Potter books that Hagrid is actually a secret Death Eater, or a servant of the Dark Lord Voldemort. For a "Harry Potter" aficionado like me, finding unintended tidbits like these and fan theories are part of the joy in re-reading the series dozens of times.

No matter how many times true fans read the series, they can always find something new or unexpected to ponder. ♦

Reading fanfictions, if you do it correctly, can be the best vehicle for a quick getaway from reality

Sellin' a fanfi-chen

Selina Chen

While I had always been marginally aware of the existence of fan fiction, it felt as elusive as the deeper meaning behind Mr. Yim's calculus lectures. That is, until I came across fan fiction while working on a research paper last year, and the glimpse of this fascinating community spurred me to make explorations.

AO3 shutdown in China

For a Stanford class I took in my sophomore year on contemporary China, I wrote my final research paper on the Chinese media's prohibition and commodification of homosexuality. It included a case study on the scandal involving "Untamed," a Chinese breakout drama aired in the summer of 2019 that gained immense fame for its actors, specifically Xiao Zhan.

The show's popularity prompted fans to write numerous erotic fan fictions between the two male stars. On Archive of Our Own (AO3), an international repository for fan fiction, a book

named "Falling" elicited anger from Xiao's fans who believed that the piece hurted the image of their idol, feminizing and sexualizing him. In February 2020, they began a massive online movement to report "Falling" to the Chinese censors, who then made the AO3 platform entirely inaccessible in China.

Blaming Xiao for the website's shutdown, AO3 users launched a boycott of the all the products he was endorsing and the TV series itself, resulting in low ratings. Brands such as Estée Lauder deleted their promotional materials featuring Xiao, whose viral status and flawless public image were ruined.

Fan fiction website explorations

I was shocked by the sheer number of users who could be so outraged at losing the ability to read fan fiction, so I decided to find out what exactly was so enticing about this genre.

A quick Google search yielded Wattpad as a platform for fan fiction, and its beautiful website design lured me in. I typed in the first fandom that came to mind — Harry Potter — and set out to skim a few stories.

A few days in, I came to a rather unflattering verdict: Wattpad's contents do not live up to its UX (user experience) team's efforts. Although a few stories have genuinely good writing, many more are juvenile attempts written by elementary schoolers or the equivalent — cute, but far from what I'd like to read.

Worse, most of the stories had racy content that made me stop reading

immediately (and wouldn't be appropriate to publish in The Falcon). Seriously, what happened to having plots?

I decided to try out AO3, despite its subpar website design that looks akin to the first generation of Internet Explorer.

Soon, I discovered that AO3 is an absolute goldmine if, and only if, one uses the "Sort and Filter" functions properly. By weeding out certain ratings and categories, I avoided the "Contents that Must Not Be Named," allowing myself to explore stories without grimacing.

Next, I learned to have the system sort the works by "Kudos," which are essentially "Likes" anyone can leave on the stories they enjoyed. This way, the stories that show up on top are the ones readers truly love. I was pleasantly surprised by the excellent writing — by my amateur judgement, some AO3 works are neck-to-neck with published novels.

But if you just want a light-hearted story, then fanfiction is one of the best guilty-pleasures to have.

My favorite discovery was AO3's ability to filter by word limits. Because reading fan fiction is solely meant for relaxation, I didn't want to get hooked by million-word-long books that were overly time-consuming on a school night. Instead, if I wanted a quick story to fill in the short break between classes, I entered a range of 1,000-2,000 words. If I just had an upsetting experience or got undesirable results at a speech tournament, I'd choose the 10,000-20,000 limit and give myself an hour to get over any negative emotions of a stressful day.

Scouting my favorites genres of fan fictions

As I got more comfortable with AO3 and the fan fiction jargon — like "AU," "drabble" or "one-shot" — I learned to add tags like "Humor" and cross out tags of things I don't want to read. I know that on principle I shouldn't be only



reading what fits my liking — I follow Fox News on Instagram for the exact purpose of listening to the "other side" — but I think I can be excused with something as trivial as fan fiction.

Aside from Harry Potter, I've read from fandoms like Marvel and Sherlock Holmes — popular movies or shows I didn't love because of certain elitist or flat characters to whom I couldn't relate. In fan fiction, however, such characters are given rounded backstories and arcs that sometimes exceed the original.

My favorite work thus far is a 228,000-word book, "Life in Reverse" by Lise that I indulged in over summer — insanely long, I know, but totally worth it. The work imagined an alternative universe in which Marvel character Loki falls to Earth post-"Thor" and finds a home in SHIELD. Unlike many other Loki-centric fan fictions, this Loki's villainous identity isn't erased with a rushed and far-fetched redemption; rather, he slowly reckons with guilt and kindness, influenced by the humans around him. Under Lise's pen, the trickster god becomes a morally-ambiguous but relatable character who struggles with internalized racism and, in a memorable scene, seeks the help of a therapist upon experiencing some suicidal thoughts.

We're all familiar with the comparison of a good book to a best friend. Fan fiction isn't exactly like a best friend, but I'd say it's like a friendly face in your calculus class that understands your suffering; spending time with them a couple times a week always brings a smile to your face. ♦

Although fan fiction has been a constant companion to help me relax in stressful times, it simply does not have the same literary value as most books published by professional printing presses. However, I was inspired to write about my experience after a conversation with my friend, who marveled at how confidently I admit I read fan fiction. Further inquiries made me realize that people often view fan fiction in a tainted light because it's oversimplified to the "Content that Must Not Be Named" and nothing else.

But reading fan fiction shouldn't be something to be ashamed of. Sure, if you read the said content, then please kindly keep that hush-hush, thank you very much. But if you just want a light-hearted story to cheer you up, then I'd say fan fiction is one of the best guilty-pleasures to have.

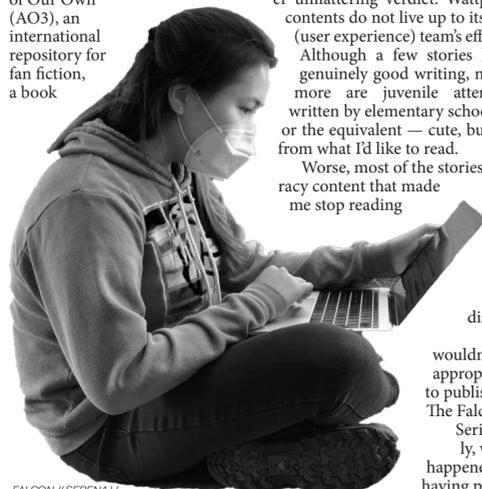
Community of writers on AO3 Beyond the works themselves, AO3 harbors a vibrant writing community. Within the "comments" section, countless users leave constructive critiques on the author's characterization. Occasionally, a writer shares their

personal struggles and readers respond with words of encouragement. With anonymity and without the burden of publication, writers are free to explore unconventional styles, resulting in innovative storytelling techniques that have opened my eyes to new writing possibilities.

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FALCON // SERENALI

The BYE BYE MAN followed me out of movie

A POWERFUL, SHADOWY FIGURE THAT HAUNTS YOUR MIND, THIS CREATURE MESSED WITH MY 13-YEAR-OLD SELF

Bye-jamin Leave

Benjamin Li

As the coin slowly rolled across the floor, behind my wall and under my bed, I pulled the blanket tighter around my body, desperately trying not to overthink.

A second coin hit the floor. That sound shattered my hopes: *It's the Bye Bye Man, I thought.* I'm screwed.

The Bye Bye Man is the antagonist from the 2017 movie "Bye Bye Man." Starring Douglas Smith, Lucien Laviscount, and Cressinda Bonas as a trio of protagonists, this film suffered from heavy criticism. The main complaints were that it seemed like a series of randomly strung together ideas

and its cinematography was "lifeless." This led to an abysmal rating of 19% of Rotten Tomatoes as critics dubbed it a film to watch for those who sought "so bad it was good" films.

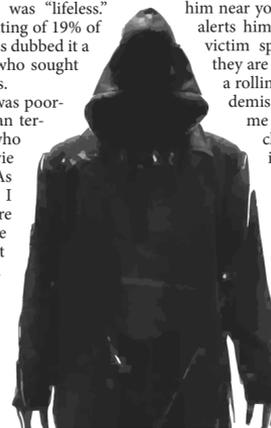
Although the movie was poorly made, it was more than terrifying enough to me, who snuck glances at the movie in untimely intervals. As the first horror movie I watched, each jump scare and tension filled scene was amplified at least ten-fold. My imagination during the times I hid my face away did not help either.

The Bye Bye Man was a monster who hunted using logic defying means — thinking of his name brings

him near you and speaking it out loud alerts him of your location. Once a victim speaks his name out loud, they are tormented by the sound of a rolling coin until their dramatic demise. This absolutely terrified me at age 13: I forced myself to clear my mind like a monk in training, and bury myself under my covers for comfort.

The nightmare started when I watched the film at my friend's sleepover in 8th grade. Huddled together, we snuck peeks at the TV in the living room and went through a series of

After weeks of going to sleep with music pumping into my ears to drown out the eerie silence, the Bye Bye Man eventually left me alone. From sticking my foot outside my blanket to sleeping without facing the wall, I took slow steps in overcoming my fear. In short, saying goodbye to the Bye Bye Man was a huge relief, one that I still think about occasionally today. ♦



Courtesy of WALLPAPER CAVE

Yearbook enrollment drops; freshmen join staff

BY Christina Chang

When yearbook editor-in-chief (EIC) senior Savannah Lin was first informed by journalism adviser Michael Tyler that the Yearbook class would be combined with Journalism 1 this year because of low enrollment, she was extremely nervous. Never before had a group of untrained freshmen been directly funneled into an advanced publication class.

“The numbers this year fell off a cliff in a way that I’ve never seen,” Tyler said.

In previous years, freshmen couldn’t go directly into publication classes due to the high number of students in newspaper and yearbook coupled with the fact that Journalism 1 teaches concepts that are crucial to the quality of the yearbook and newspaper.

However, the trend is that enrollment has been on a decline: 10 years ago, Tyler would get around 90 sign-ups for Journalism 1; last year, there were 40; this year, only 18.

Additionally, there were only 12 returning students in yearbook instead of the usual 20 to 30.

If this trend continues, Tyler speculates that the school may likely be down to one yearbook staff and one newspaper staff within the next two years. (There are currently two newspaper staffs; periods 3 and 4.)

“I think journalism has great value, and it’d be really sad for a school not to have a place for kids interested in writing and current events to express themselves,” Tyler said. “Students are the ones who are documenting what goes on here on a daily, weekly and yearly basis. And if you don’t have that going on, then what happens here doesn’t get documented nearly as well. So, it’s puzzling to me that more kids aren’t interested in being storytellers.”

Tyler attributes the dwindling journalism enrollment to the low attendance of the online Electives Night last year and the growing student interest in primarily STEM subjects.

He has also noticed far fewer students willing to try new things that don’t align with their strengths, which has contributed to smaller class sizes for non-STEM electives.

“[Exploring interests] is really a valuable thing at the high school level,” Tyler said. “The pre-professionalism that this school is going toward isn’t the direction I would choose. I think there’s time for some of those things in college and beyond.”

The first-year yearbook students (traditionally called yearbies) are currently working on their second story cycle, and freshman Divya Vadlakonda said even writing one story already has given her some experience to fall back on.

Still, she said she would’ve preferred taking a Journalism 1 class beforehand.

According to Vadlakonda, learning the journalism concepts and difficult design programs in depth before jumping straight into the fast pace of publication assignments would have been easier.

Although she has found herself constantly relying on her peers as the yearbook concepts were only taught briefly, having other yearbies in the class has provided a sense of comfort.

“I think I would feel more unprepared if I was in a class with people who already had prior experience, but the class is mainly comprised of freshmen who are in the same boat as I am,” Vadlakonda said.

“It’s less scary knowing that I am not the only person confused or feeling overwhelmed because they aren’t used to this. Knowing that we’re doing it together makes

it easier because we know we have each other to lean on.”

Nonetheless, she said veteran staffers, EICs and Tyler have displayed great leadership in pointing the yearbies in the right direction.

Freshman Timothy Leung, on the other hand, said he has enjoyed going directly into the publication class.

Because Leung has been video editing with Adobe After Effects since third grade as a hobby, he is more acquainted with the Adobe applications the class uses.

“I kind of like going straight into yearbook, because I feel like I went in with some prior knowledge, especially with design,” Leung said. “I don’t mind it going really fast because even though it’s challenging, it’s fun.”

Leung said that a problem he, along with the other freshmen in the class, has faced is a lack of knowledge about the school. Despite being completely unfamiliar to the campus, staff and school traditions, yearbies are sent out to cover every aspect of the school for the yearbook. Still, he said he’s had a great time on the yearbook staff thus far.



Freshman Timothy Leung works on a spread about Homecoming week for the Talisman.

Because this year’s yearbies didn’t have the opportunity to take Journalism 1, the students who decide to go into the newspaper staff next year may lack the skills to write opinion stories or other ambitious feature stories.

These skills are aspects of journalism that are covered in traditional Journalism 1 but aren’t needed for yearbook.

With the staff starting to work on deadlines and spreads that will be used in the actual yearbook, Tyler expects the first couple of cycles to be a big learning curve before seeing improvements.

“The editors are still very motivated and ambitious, and we’re wanting to produce another great book this year, which I’m confident that we will,” Tyler said. “The yearbook is really all about hard work, so it just depends on how much work they’re willing to do.”

“The EIC philosophy is to just throw them in shark-infested waters so they can learn by themselves.”

SENIOR Savannah Lin

From the EICs’ perspective, Yearbook has been going better than initially anticipated. Lin was surprised to see that their journalism crash course worked well, and how self-sufficient the new staffers have been.

“Of course, there is difficulty because the yearbies are new, but the EIC philosophy is to just throw them in shark-infested waters so they can learn by themselves,” Lin said.

However, Lin has faced a few challenges as EIC.

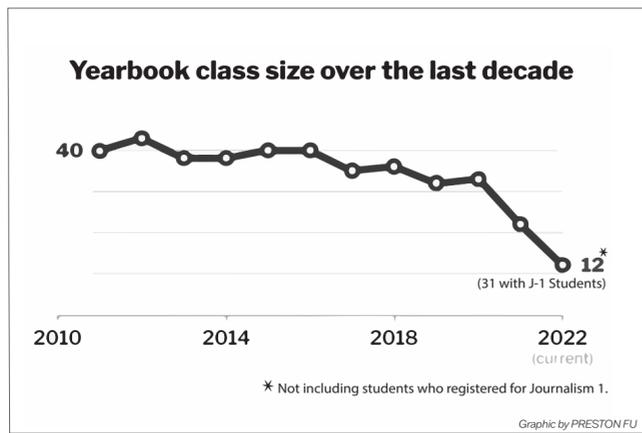
Before, she just had to focus on carrying her own load and finishing spreads.

Now, she has to teach yearbies on top of helping others in the class, designing the yearbook and facilitating the entire process.

Lin said she and the three other EICs — seniors Emma Foley, Isabel Lee and Alissa Doemling — have been lenient on deadlines so far. But as yearbies get accustomed to the yearbook environment, they will begin to push for tighter deadlines.

Tyler said that although it is too early in the year to be sure, he’s optimistic about the yearbook’s success.

However, he is hoping to go back to a separate Journalism 1 class next school year because it provides the foundational concepts for future publication classes.



>> falconfigures

- 18 Freshmen come into journalism for the first time
- 3 Sophomores directly join the publication as new staffers
- 6 Juniors return to the program for another year
- 6 Seniors lead the publication of the Yearbook

AP Environmental Science combined with regular class

BY Nilay Mishra

For the first time, all four periods of Kristen Thomson’s environmental science classes have a combination of AP Environmental Science and college prep Environmental Science students.

The number of non-AP Environmental Science students in each period ranges from one to three, with a total of nine students taking the course.

Thomson said the goal of offering students the option to enroll in non-AP Environmental Science was to make material generally reserved for APES more accessible to students who wish to learn it without the heavy workload and pressure that comes with AP classes and to ease the scheduling difficulties of dropping the AP version of the class.

“If you walk into a class, you shouldn’t be able to tell the difference between an AP student and a non-AP student,” Thomson said. “They’re learning the exact same material and the curriculum is accessible to both groups.”

“Everyone just feels the same. We often forget that there’s a distinction between AP and non-AP.”

JUNIOR Mary Campbell

According to Thomson, the primary differences between the two groups of students are assessments and labs.

Both APES and regular Environmental Science students are expected to keep up



Environmental Science teacher Kristen Thomson lectures to her 4th period class on Oct. 19.

with class readings, but APES students have daily homework quizzes while regular students are only required to take notes on the readings.

Additionally, Thomson prepares a different version of each test for regular Environmental Science students, with the intention to make the test more conceptual, rather than asking the critical thinking and skills-based questions the AP exam tends to ask.

In the past, Thomson has created several versions of each test for her AP Environmental Science classes.

As such, she is used to creating multiple versions of tests, and does not feel that creating the regular Environmental Science tests was particularly challenging or time-consuming.

“For AP tests, I have to review them and

make sure that each version is at approximately the same level of difficulty,” Thomson said. “For my non-AP tests, I don’t have the same issue. It’s often just a matter of lowering the amount of questions and simplifying them.”

In order to encourage regular Environmental Science students to study the subject rather than stress about the grade, Thomson also removes several questions from labs in order to further facilitate a lighter workload for non-AP students.

For example, she often does not require the CER, or “Claim-Evidence-Reasoning,” paragraphs for regular Environmental Science students’ labs.

Additionally, Thomson emphasized that students who wanted to transfer from AP Environmental Science to regular Environ-

mental Science before the deadline would be able to keep the exact same schedule.

The goal of this was to incentivize students to make the right decision for themselves without the pressure of scheduling constraints.

Junior Mary Campbell, a student taking the non-AP pathway, said she finds that the class is fun and engaging, but provides a more relaxed workload.

She believes that the culture of the class is inclusive and that there is no stigma against regular Environmental Science students.

“Everyone just feels the same,” Campbell said. “We often forget that there’s a distinction between AP and non-AP.”

Campbell also said she enjoys the class’s labs and projects more than the reading and quizzes.

Enrolling in the regular class made sense for her because she can spend more time engaging with the material interactively without being bogged down in studying for difficult tests and completing homework quizzes.

Thomson wants to make sure that all students who wish to learn environmental science have a supportive environment, regardless of whether or not they want to take an AP class.

“I opened it up this way because I didn’t feel right that the curriculum was exclusive to AP students,” Thomson said. “My main goal is to retain as many people in the sciences.”

In particular, Thomson wants students genuinely interested in the subject but unwilling or unable to commit to an AP-level workload to be able to gain exposure to the subject material.

“It has always killed me when students loved environmental science but found it too hard,” Thomson said. “That’s exactly what I’m trying to prevent here.”

Junior creates platform for students to share mental health stories

BY Christina Chang & Shreya Rallabandi

When junior Allison Tan posted her mental health story on her Instagram account on Nov. 2, 2020, she was met with a flood of supportive texts and messages. A year later, when Tan created @semicolonsaratoga, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “building better lives for people all over the world faced with mental illness.” The semicolon symbolizes a point where an author, instead of cutting off their sentence, has chosen to continue on — an encouragement to those struggling with mental illness to actively push to continue on instead of cutting off their lives.



Tan

“After I posted my own story on my Instagram, I started thinking about [starting the account] more. I thought, why not? I know why I do it, and if people don’t see it that way, that’s OK,” Tan said.

Students may anonymously submit content to be posted via a Google form in the account’s Instagram bio. Though most of the posted submissions are stories of mental health experiences, the account also welcomes other forms of art such as poetry that focus on the topic. So far, @semicolonsaratoga has posted 31 submissions.

Each post begins with a content warning to alert social media users of potentially triggering content, which is then followed by the anonymous submission.

One student detailed their struggles with body image in being skinny and underweight coupled with an invalidation of their mental health and body-shaming experi-

ences. Another described their experience with depression, self harm and substance abuse, along with Redwood’s lousy job in providing students with mental health resources and support.

Tan captions each post with a heartfelt message of encouragement to the submitter. She was inspired by Project Semicolon, a nonprofit organization dedicated to “building better lives for people all over the world

faced with mental illness.” The semicolon symbolizes a point where an author, instead of cutting off their sentence, has chosen to continue on — an encouragement to those struggling with mental illness to actively push to continue on instead of cutting off their lives.

Tan also said she took inspiration from the Instagram account @metoo.losgatos, which is still up but now remains mostly inactive as the creator is a Class of 2021 LGHS graduate. The account was created in July 2020 and posted anonymous submissions accounting sexual assault and harassment at Los Gatos High while aiming to bring awareness to the rape culture at the school.

Soon after creating the account, Tan realized she would need support if complications involving a submission with possible legal implications were to arise. Thus, she added her two friends, juniors Elsa Blom and Jasmine Ispasiou, onto the Instagram account. Tan said she related to them and their personal mental health journeys, so

she believed they would be a great fit to help run the account with her.

The account went public on July 7, 2021, and by the second to third day, @semicolonsaratoga received around “six to 10 responses.”

“I remember being so excited,” Tan said. “I was messaging Jasmine and Elsa in all caps, saying, ‘Oh my gosh, we have more responses!’ That made me so happy.”

The next day, they received even more. Along with the submissions came an outpouring of support and gratitude.

“I was just so happy that people were able to trust me because I know how difficult it is to share that kind of thing with someone, especially someone you barely know,” Tan recounted.

This overwhelmingly positive response was a bit surprising for Tan, who mentioned that her primary concern had been backlash from the student body for being too performative.

“I was always very scared that it might come off as performative or not helpful,” Tan said. “So having people tell me that it’s great that I started @semicolonsaratoga or that it really helped them feel less alone

makes me feel a lot better. They make me feel like I started it for a good reason.”

According to Tan, while the wellness center and CASSY do a lot to help students, more time and focus needs to be spent on dismantling the “high pressure cooker academic culture” at SHS.

Ispasiou shares a similar view and believes that the highly academic culture of the school pushes too many students beyond healthy limits.

“At the end of the day, what matters most is your ability to get up each day and function — whether that be just waking up and going back to sleep, brushing your teeth or doing your homework,” Ispasiou said. “Mental health is joked about, like ‘I’m going to kill myself because I stayed up late doing this assignment, I pulled an all-nighter, like, oh my god, I’m going to die.’ I think it’s just stupid.”

Ispasiou has submitted to @semicolonsaratoga twice; both times, she received heartfelt comments.

“Not everyone is going to be comfortable with sharing their story, even anonymously with the vaguest bits of detail,” she said. “If there’s someone out there who is comfortable enough to share, [@semicolonsaratoga] can help.”

Juniors initiate new club exploring ethics and tech

BY Atrey Desai & Aiden Ye

During the first Ethics in Technology club meeting on Sept. 13, members excitedly voiced their opinions about different fields of ethics that they wanted to learn more about.

“Ethics in Tech is going to cover our namesake topic in much more depth than other technical clubs have.”

JUNIOR Isha Goswami

riculum to cover the new topics more thoroughly.

Goswami became interested in starting the club after a lengthy discussion with Fung during former English 10 and AP Government/Econ teacher Melissa Hesselgraves’ end-of-year Social Justice Project, in which students were tasked with presenting different social justice issues. Other officers include senior vice president Riya Lodha and junior secretary Anika Verma.

The club hopes to introduce students to major problems in the technology industry that are often overlooked, such as privacy of personal information, algorithmic biases and

regulation of the tech sector.

“Most students from SHS will go onto tech-oriented jobs, so if they can take what they learn here in high school, they can definitely improve the tech industry later on,” Goswami said.

In order to raise more awareness on the topic, Goswami aims to host future combined meetings with Wellness Club and AI Club, interspersed with individual club meetings, every blue Monday in Intro to Computer Science teacher Sara Tseng’s room.

She believes that by working with these clubs, Ethics in Technology Club can show that these seemingly vastly different disciplines actually have a lot

in common with each other.

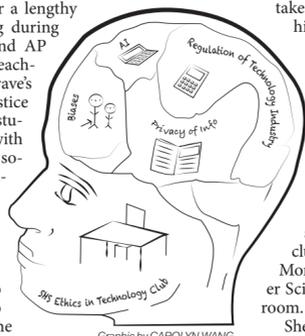
In the beginning, there were a few technical difficulties during their first meeting, but the officers managed to lay out the roadmap of the topics for the next eight meetings.

In the end, they also held a vote with club members to decide on topics important to them.

Goswami also hopes to bring in guest speakers from colleges who will share their experiences and the real-life implications of ethics.

The club has already scheduled a speaker series with Dr. Peter Hurlbut, a psychology professor from UC Berkeley, for late November.

“Ethics in Tech is going to cover our namesake topic in much more depth than other technical clubs have,” Goswami said. “Most other tech clubs cover very specific, technical topics, such as AI or computer development, leaving an important niche for this club to fill.”



Graphic by CAROLYN WANG

togatalks

What are your thoughts on semicolon saratoga?

“It’s impactful how they destigmatize mental health by providing a support platform.”



junior Stanley Yang

“The most valuable thing about it is giving students a safe place that’s free of judgement.”



junior Elsa Blom

“The organization is great because, often in Saratoga, mental health isn’t taken into account.”



senior Amitav Rawat

Indian-American freshman reconciles with her heritage

When freshman Dahlia Murthy's classmates called her a "coconut" in third grade, she didn't understand what it meant. Murthy eventually realized why people had assigned the nickname to her; it was the same reason strangers in shopping malls unabashedly asked her if she was adopted when she was out shopping with her mother. "When they called me a coconut, they meant I was brown on the outside and white on the inside," Murthy said. "And when I got older, I realized that that's probably what people would see me as for the rest of my life."

Murthy's father was born and raised in North India, while her mother — of Scandinavian descent — is white. Murthy's parents met in San Francisco after her father joined the hospital where her mother worked.

Initially, her father's side of the family was skeptical and dismissive of their relationship because her mother was Caucasian.

But over time, her father's family overcame the cultural stigma around interracial marriage and accepted Murthy's mother as one of their own.

Murthy's late grandmother on her mother's side helped Murthy connect to her Scandinavian heritage by translating Finnish literature and poetry to English.

Connecting to her Indian culture was a bigger challenge for Murthy. Her Indian

relatives in the U.S. mostly lived on the East Coast, and she only got to see them on holidays like Thanksgiving.

Murthy felt her family was isolated from their extended South Asian relatives.

Despite growing up in Saratoga, which has a thriving Indian community, Murthy said she didn't take the time to immerse herself in Indian culture.

Her father helped her find ties to her culture through food, one of the most significant aspects of Indian culture.

Murthy explained that her dad puts effort into introducing her family to Indian dishes, and has encouraged her mother to learn how to cook these meals as well.

Despite her early struggles in connecting to her Indian heritage, Murthy has made peace with both sides of her culture.

She plans to partake in more cultural activities over the course of high school, like the annual Bombay in the Bay production.

"I definitely have some regrets and do wish that I incorporated more of the culture on both sides of my family, but it just didn't happen," Murthy said. "It's something we live with and I think I'm finally okay with that. I'm incredibly proud of both sides of my culture, and I'm going to keep trying to be connected [to them] in the future."



Murthy

Sophomore balances three different cultural influences

Sophomore Jarrett Singh's parents' interracial marriage has always been a major source of family conflict. While his parents were both born and raised in Malaysia, his father is of Indian descent and his mother is of Chinese descent.

Singh said he has memories of his mother's tension with her parents, both of whom opposed her marriage to an Indian man; his paternal grandmother was also against the marriage because she wanted his father to marry an Indian woman.

Despite these family's issues, Singh is on good terms with his aunts, uncles and cousins in China and Malaysia. Though building relationships with them was difficult because of the geographical distance, his extended family was accepting and friendly when he visited them in Asia.

Singh said his parents' Malaysian upbringing had just as much of an influence on their parenting as their Chinese and Indian cultural backgrounds.

He believes that the differences in Chinese and Indian culture that would typically be present in a multiracial relationship are much less drastic in his parents' relationship because they both grew up in Malaysia — despite the lack of cultural assimilation between different ethnic groups in the country, his parents were exposed to many different cultures growing up.

According to Singh, growing up

surrounded by cultural diversity in Malaysia made his parents much more comfortable with being in an interracial relationship than they would have been if they were raised in India or China.

Another important factor in their parenting styles is that Singh's parents served in the military before college — as a result, Singh explained, his upbringing was "military-style" with strict rules and routines, which heavily contributed to his sense of discipline today.

Although he feels a slightly stronger connection to his Chinese side due to stronger family ties to his mother's relatives; he said he has a strong connection to his culture through food.

"We shop at India Cash and Carry as much as we do at Ranch 99," Singh said. "There was never a question of whether we would have a Chinese lunch or Indian dinner — things were always very mixed."

Even though his family is multiracial, Singh has always felt welcome and included in the Saratoga community.

Because of the large percentage of both Chinese and Indian students, he said his mixed race background has rarely felt like a burden — instead, Singh appreciates the diverse perspectives and experiences he was exposed to as a result of his unique heritage.

"I don't think I've faced any discrimination here in Saratoga," Singh said. "It's helped me enjoy the experience of being multiracial, rather than worry about it."



Singh

MULTIETHNIC SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS

BY: TaraNatajara & SarahThomas

Colorism leads to senior's struggles to connect with both of her family's cultures

Ever since senior Maya Vasudev was a child, she and her family loved visiting San Jose's Little Saigon, home to many Vietnamese American people as well as an abundance of Vietnamese shops and restaurants. Her mother, who is Tai Dam — an ethnic minority near Vietnam and Laos — often took Vasudev and her siblings there to visit.

On one of her family's visits to Little Saigon, Vasudev's mother and sister were sitting on a bench waiting for Vasudev to finish shopping. Throughout the day, Vasudev had noticed that she was treated differently than her siblings and she knew why.

Vasudev said that, unlike herself, her mother and grandma — who are both Tai Dam — and her sisters looked like the majority of shoppers in Little Saigon.

Vasudev's mother and grandmother are light-skinned Asians, and her sister is white-passing. Vasudev, however, has brown skin.

As Vasudev approached her family on

the bench, a woman sitting next to her family got up and moved away.

"I sat down and the lady gave me a weird look and moved all the way to the other side of the bench," Vasudev said. "The reason why that hurt in particular is because my family is literally from Vietnam. I realized that even with people who are your own or close to your own — they sometimes won't want you because you don't look like them."

Vasudev is half Vietnamese, a quarter South Indian and a quarter white — her mom is Tai Dam and her dad is half Norwegian-Lithuanian and half South Indian. She said she has had a difficult time grappling with her identity and figuring out how to connect equally with all parts of her background.

Vasudev felt pressured to choose a single part of her culture to connect to, and didn't realize that she could identify as multiracial until two years ago. She felt like she had to 'pick and choose' between her cultures when asked what race she was, and didn't

realize there was a label for people who were of multiple races.

Since Tai Dam people are a very small indigenous minority, Vasudev said she felt more motivated to learn about that aspect of her heritage. Due to her Indian and white heritage, she looked different

from most of her mother's relatives and she said that she struggled to feel like she was actually Tai Dam.

According to Vasudev, she was not exposed to her father's culture much, since she was never truly close to his family. She also found herself denying parts of her Indian heritage and disengaging from family events due to the effect colorism had on her.

"I never really involved myself in [Indian] culture that much as a kid," Vasudev said. "There was this one time where we went to India and went to my relatives' house. [In certain Indian cultures] when you leave the house, they'll give you a [tilak]. I didn't know what it was so I just wiped it off. I think it was more of, 'I don't want anything to do with that because I don't want to be [Indian].'"

Because of this, Vasudev struggled to connect with Indian Americans as well as the Vietnamese American students who she said didn't look like her and often had different cultural experiences than her at school.

Another factor that prevented Vasudev from relating to her different ethnicities was the language barrier: She isn't fluent in Vietnamese, Hindi or Kannada, the southwestern Indian language spoken by her dad's family. Vasudev added that she was never exposed to these languages growing up, which she regrets.

"It's kind of sad because language, in particular, is something that people bond over, and I never had that," Vasudev said.

Although Vasudev struggled with her identity for a long time, she came to the realization that it is important for her to acknowledge all parts of her heritage equally; recently, she has been making an effort to connect with her Indian family through attending family events, speaking more to her father about his childhood and trying more Indian food.

Strong figures in her life like her grandmother have helped her come to terms with her identity. Vasudev recalled opening up to her grandmother about not looking like many people from Tai Dam, and remembered her grandmother saying that she would always be Tai Dam regardless of her appearance.

"I know that it may just be something that's little, but it really does mean a lot to me," Vasudev said.



TACKLING THE DROUGHT

CITY, STATE AND FEDERAL OFFICIALS SHED LIGHT ON COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO COMBAT PARCHED CONDITIONS

By CiciXu

On Herriman Avenue just out front of the school, recent renovations echoed a trend that is occurring all over the state: At three houses, dry, brown grass lawns have been replaced with new soil and drought-resistant bushes — landscaping meant to cut down on water usage.

Scientists say the West is experiencing its worst drought in 1,200 years, evidenced best by the low depth of water at the Hoover Dam in Lake Mead. Lake Mead, the largest reservoir in the U.S., supplies 55 to 60 percent of California's water.

However, as of Sept. 25, its water level had dropped 161 feet below the level classified as full. This record-low water level poses risks to around 40 million people in Arizona, California, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada and Mexico.

Although visible impacts of the drought aren't always obvious in Saratoga and other suburban communities, the same privilege does not apply to other impacted and neighboring states (past Supreme Court cases such as Arizona v. California put California water rights above other western states).

Advocates say the crisis calls for city, county, state and

federal attention toward re-assessing the collective progress of sustainable development as well as mitigation and adaptation plans for environmental advancements.

County, state and federal governments impose restrictions

According to the book "State of America's Water Resource" by David McNabb, climate change disrupts traditional precipitation patterns and raises sea levels through the melting of polar sea and land ice, causing saltwater intrusion into freshwater. This also makes safe and clean drinking water less accessible. These factors collectively increase the severity of drought triggered by climate change.

Rep. Anna Eshoo, who represents Saratoga and other Bay Area cities in the U.S. House, said that the federal government was forced to implement water usage restrictions as a result of drought — including a recent decision in which President Biden ordered the rationing of Nevada and Arizona water usage.

This plan that Biden carried out followed the federal drought mitigation policy 2007 Drought Contingency Plan (DCP), which authorized reduction of water allocation from Arizona's Central Arizona Project — a canal that directs water to population centers in Arizona — whenever

water levels of Lake Mead dropped below 1,075 feet.

Though California's water allocation has not been reduced yet, Eshoo said California's superiority in water appropriation will not last long if the drought exacerbates.

In response to the drought on the state-level, Gov. Gavin Newsom extended the drought emergency proclamation — initially created in May — to include Santa Clara County on July 18. This proclamation immediately led to stricter enforcement of water usage rules, prohibiting illegal activities like cleaning hard-surfaced sidewalks with water and irrigating between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. for more than 15 minutes a day.

Water sources vary across the county. The water supply of the South County of Santa Clara is almost 100 percent from groundwater through the drilling of wells. In Saratoga, the city draws much of its water from the Saratoga Creek, which is a surface water tributary that originates from the Santa Cruz Mountains and seeps through Saratoga through natural runoff. The water supply from the Saratoga Creek is supplemented by water from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD).

In response to the exacerbating drought, Saratoga is solely adhering to the water usage rule from the county-level drought emergency proclamation. Though no additional drought restrictions are imposed on Saratoga by the city council, SCVWD encourages voluntary conservation of water through daily actions like taking shorter showers and advises well owners to create a zone of protection in

keeping the water source clean.

Politicians call for climate infrastructure investment

Water shortages increase people's reliance on groundwater usage, which can harmfully impact water systems and utilities. Through more frequent pumping, pipelines become damaged; another effect is subsidence — the sinking of land — which is occurring in Central California.

"We are really learning that our water infrastructure is outdated," said Tara Sreekrishnan, member of the Santa Clara Board of Education and staff member of State Senator Dave Cortese's office. "We'll see the deterioration of our water quality and supply if conditions get worse in the future."

To address this growing infrastructure concern, a \$1 trillion bipartisan bill was passed by the Senate in August.

The House will seek to pass the same bill in early October, Eshoo said. The bill would invest \$8.3 billion in drought mitigation in western states, including water storage, recycling, conservation and efficiency projects.

Despite the infrastructure bills' investments, Eshoo believes more action is necessary. She supports Biden's \$3.5 trillion Build Back Better Act — currently being debated in Congress alongside the infrastructure bill — which includes big investments to tackle the climate crisis such as making California's water systems more resilient to climate change and drought.

"Our water management policies must address the fact that this drought is not an isolated

incident," Eshoo told The Falcon. "Drought is likely to remain a persistent problem in California and other western states, and we need to make the necessary investments now to conserve water and prepare for future dry years."

Local officials and students work on environmental education

One of the long-term investments Eshoo referred to is education.

According to Sreekrishnan, the Santa Clara Board of Education will make increasing environmental literacy a "top priority" in students' K-12 curriculum. She said she supports ideas such as establishing a leadership program with youth climate ambassadors, and having fairs and showcases about sustainability-oriented projects.

In addition, many clubs, like the school's Green Team, have the goal of improving environmental literacy. As the only student-run organization on campus that tackles local sustainability and advocates for environmental changes, Green Team aims to strengthen recycling awareness by working closely with the school's maintenance department, cafeteria and administration.

As demonstrated by the mitigation plans proposed and implemented on the federal, state and local levels, combating drought requires voluntary and collective action.

"Water is a resource many Americans take for granted, and it's important for those of us living in states prone to drought to understand that we may need to use less water in the future than we're accustomed to," Eshoo said. "I encourage young people to learn more about the impact of climate change on our water supply and how they can reduce their own water usage."

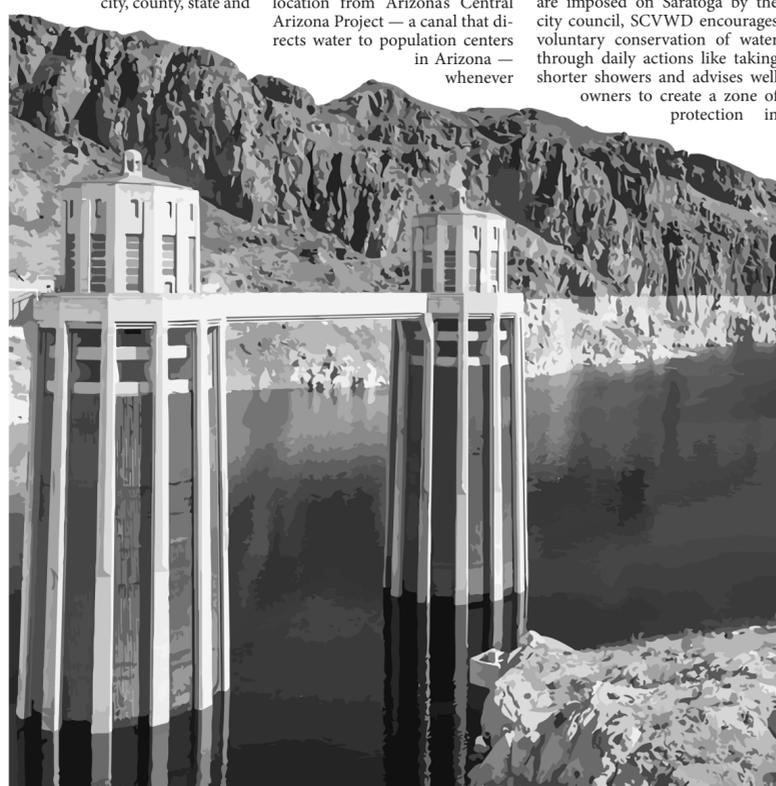
To directly engage with local water conservation efforts, join Save Our Water Campaign or renovate your lawn to make it less water dependent.



Sreekrishnan



Eshoo



Human use of water beyond capacity and climate change that has placed the Colorado River in drought are some of the reasons leading to historically low water levels at Lake Mead, evidenced by its white bare columns.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR YARD CLIMATE FRIENDLY

- Use native plants (visit uswildflowers.com to find plants native to your area)
- Plant ground cover like moss and clover instead of water-intensive grass
- Start composting and stop using man-made fertilizers or unnatural chemicals

Information from TATAANDHOWARD.COM All graphics by SHAAN SRIDHAR

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Student weightlifting: confidence, exercise and gains

Bench Press Pro

Benjamin Li



Walking through the gym doors for the first time at 49ers Fitness Club in Westgate early last summer, I looked around at the collection of machines, each with dozens of different settings seemingly designed to confuse me.

Looking back now, I realize that my discomfort was natural; however, most people at the gym are encouraging and love seeing new faces. Even now, I still receive advice from more experienced gym-goers.

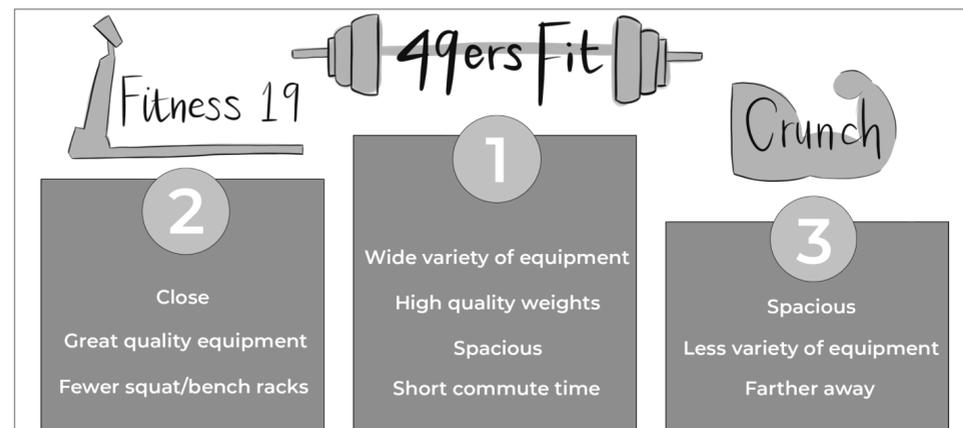
Despite weightlifting being extremely rewarding and easy to start, it is a beauty not understood by many.

While I began weightlifting to develop strength and increase muscle mass, there are many other reasons people start lifting. Whether it is for losing weight, powerlifting for strength gains or training for a sport, each person will have a unique training experience.

I'm often asked what motivated my sudden urge to hit the gym, and what pushes me to continue. The answer is simple: I wasn't satisfied with the way my body looked. Compared to my friends, seniors Christopher Liu and Ishaan Bhandari, who had started working out six months to a year before me, my body felt massively underdeveloped. To change this, I took advantage of the 50 percent discount for a 49ers Fit gym membership my basketball coach gave and began my fitness journey.

At first glance, my reasons for working out seem to stem from my insecurity; however, this is not the case. While I was dissatisfied with my body's appearance, this didn't mean I was ashamed of myself. Instead, I saw the potential for improvement and urged myself to grasp it. When I saw how quickly my friends were improving their strength and physiques, I felt the urge to follow suit. Since then, building my body has become something much more than a desire for aesthetics; I must continuously break through my limits in order to continue growing.

One of the best ways to learn and have fun in the gym is to make it a social occasion with a friend. One of the biggest benefits to working out with friends is the ability to go



Graphic by PRESTON FU

for riskier sets with the assistance of a spotter (someone who helps if you fail a rep).

My friend group often makes plans to work out together multiple times a week at the gym.

Not only does this push us to compete more fiercely, but it also gives a sense of pride that our friends are getting stronger. While all of us still enjoy working out alone, having friends who share the same passion makes it much easier and fun.

This motivation from my friends has pushed me to improve my lifts for months; when I started weightlifting, my max weight for the three main lifts were as follows (in pounds): 135 bench, 225 squat and 205 deadlift. After constant, arduous work, they have improved to 180, 335 and 300, respectively.

When I saw how quickly my friends were improving their strength and physiques, I felt the urge to follow suit.

Over time, I built a routine based on research and experience. I borrowed exercises from my coaches, online experts and trainers at the gym to ensure I was working as efficiently as possible. I decided on the push-pull-legs split routine, in which the full body

workout is split into three days, with each day corresponding to all the muscles that contribute to the motion in its name.

On push day, I work my chest, triceps and shoulders, and on pull days, my back and biceps. While leg days are the hardest, their difficulty makes them the most rewarding. Usually I'll use heavy weights for low reps, which causes more tears in my muscle tissue, leading to more regrowth and the most muscle buildup. These workouts take 90, 60, and 75 minutes for push, pull and leg days respectively.

I've also learned that my diet is just as important for building muscle as my workouts itself.

In order to build muscle, I eat around 5,000 calories a day. Generally I try to eat healthy foods high in protein while fulfilling my vegetable servings and fulfilling my other nutrient goals. However, every night I also eat two double quarter pounders from McDonalds, which add around 650 calories each. While this isn't the healthiest of all options I take out the cheese, the biggest source of empty calories, and focus on eating the meat.

Another helpful routine I've integrated into my daily life is the use of protein powder and creatine. Both come in powdered forms, making it easy to add and mix in my water bottle.

Creatine, the substance that is said to be the most effective at increasing muscle mass, has worked extremely well for me. Be-

fore I began using creatine, however, protein powder alone was also very useful in bulking up. In the future, I might look deeper into the world of supplements to see if there is anything else that can benefit my muscle growth.

With these lengthy workouts, some may find it surprising that I have time for these workouts and commute times during my day. With college application deadlines nearing, I was hard pressed to find a schedule that worked, so I developed a consistent and efficient routine.

Ultimately, I decided on a plan where I went to the gym before school started. I wake up at 6 a.m. and work out until 8 a.m. to get ahead of the heavy traffic on Saratoga Ave on my way to school. On push days, which are my longest workouts, I sometimes might even head to the gym quickly after school to finish my workout, which generally ends around 8 p.m.

As a basketball player, I've definitely seen improvements in my performance. Not only am I jumping higher, but I feel stronger and sturdier in all aspects of the game, such as rebounding and defense.

Among my friends I no longer feel like a weakling — my muscle gain has given my newfound confidence.

My verdict on weightlifting so far: I would have started much earlier if I had known the benefits it would bring. Working out is an activity I would recommend to almost anyone at almost any age. ♦

Mirroring a pro athlete's personal workout routine

Cheng-ing my workout

Jason Cheng



After Manchester United's last-minute triumph against Villarreal in the UEFA Champions League on Sept. 29, superstar Cristiano Ronaldo tore off his jersey in celebration to reveal a stunning, muscular body. Most of us lesser mortals could only envy him.

At age 36, Ronaldo is only getting fitter — not an ounce of fat can be seen on his shredded figure, and his body almost looks like those sculptured diagrams in biology class. That got me thinking: How has Ronaldo maintained his stellar physique for so long?

Although I had previous fitness experience, I wanted to take it to the next level.

With some simple research, I learned that Ronaldo's strict training regiment follows a precise combination of training, diet

and rest.

In an interview with Goal, Ronaldo said, "A good workout must be combined with a good diet. I eat a high protein diet with lots of whole-grain carbs, fruit and vegetables, and avoid sugary foods."

His workouts consist of soccer drills, cardiovascular exercises and weightlifting. Hydration is key, too — in a recent press conference, Ronaldo removed sponsored Coca Cola from his table, urging viewers to "drink water."

In an attempt to adopt this impressive lifestyle, I planned a "high school" version of Ronaldo's schedule: daily gym sessions after school, frequent jogs around the neighborhood, intense pre-workout stretches and a strict, healthy diet. Although I was somewhat well-versed in the world of fitness, I wanted to take it to the next level.

The first day came and went as planned. I pushed myself through an afternoon of upper and lower body training, drinking only water and consuming meals of almond yogurt, fruit, chicken, vegetables and rice.

Unfortunately, I woke up the next morning unable to move: My legs wouldn't budge from the previous day's 5-kilometer run, and my chest and shoulders were numb from lifting dumbbells way out of my comfort zone. My entire body ached, and with an entire day of school and training looming ahead, I'd already hit a dead end.

Moreover, taking on one of Ronaldo's fa-



FALCON // JASON CHENG

Junior Jason Cheng attempts a variation of soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo's workout routine. mus cold showers only slightly soothed the pain, and I stumbled to school like a zombie. The next few days followed a similar pattern of burning soreness, struggling through exercises and eating a minuscule variety of food.

Yet, by the time the final day rolled around, I'd gained a sort of immunity to pain. My body developed a tolerance for post-training soreness, and by day seven of the cold showers, my senses were at an all-time high — the results were clearly there.

As such, I've decided to carry on with

my routine, albeit with a more toned down one (I've confirmed my speculation that I'm no Cristiano Ronaldo), but in this short yet meaningful journey, I've learned so much about fitness and commitment.

Ultimately, what it takes to be a "Cristiano Ronaldo" is an unmatched level of determination and dedication to fight the mental battle against doubts or failures. Of course, not everyone is capable of becoming Cristiano Ronaldo himself, but we can all learn a thing or two from his undeniably elite lifestyle. ♦

BOYS WATER POLO

Falcons look to avenge loss in league tournament

By Jonathan Li

On Oct. 12, the boys' water polo team lost their 12-game win streak in an 11-4 regular season loss against Lynbrook. Despite the loss, the team is still the favorite to win the league championships after sweeping through the El Camino League. At their peak, they were ranked 38th nationally, according to Maxpreps.

"The season was going well," senior Kian Kwa said. "We were feeling confident we would remain undefeated."

The team's newfound success was unanticipated: Last season, the team lost to Lynbrook and Harker and finished with a record of 8-4. After Harker joined the De Anza league and Wilcox returned to the El Camino League, Lynbrook became the key matchup for the season.

While the team edged out a victory against Lynbrook during their first matchup this season on Sept. 21, they lost the most recent rematch.

They started off strongly with a long, sharp goal from senior wing Daniel Jiang. But when Lynbrook answered with two goals in succession, the tide began to turn in the opposite direction.

"There was poor awareness, and we were making bad passes and not recognizing

drops into the center," Kwa said. "Our communication on defense was abysmal."

On offense, the boys would make a season-high 16 turnovers.

"That was our worst game in this season I think, and that was their best game," senior co-captain and hole set Kendal Jarvis said. "I was kind of concerned going into the game that we weren't taking them seriously."

For the first half of the game, the match remained close, with neither team able to open a lead of more than 2 goals, but through Lynbrook's continued pressure, the team's defense eventually fell apart.

After consistently outplaying their competition in the past, the team went into the game overconfident and unprepared, Jarvis said.

As a result of this attitude, Lynbrook set the pace of the game instead.

"There's a lack of mental fortitude for our guys, and it's just because we've never been put in a situation where we needed to fight for something like that," Jarvis said. "Some guys started to panic, and once Lynbrook got a lead of three, they just pulled away because everyone seemed to just give up."

Additionally, Kwa said that there was a clear lack of drive as players were going to practice late, adding that the team needed to work on their conditioning.



Courtesy of TONY KUO

Senior Chris Wu examines the pool for offensive opportunities against Wilcox for a win.

The team will be taking practice more seriously in hopes of winning the league championships.

Despite the painful loss, Kwa sees it as a necessary setback and wake-up call to their complacency.

"I definitely think this loss will make our team way better in the long run," Kwa said. "We had a 30-minute discussion after the game where we really set a proper direction and purpose for our practices, reflecting on

why we lost the game and how to improve in the future."

The team is still seeded first within the El Camino League, and is set to play against Lynbrook again during the League Championships on Oct. 29 at Saratoga.

"We still are looking to win the league championships and advance to CCS," Kwa said. "I think we now want to re-establish dominance in our remaining games by absolutely destroying our opponents." ♦

FOOTBALL

Injury forces depleted Falcons to forfeit to Los Altos

By Shaan Sridhar

Trailing 28-0 against Los Altos High, the Falcons hoped to mount a comeback during the second quarter. After turning the ball over repeatedly and allowing Los Altos to score multiple times, the Falcons began to match their opponent's stellar defense.

Junior receiver Seth Hulme said he remembered that the Falcons had just made a great stop on defense when he looked back and saw junior LG Gaskin screaming in pain from an injury — an injury that ultimately forced the team to forfeit at halftime due to a lack of healthy players.



Hulme

Los Altos scores twice in first quarter

The game started off with a kick-off return by junior running back Paolo Navarro. The Falcons failed to get a first down after three downs so Hulme punted on fourth down — the punt failed and resulted in a net-zero change in yards, placing Los Altos close to the goal line and allowing them to score quickly.

Los Altos then kicked off back to the Falcons, who got one first down before being stopped. The Eagles turned that possession into 7 points.

Towards the end of the quarter, Los Altos

kicked off to the Falcons, who once again turned over the ball on downs.

Los Altos advanced near the goal line and was in position to score when the quarter ended.

Los Altos scores two more touchdowns

Los Altos picked up where they left off when the second quarter started and quickly scored, making the score 21-0.

The Falcons proceeded to have their best drive of the game after Los Altos kicked off to them. The Falcons secured multiple first downs, but fumbled on a botched snap between center Gaskin and sophomore quarterback Shane Timmons. Los Altos scored again on the drive, making the score 28-0.

Both teams played stellar defense after the fourth touchdown before Gaskin was injured with about 2 minutes left in the quarter.

As a defensive lineman, Gaskin was engaging with a Los Altos offensive lineman when another player rolled into his leg.

After waiting on the field for 10 minutes to evaluate the injury, the referees and coaches decided to cut the quarter short, ending the half and sending the Falcons back to their locker room to figure out what to do next.

Falcons forfeit due to injuries

Hulme said the Falcons waited in their locker room for less than an hour as they tried to figure out how they would play the second half of the game. Eventually, head coach Tim Lugo decided to forfeit the game because of the team's affected mindset and shortage of players caused by low team participation and a high number of injuries.

"We're losing about four players a game [to injuries] and that's not sustainable on a varsity football team."

JUNIOR Seth Hulme

"We already don't have enough players to begin with," Hulme said. "We're losing about four players a game [to injuries] and that's not sustainable on a varsity football team."

The team has already been calling up sophomores from the JV team to play on varsity. Hulme said that most sophomores are playing on varsity due to the team's player shortage; freshmen are not being called up due to their lack of experience and concern for their safety. The team is also taking other measures due to a lack of players.

"We're putting non-linemen on the line," Hulme said. "We're putting tight ends on the line. And still that's not sufficient."

Hulme said that because non-linemen do not practice to be linemen, they are more prone to injury and likely to be ineffective during the game.

Injured players on varsity currently include senior receiver Parsa Hashemi, senior running back Zach Joe, junior lineman Aarav Badani, junior lineman Jack Burgess and now Gaskin. This means five of the team's 25 players are injured.

Hulme said some players will be able to recover before the season ends, but that others were out for the entire season. He added that others, including himself, are more rouged up than usual because of increased playing time with less rest.

Despite the devastating injury and disappointing forfeit, Hulme said the team is continuing to focus on improving for the last games against Lynbrook, Cupertino and Fremont — all of which he said he is hopeful they can play.

"We need to improve everything," Hulme said. "We need everyone to try a little harder and give a little more effort. I think this coming week will have easier competition and we should be able to win." ♦

Danny Moon: From paper-boy to runner and coach

By Sara Bright & Carolyn Wang

Over six decades ago, girls' cross country coach Danny Moon, now 74 and a current resident of Saratoga, began a job that would spark his lifelong passion for running.

Growing up in Santa Cruz, Moon was a paperboy who delivered papers at 4 a.m. in the morning all over town. Every morning, Moon would ride 12 miles to the eastside of Santa Cruz near Ocean Street near Marianne's ice cream parlor and back on his bicycle.

Then, he would continue cycling through the Santa Cruz Boardwalk area and then downtown, delivering dozens of papers along the way.

The stamina, persistence and determination he developed in elementary school laid

the foundation for his future as a long-distance runner.

Prior to high school, Moon never thought of pursuing running as an extracurricular activity.

At age 36, Moon ran his record mile time of 4:35. He reached his peak in his late 30s and mid-40s.

It wasn't until then-president John F. Kennedy established a fitness education program that mandated a 1-mile requirement during his sophomore year at Santa Cruz High School in 1962 that he ran his

first ever mile — with a time of 5:45.

Seeing Moon's talent, his school's cross country coach encouraged him to join the team. Moon quickly advanced to the varsity team.

After high school, Moon continued to run on his own, despite pursuing careers as a manufacturer engineer, inventory specialist and tech writer.

At age 36, Moon ran his record mile time of 4:35. He reached his peak in his late 30s and mid-40s, running a total of 128 sub-5 minute miles in 26 years.

Since the '70s, Moon has also coached on and off in various running clubs. After retiring from Lockheed Martin, an aerospace company, he accepted the job to coach the school's girls' cross country team in 2008, becoming a mentor to the next generation of young runners.

Moon noted a great shift in his personal running mindset as he matured.

While he used to focus primarily on speed, he now sees running as a lifelong habit to maintain his physical and mental health.

Despite being 74 years old, Moon continues to run between 12 to 15 miles per week and is still capable of running a 7-minute mile.

His hope is to pass this running habit on to young people, especially for those who don't think they are or could be runners.

"You'll be amazed by how much you can run if you put the work in it," Moon said. "I want people to take what they learn in cross country and carry it with them for the rest of their lives. After starting out in cross country, I'm still running. They can do that too." ♦

Traditions fuel team bonding over quarantine

By Lynn Dai

For many, the year over quarantine severely strained friendships, and Falcon athletes had it no different. However, when pre-season started, many teams kicked off right where they left off two years ago: pumped with high expectations for upcoming in-person seasons with no signs of withered relationships.

As it turns out, social distancing protocols did not deter team bonding; the majority of teams who kept in contact over text or video calls continued to follow most of their team traditions.

Boys' basketball bonds off the court

While the boys' basketball team had far fewer team dinners over quarantine, players bonded through practices in outdoor courts and virtual challenges, often hosting competitions to see who worked out the most that week.

The team maintained an active group chat, where they shared challenges and tracked results on a spreadsheet.

"It was very obvious when we started last season that we were strong because we were a team both on and off the court," senior Christian Li said. "I felt like we were one of the only organized teams out there, and that's mainly because our coaches were able to provide access to the outdoor courts when other teams couldn't practice."

Though the team was unable to play with other high school teams in team camp at UC Santa Barbara like usual, they took a trip to Anaheim in the summer to compete with club teams in a four-day Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) tournament last year.

As part of their trip, the boys watched "Black Widow," went F1 racing together and toured Disneyland in a full-fledged trip focused on "growth ... [as well as] performance."

According to Li, the team bonded by staying up overnight playing Avalon at 1 a.m. against the wishes of their coaches, shutting off the lights and keeping quiet whenever they heard footsteps approaching.

"Something unique about Saratoga's basketball team is that we're always together doing something, whether it's joining a workout or playing summer league," senior Ishan Bhandari said. "[Playing games] was all voluntary. We could've sat in our rooms and went on our phones, but we all wanted to come together."

Bhandari added that team chemistry helped the team perform better because members all trusted one another. Last year, the team had a collective record of 21-2 in

the AAU season.

Every year, the team also visits The Cheesecake Factory for a gift exchange and dinner afterward, a tradition that started with their coach, Patrick Judge, 14 years ago when he was coaching JV basketball at Santa Teresa High School. Despite COVID-19 restrictions last spring, the team was still able to make it happen and are now planning another dinner this December.

"Many of my fondest moments with friends and family have been at the dinner table, so I wanted to pass that on to my basketball family as well," Judge said. "All of the trips, lunches and dinners that we do as a basketball program are not only great team bonding experiences — which lead to greater teamwork and success on the court — but also create lifelong memories."

Li said the team is optimistic about the team "winning big," in what for a majority of team members is their senior year. With the loss of small forward Cameron King to graduation last year, the team has "no star player" this year, Li said. Thus, everyone on the team plays a crucial role and depends on each other.

"A lot of us are willing to work hard for one another versus putting individual stats on the board," Li said. "For us, it doesn't matter who plays well or who doesn't. We all win as a team and lose as a team. That's our mindset. That's the chemistry."

Field hockey bonds over Boba Tuesdays

Last year, the field hockey team noticed a lack of unity and commitment between players of different positions. Senior co-captain Rima Christie attributes the disconnect to a lack of verbal communication; she said that this year the team is focusing more on communicating and bonding regularly with players.

With a 13-player roster, the girls often split up in three cars and drive to cafes to get boba on Tuesdays after practice, a tradition that started during the pandemic when traditional options for team bonding weren't feasible.

In addition to Boba Tuesdays, the team hosts annual sleepovers and Friday-night dinners. Athletes use these opportunities to get to know each other and talk about matters unrelated to school or sports.

This year, the varsity field hockey team has eight seniors and seven underclassmen. The abundance of seniors on the team also has an impact on team chemistry as captains aim to provide leadership and maturity to new players.

Senior Nandini Desai said working with the team builds her up and gives her the confidence to face her opponents.



Li

Return of revamped Premier League sparks excitement

By Jason Cheng, Atrey Desai & Vinay Gollamudi

The 2021-22 Premier League season is under way, and after a scintillating transfer window that saw superstars such as Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo on the move, soccer fans are now being treated to what could be a season for the books.

Specifically, the four main contenders — Manchester City, Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool — stand levels above the rest of the league in terms of squad strength. In the first few match weeks of the season, we've seen dominance from these top teams.

Manchester City's record-breaking \$139 million transfer for winger Jack Grealish this summer set the club up with a devastating attack consisting of Kevin De Bruyne, Riyad Mahrez, Raheem Sterling, Gabriel Jesus and youngster Ferran Torres. The rock solid defense of Portuguese



duo Rúben Dias and João Cancelo means that Manchester City can shine on both ends of the pitch.

On the other half of Manchester, Manchester United's marquee signings of Jadon Sancho, Raphael Varane and, most significantly, Cristiano Ronaldo, have bolstered the team's hopes for the coveted Premier League title. Still, the recent 1-0 defeat to Aston Villa on Sept. 25 means the club still has room to grow before becoming true contenders.



Courtesy of CHRISTIAN LI

Varsity boys' basketball poses for a team photo at Mountain View High School on July 16, finishing their summer league season with a victory at the Mountain View tournament.

Current seniors on the team include Christie, Desai, Kinoshita, Lauren Yarrington and Lauren VandeVort. All five seniors have been playing the sport together since eighth grade.

"It's crazy how much we've grown throughout these years," Desai said. "We have a really strong team of girls who've grown a lot from not knowing anything to learning our basics to getting a lot better. Going through these ups and downs together made us really strong as a team."

Boys' water polo builds new traditions

Although the boys' water polo team doesn't have many traditions — the only ones being fast-food restaurant dashes after workouts and a specific TOGA cheer before every game that the team created in 2018 — senior co-captains Kendal Jarvis and Marcus Kuo are focusing on creating new ones.

Late coach Jerome Chung, who had been head coach for the 2019-20 season but passed away unexpectedly at age 37 the month before the 2020-21 season, left a profound impact on the boys' practice routines. He created an online folder with over 70 plays that repetitively hone in on specific skills, a tool the captains have continued to use for its effectiveness.

In previous years, Jarvis said Chung's old-school coaching style helped bring the team together. Now, he and Kuo are forced to lay into the players more as new coach

Michael Fleming primarily focuses on training the underclassmen. The team is first in the El Camino League with an 12-1 record, as of Oct. 20.

"I feel like our recent success has made an opportunity for us to build traditions not only celebrating success, but also instigating team bonding," Jarvis said.

So far as part of bonding, the team has been eating out at restaurants such as In-N-Out, Maggiano's Little Italy in Santana Row and BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse in Saratoga more often.

Kuo recalled that the team didn't eat out much last year because of the pandemic and not as many of the boys were able to drive. While the team only goes out for whole-team meals at the beginning and end of each season, he said some athletes often get food together after games.

In addition to more frequent team meals, members have adopted a new tradition — wearing attire in honor of Chung.

The boys' swimsuits now have Chung's initials on the side in Carolina Blue, Chung's favorite university and color. On special occasions, the team wears "Jerome" T-shirts in the same shade, a tradition that has helped pull the team together through the season.

"I've been trying to be as constructive as I can with criticism, especially as a captain," Jarvis said. "I think about what Jerome would tell me to do as a leader, and I make decisions accordingly." ♦

duo of Michail Antonio, who leads the league with five goals in six games, and Saïd Benrahma has led the club to sit comfortably in the top half of the table.

Despite the newfound strength in the Premier League, North London rivals Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal have regressed from their traditional "top-six" status in England, and for fans, another disappointing season may be on the horizon due to poor management.

Yet this season hasn't been short of surprises so far. The newly promoted Brentford team has begun its campaign with inspired performances as well, including a hard-fought 3-3 draw against a full-strength Liverpool side.

With so much riveting action, this Premier League season is worth watching, and with fans back in stadiums for the first time in over a year, enthusiasm is at an all-time high for what may be one of the most exciting title races in decades. ♦

