



ChatGPT's potential for cheating has been overblown



Alumni recalls filmmaking journey beyond Saratoga



Tree removal regulations have contributed to property values



THE saratoga falcon

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

FALCON // ATREY DESAI

Engineering lab building renovated

BY SaachiJain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

>> **ENGINEERING** on pg. 5

SUFC addresses mental health struggles

BY SaachiJain & KathyWang

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

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

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

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

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

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

Brad Ward: Speaking up for trans rights

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

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

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

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

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

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

>> **ASSEMBLY** on pg. 4

Lacrosse season to be canceled

BY SunnyCao & SaachiJain

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

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



Ellis

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

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

>> **LACROSSE** on pg. 5

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newsbriefs

Winter storms cause baseball field renovation delays

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

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

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

— Beverly Xu

School averts post winter break COVID-19 outbreak

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

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

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

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

— Andrew Lin

Mock Trial receives split decision in first competition

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

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

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

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

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

— Christina Chang and Sanjoli Gupta



FALCON // EMMA FUNG

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

Clubs host activities during Speak Up for Change week

BOARD GAMES, PUZZLES AND GROUP MEDITATION WERE OFFERED

By EmmaFung

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

Monday, Jan. 23

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

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

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

"Hopefully, they found a relaxing game that they can play in the future for stress relief."

TEACHER Kirk Davis

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

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

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

Tuesday, Jan. 24

Four activities took place on

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Two students at my old school came up to me with this idea, so we started something called the Happiness Club," Ward said. "We would meet every few weeks and come up with activities to do. It is something that I would like to start permanently at Saratoga as well."

Wednesday, Jan. 25

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

sa Muñoz hosted a ceramic craft making activity to simultaneously socialize and express creativity during lunch.

Wellness center coordinator Grace Conley hosted "Talkative Thursdays," which was moved up a day so that a meditation session could be held on Thursday instead. "Talkative Thursday" allowed students to sit in the wellness center and talk to each other or the staff about whatever was on their minds at the time.

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

Thursday, Jan. 26
The Ultimate Frisbee Club invited all the students to play frisbee on the upper field as a way of destressing through team bonding. The Crafting Club opened its doors and invited students to make yarn leis.

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

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

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

Friday, Jan. 27
The week concluded with a school-wide assembly on Friday, finishing off a week of Moving Past and spreading mental health awareness in the school community through a series of activities and events. ♦



Conley

Saratoga Library celebrates Lunar New Year by hosting lively cultural activities

By EmmaFung & KathyWang

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

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

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

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

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

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



FALCON // EMMA FUNG

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

the Rising Phoenix lion dance.

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

A member of the Rising Phoenix and Lion Dance Association, Nguyen feels that performing at events like the Saratoga Library's Lunar New Year helps connect him to his heritage and the Asian community.

"When [our members] are able to practice

this traditional art, they're able to learn more about its roots and origin," Nguyen said. "At the same time, we're also being more involved by performing traditional art that's been around for thousands of years."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advanced Science Research class to be canceled

By NatalieChua & SanjoliGupta

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

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

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

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

Because it is the final year of ASR, students are making the most out of the oppor-

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

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

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

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

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

By AmyLuo & KathyWang

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

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

Soundings released their winter issue on Jan. 31 through their official website, saratogasoundings.com. Twenty three of 35 writing submissions and 15 of 35 art submissions will be published in the winter issue.

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

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

ty by having both a submissions editor and member provide critiques for each piece."

When determining which works to publish, the three editors-in-chief — Chang, Panidis and senior Shaan Sridhar — did a preliminary round of voting. Works that received the vote of at least two editors were later presented to the staff for a second round of voting; eight writing submissions and 12 art submissions were eliminated in the initial round. The staff voted for art submissions on Jan. 12 and writing submissions on Jan. 19. To be published, a submission needed at least 50% of staff votes in favor.

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

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

While there are plenty of submissions, the budget to fund Soundings is tight this year. Before the pandemic, Soundings was funded by profits coming from yearbook sales, which have been decreasing in the past three years, Keys said. Last year, a one-time grant from the PTSO funded the printing for the spring



Graphic by CHRISTINA CHANG

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

Burnout

Christina Chang
2022, colored pencils and pen, 9x12

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

Even though PTSO normally looks away from offering grants to consumable organizations, they have once again granted Soundings \$500 for the upcoming spring issue. While the donation is a good start, they will need "lots more than \$500 [roughly \$3,000] for the print version," said Keys. Hence, Soundings will look to more income from donations and fundraisers.

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

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

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

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

by Saachi Jain & Isabelle Wang



FALCON // SAACHI JAIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since a few students were still without power after coming back to school, some teachers had to incorporate parts of missed classwork into the future lessons so those students wouldn't be confused when learning new material.

"I was able to do a bit of work before my Wi-Fi went out, but eventually I couldn't do anything," said sophomore Annette Li, one of the students affected by the power outage. "My work started to pile up from other classes, but some teachers have been understanding and allowed some assignments to pass."

Even after the power came back the next day for Saratoga High, there was visible damage on Saratoga roads. Along Herriman Avenue, a tree fell down with two power lines, forcing cars to take a detour and causing the power outage to last longer around

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

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

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

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

"It has been a while since I've experienced such a prolonged power outage," said sophomore Sarah Lim, whose power was out for 16 hours. "We definitely needed some water, and it was nice to unplug for a day." ♦

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

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

Why aren't you applying to more schools? Why'd you get deferred from the school when I provided all the perfect resources for you?" She emphasized the importance for people to speak with more mindfulness, and to "foster a culture of comfort, solidarity and empathy starting at home and academic settings."

She hopes for the community as a whole to overcome the mental health stigma and combat the toxic academic culture. "When prioritizing academic achievement over our mental health, we fail to protect our students and our faculty from other prevalent issues such as rape culture, racism, ableism, and more," Tan said.

With the gathered experiences shared from Leung, Mathihalli, Tan and Ward, along with the supportive cheers from students, the four speakers have created an even more welcoming and inclusive environment in terms of coping with trauma, and healing from the past. "We hope speaking up for change can inspire meaningful conversation and that you'll all find solace in the fact that we're not alone," Potluri said. ♦

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SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

continued from pg. 1

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

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

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

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

Nidhi Mathihalli: Body dysmorphia and accepting yourself

Participating in various forms

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

Mathihalli began to shut out friends and family as a result of growing anxiety. Her grades began to drop, she lost interest in extracurriculars, put herself through harmful diets and would only sleep two to three hours every night. During this time, she was diagnosed with insomnia, a binge eating disorder and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) after losing her period.

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

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

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

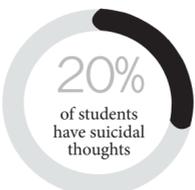
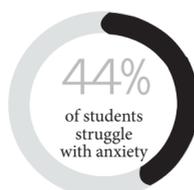
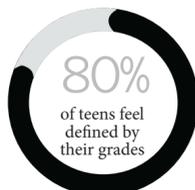
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>> falconstats

Struggles with mental health are prevalent among teens.



Data from UCLA HEALTH

Colleges should release application ratings to all, including the rejected

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are admissions truly holistic?

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

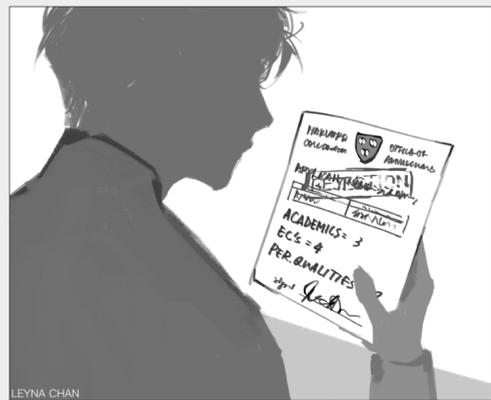
With college serving as an instrumental factor of social mobility, it is important that students facing educational barriers are evaluated in proper context, and that academic pedigree is only one of many considerations. Yet colleges likely spend more time on applications with high GPAs and test scores,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

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

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

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

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

Without better transparency,

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

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

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

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

by Shreya Rallabandi & Allison Tan

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

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

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

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

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THIRDPERIOD

STAFFPOLICY

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

MISSIONSTATEMENT

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

LETTERS OF THE EDITOR

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AI-generated images cannot be the future of art

By GeorgeHuang, AndrewLin & EricShi

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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Digital art is not inferior to physical mediums just because computer programs provide many

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

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

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

This fear isn't unwarranted, as situations like this have happened before — consider the Industrial Revolution, where many traditional artisans were swiftly replaced with factory machinery.

Art contests could create a separate category for AI-generated works, requiring digital artists to send recordings of their creation process to prove their submission was made by a human, but what's the point? At the end of the day, art is most memorable when it offers a new insight, challenges norms or acts aesthetically striking. The amount of effort put into the creation does not matter. We tend to humanize AI or see it as competition, when in reality it is just another tool, like paper, ink, cameras and computers.

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Colleges should release application ratings to all, including the rejected

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

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

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

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

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

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

Are admissions truly holistic?

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

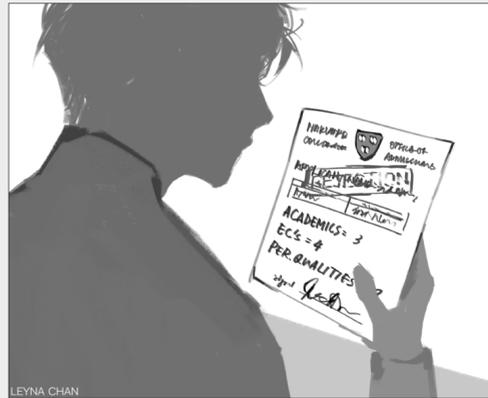
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This wouldn't be an issue alone, as of course a solid high school GPA is an indicator of success in college, but holistic admissions are among the most advertised parts of college admissions. Colleges attract students to apply with holistic admissions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

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

ing reintroduced to campus.

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

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

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

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

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

by SunnyCao & SaachiJain

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

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

Mass shootings following Sandy Hook

A decade has passed. Sandy Hook should have been a warning sign to the country, yet deaths from mass shootings — events where four or more are killed — have only risen year by year.

Despite bills and laws aimed at curbing gun violence after Sandy Hook, over 19,000 people were killed by a firearm in 2022 excluding suicides, 1,300 of whom were teenagers.

Compared to other countries, firearm homicide rates in the U.S. are 22 times greater than those in the European Union and 200 times greater than in Japan.

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

Despite these protections, law enforcement has still failed to respond in its responses to many shootings.

When 18-year-old Salvador Ramos walked into his former fourth grade classroom in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24 and claimed the lives of 19 students and two teachers in one of the most horrific shootings this year, law enforcement determined that Ramos was a "barricaded subject," or not suspected of committing a crime, preventing SWAT teams and local police from engaging

with the gunman despite being in range. James Densley, a professor of criminal justice at Metro State University, commented on slow action both during and after Uvalde, despite resource officers at the school before Ramos entered campus.

"[In Uvalde] there was an army of good guys with guns in the parking lot. The hard approach doesn't seem to be getting the job done," he told Politico.

Since Sandy Hook, the nation has experienced 3,500 mass shootings, 47 of which have taken place in schools.

Other shootings have taken place in grocery stores, night bars and malls, the deadliest of which ended up taking over 20 lives. California is no exception.

This year, six were killed and 12 wounded outside a nightclub in downtown Sacramento.

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

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

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

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

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

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



While understanding the motives of shooters is difficult, investigating the root causes of their behavior is key to preventing mass shootings in the future.

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

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

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

According to a 2021 comprehensive study that analyzed the behavior of every documented mass shooter since 1966, a shooter typically has a family history of violence in the home, sexual assault, parental suicides or being bullied as a child. As a result, childhood trauma can lead to a build-up of isolation and self-hatred, feelings that prospective shooters seek to release upon a group of people. For example, further investigation after the shooting in Uvalde revealed that Ramos had struggled with a long history of drug use and was bullied throughout his school years for a speech condition.

Over 19,000 people were killed by a firearm in 2022 excluding suicides, 1,300 of whom were teenagers.

The study also found that the mental issues shooters faced in the past contribute to a never-ending cycle of creating more mass shooters. An investigative article published by the Los Angeles Times found that most school shooters have studied and used the actions of other shooters to seek attention and validation for their motives.

Trends across mass shootings show that they often come in clusters and are socially contagious events.

Psychologist Jillian Peterson and sociologist James Densley, both of whom have studied various mass shootings, found that media exposure and glorification of shootings in society and culture rendered a "Columbine generation," a term that stems from the Columbine shooting in 1999 at Columbine High School in Colorado.

It refers to the generation currently going through secondary schooling and partaking in safety measures at their schools such as the requirement of clear backpacks and metal detectors. Starting from the tragedy at Columbine, which has since become a blueprint for school shooters to follow, Peterson and Densley have identified six mass shootings and 40 active shooter incidents at schools in the U.S. In 20 of those 46 school shootings, the perpetrator purposely used Columbine as a model.

Since then, mass shootings have been perpetrated through the use of firearms, which are widely available to almost anybody on the streets with so few gun control laws. Today, the main restriction against buying a gun is age.

In the U.S., shotguns, rifles and appropriate ammunition may be sold only to individuals age 18 or older, while all other firearms and ammunition are available to anyone 21 and older. Due to these loose laws, it makes it easier for school shooters to get guns, contributing to over 250 of these shootings that have taken place in schools this year — one-third of all shootings so far.

There is so much that is still unknown about the psyches of mass shooters, and further research about their mentalities would allow psychologists to effectively devise treatments for would-be mass shooters. New findings from researchers at Columbia University have begun to analyze data from the Columbia Mass Murder Database to gain much needed insight into the relationship between murders and mental illnesses. Their research has found that mass shootings should be classified as different from other forms of mass murder and should be looked at as a distinct phenomenon. Small

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

How has the government taken action?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

>> falconfigures

26 lives taken at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012

33 percent increase in gun violence from 2011 to 2020

5 mass shootings in California since January 1

39 mass shootings in the U.S. since January

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

Lovestruck: The Falcon plays matchmaker

Start

Move forward
2 spaces



Is Valentine's
Day an official
Holiday?

In which empire
did Valentine's
Day originate?

Skip a turn

What are your
Valentine's
Day plans?



Instructions:

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

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

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

Have fun and good luck!

Synopsis:

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

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

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

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

Match No. 1: The cold never bothered Shane Timmons and Elsa Blom anyway

Though it was cold on the ice, it was never cold between junior Shane Timmons and senior Elsa Blom when they went on a date on Friday night.

The pair went to an ice rink in Palo Alto, where they enjoyed their Friday evening ice skating.

"It was all very homey and cute," Blom said.

The pair hadn't hung out together outside of school before, so this date was their first time.

The two had no awkward moments though, as their time was filled with conversations about school, future

plans, family and their interests.

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

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

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

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

Shane Timmons & Elsa Blom



Move back
3 spaces

What bird
symbolizes
Valentine's
Day?

Who would
you like to
see paired
together?

Match No. 2: Ela M. & Paul H's close brush with true love

It's been said that art brings people together, and it's no different when matchmaking is involved. Art's capacity to inspire reflection and form connections that transcend differences brought together junior Paul Hulme and senior Ela Machiroutu. The pair spent Saturday evening together at Los Gatos's Petroglyph, where they painted pottery and got to know each other better. Machiroutu previously knew Hulme through her friendship with his older brother, Johnny.

Machiroutu said. Although the date started off slightly awkward, Machiroutu was grateful that Paul's easygoing nature made conversation easy. Hulme appreciated their shared experiences as part of the Leadership class.

For Hulme, the most shocking part of their date was learning she couldn't yet drive, but both of them agreed that they would definitely hang out again.

Although Machiroutu didn't previously consider her and Hulme close friends, she felt that the date gave them an opportunity to get to know each other better.

"Painting gave us an opportunity to talk a lot,"

Paul Hulme & Ela Machiroutu



What's your
favorite
candy?



Move
forward 3
spaces

Who is
Valentine's Day
named after?

Skip a turn

What's your
favorite
Valentine's Day
memory?



Dahlia Murthy & Tevita Pahulu

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

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

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

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

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

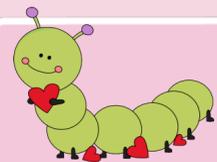
Not only did their date result in hours of fun for the two, but it also

led to realizations for them. Lim was initially intimidated by Debecker's seemingly introverted demeanor at school.

"She usually has headphones in and seems really quiet," Lim said, though the way she acted during the date changed his mind. "Her outgoing personality and welcoming energy made this date all the more enjoyable."

While it was too short for a true love connection, the date sparked a deeper friendship between the two. "I had a really good time, and I'm glad that I have a new person in my class to call a friend," Debecker said.

Nathan Lim & Charlotte Debecker



Skip a turn



Roll
Again

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

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

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

they deepened their friendship.

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

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

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

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



Move back
2 spaces



Move forward
4 spaces

Who is
Cupid?

Skip a turn

Who was your
childhood
crush?

Move back
4 spaces



Drama program works to increase student membership, provides new opportunities

By JonnyLuo

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

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

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

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



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

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

This year, for example, over 36 students

participated in the fall play, which was higher than the 25 in last year’s fall play.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A filmmaking journey continuing beyond SHS

By LynnDai

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

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

“I have so much appreciation and admiration for the teachers and the program itself.”

ALUMNUS Luke Salin

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

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

workings of the camera. He was hooked. He took McCue’s art class in his freshman year and joined MAP, where he started to look at movies from a different viewpoint: as an art form that allowed him to communicate ideas.

A decade later, he now works as a creative advertising coordinator at Bleecker Street Media in New York City. Salin said he is still inspired by Spielberg’s ability to “capture something heartfelt and special in all his films” and create things that people enjoy for different reasons, a “special feat” that he says stands the test of time and is more motivating than any particular aesthetic style.

Looking back, Salin thinks the biggest takeaway from MAP is the teamwork mentality that was instilled in him.

“Working with other people will make or break any experience in any project: the better the experience can be for everybody, the better the product will be,” he said. “MAP fosters that mentality well and gives you the tools and opportunity to practice it.”

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

For Salin, the award remains to be one of the “coolest things” that has ever happened to him. He said he still keeps in touch with many of his MAP friends above and below his grade, something that attests to the long-lasting bonds developed as a result of the program.

“I have so much appreciation and admiration for the teachers and the program itself — to know that I contributed to it, have left some kind of impact and hopefully encourage other students in the future to go into that mentality of service is super special and meaningful to me,” he said.

In addition to Salin’s teamwork mental-

ity, longtime MAP teacher Joel Tarbox also noted that his “unique vision set him apart.” When asked to translate what his former teacher could have meant, Salin smiled and shook his head. He attributed his vision to his mindset at the time — believing that “high school Luke could do anything with his team” — and the creativity and willingness to “just go for it” that came with it.

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

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

One of the biggest projects Salin worked on was his undergraduate thesis project “Parked in America,” a half-hour dramedy that follows a Korean high schooler forced to move in with her cousins in the U.S. after experiencing a traumatic event.

Salin began the project during his junior year at NYU with Kayla Lewis, one of his best friends, who wrote the script based on her personal experience as a Korean American. For Salin and Lewis, the film was about figuring out their identity as half-Asians, processing grief and paving their way forward.

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

In addition to his NYU projects, Salin

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

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

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

“I’m still figuring out my personal style. That’s the real honest answer,” he said.

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

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

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



Graphic by MINSUI TANG

Sophomore expresses creative stories of her culture through dance

By KathyWang

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

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

What is an Arangetram?

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

“It’s an important day that you trained so hard for, and would like to showcase to those you care for.”

SOPHOMORE Anika Ramakrishnan

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

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

to learn.

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

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

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

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

Arangetram performance training

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

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

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

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

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

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



Courtesy of ANIKA RAMAKRISHNAN

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

Rundown of an Arangetram performance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Like any dream, the process will be tough but you’re always looking forward to the outcome.”

SOPHOMORE Anika Ramakrishnan

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

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

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

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

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

By EmmaFung

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

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

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

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

To save money and balance its budget, the district tries to have classes that aren’t too big and aren’t too small: usually aiming for 28 or fewer. But when those plans and estimates fail and class sizes soar, it leads to more papers to grade and more classroom management issues for teachers. Teachers both Saratoga and Los Gatos have said it is one of their main issues to work on with the district through negotiations.

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

classes that stray far above and below that number.

Currently, Wise said there are 19 classes with 35 or more students, excluding special education, P.E. and performing arts.

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

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

Despite the surprise, Laws said the large number of students means a smaller workload for each student. Having more students also uncovers a lot more opportunities for different types of partner work.

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

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

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

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

However, Le Toquin said that the advantage is that there are more opportunities to find partners for stories and layouts.

While some classes struggle with overcrowding, other classes don’t have enough students to fill half the classroom. According to Wise, there are 30 classes with 20 or fewer students.

French teacher Elaine Haggerty has expressed her liking toward her smaller class sizes.

The AP French class currently has only 13 students, which allows her to give her students individual attention.

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Sophomore Nathan Lee, who is in AP French, added that since Haggerty often calls on random students for answers, they get more chances to participate and engage with the class.

While class sizes may continue to vary dramatically in the next few years, students and teachers seem to find ways to cope with each situation.

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

>> falconfigures

65 Students in eighth-period (after school) Winterguard

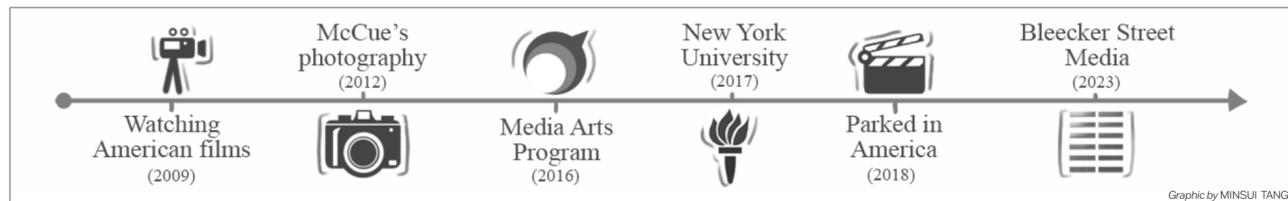
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Sophomore expresses creative stories of her culture through dance

By KathyWang

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

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

What is an Arangetram?

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

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

SOPHOMORE

Anika Ramakrishnan

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

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

to learn.

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

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

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

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

Arangetram performance training

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

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

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

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

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

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



Courtesy of ANIKA RAMAKRISHNAN

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

Rundown of an Arangetram performance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOPHOMORE

Anika Ramakrishnan

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

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

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

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

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

By EmmaFung

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

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

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

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

To save money and balance its budget, the district tries to have classes that aren't too big and aren't too small: usually aiming for 28 or fewer. But when those plans and estimates fail and class sizes soar, it leads to more papers to grade and more classroom management issues for teachers. Teachers both Saratoga and Los Gatos have said it is one of their main issues to work on with the district through negotiations.

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

classes that stray far above and below that number.

Currently, Wise said there are 19 classes with 35 or more students, excluding special education, P.E. and performing arts.

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

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

Despite the surprise, Laws said the large number of students means a smaller workload for each student. Having more students also uncovers a lot more opportunities for different types of partner work.

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

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

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

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

However, Le Toquin said that the advantage is that there are more opportunities to find partners for stories and layouts.

While some classes struggle with overcrowding, other classes don't have enough students to fill half the classroom. According to Wise, there are 30 classes with 20 or fewer students.

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While class sizes may continue to vary dramatically in the next few years, students and teachers seem to find ways to cope with each situation.

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Take a step, step again

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

By MartinXu

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

Until seventh grade, senior Kaylen pictured mental health as daily panic attacks, suicide attempts and hospitalizations. Despite suffering from these mental health issues, she avoided therapy due to her own stigma of the topic.

"It took me a while to seek therapy because of self-stigma, since I thought my feelings were trivial," Kaylen said. "There was a lot of violence in my household, and I found it harder and harder to sustain myself. I needed to talk to someone about it because I realized my mental health was deteriorating."

Students reach out and seek therapy

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

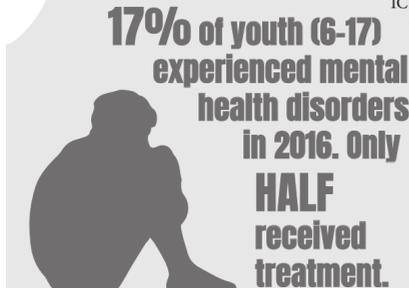
To seek more effective help, Kaylen briefly met with her sister's professional therapist, which she deemed her "first ever positive experience" in therapy.

"I sat with my sister's therapist for a little while and I remember thinking: 'Wow, he's able to put things that I'm feeling and don't know how to articulate into words that just make sense.' I really, really liked that," Kaylen said.

In searching for her own therapist, Kaylen had trouble with "misaligned priorities," resulting in visits to more than five therapists and moving in and out of therapy due to a lack of personal improvement.

She noticed it was difficult to move forward in the healing process if her therapist did not share the same goals or didn't connect with her, a phenomenon supported by the American Psychology Association. The association found that therapy is most effective when therapists and patients work through problems together.

"Therapy really depends on your therapist is," Kaylen said. "If you're forced to go to a therapist you don't like or if they don't have the same priorities as you, you don't really go anywhere."



Data from NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

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

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

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

Therapy stigmatized behind closed doors

While Kaylen was able to seek help with the encouragement of her family, she said she still feels reaching out for therapy at Saratoga High is stigmatized, which she finds ironic due to the high academic pressure and rampant mental health issues she has observed.

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

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

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

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

Student conquers her own self-stigma of therapy

Rylie, a junior, was also initially afraid to start therapy due to the stigma surrounding it at Redwood. Though she was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), she was "super against therapy" since she was clouded by its stigma

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SENIOR Kaylen

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

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

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

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

Therapist urges more CASSY visits

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

"I think [therapy] gives a lot of clarity and a very safe place for students to share what is happening," Vaidyanathan said. "Students can examine their behavioral patterns and learn strategies on how to transition into more healthy patterns. Students also learn a lot of coping strategies for when they face stress in the future."



Shobha Vaidyanathan calls on-campus therapy a boon for students.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All graphics by JONNY LEO

PROBLEMATIC BEAUTY

Saratogans love trees, except when they become a problem.

by JonnyLuo & KathyWang

When former girls' cross country coach Danny Moon moved from San Jose to Saratoga in 1988, he remembers being shocked to see "trees everywhere."

Trees line the road on Saratoga Avenue for miles; they act as fences for houses; trees fill the landscape along the SHS track.

The abundance of trees in Saratoga is at least partly because of its status as a Tree City, USA and the strict regulations against the removal of trees that come with the designation.

As one of over 3,200 Tree Cities across the nation, Saratoga provides at least \$2 per capita — which amounts to approximately \$62,000 in total per year — for the maintenance of trees and the Arbor Day foundation, a nonprofit organization with over a million members dedicated to planting trees. Saratoga's tree regulations aim to provide a sustainable urban forest and balance the rights of property owners with basic standards for the maintenance, removal and replacement of trees.

According to the city's Community Development Department, the property values are "closely tied to the rural attractiveness of the city, much of which can be attributed to the trees." In fact, the number of trees in a community has become an indicator of wealth since the 1970s. It's no surprise, then, that Saratoga would impose strict regulations about tree removal.

In Saratoga, homeowners must first submit an application for a permit that lists the number and location of each tree to be removed, after which a city arborist will make a report based on a number of factors, such as its condition, the topography of the land and the necessity of removing the tree. After the city's arborist submits the report, the community development director accepts or denies the tree removal application.

Afterwards, a notification is given to residents within 150 feet of the property, and if there are no objections, the removal may happen. This step may be skipped if a dead tree is being removed. Tree pruning of more than 25% of a tree requires a permit as well, although a notice to neighbors is not required.

Critics of this process say denying an application for removal can pose a greater threat than reduced aesthetics in a neighborhood and point to the dangers posed by falling trees or trees whose roots undermine nearby structures.

Residents appreciate Saratoga's foliage

Trees, of course, provide shade, add beauty and help tackle changes in the climate. The abundance of greenery from trees provides a multitude of benefits for cities' environmental health, according to Los Altos resident

Marta Wilde. Though Los Altos is not a Tree City, USA, it shares many tree regulations with Saratoga.

Wilde said she believes trees are one of the ways to address climate change.

She cited the recent heatwave across the Bay Area as an example of a problem that could be mitigated with more trees in communities. To help residents learn more about areas in the city more prone to high heat, the San Francisco community mapped heat islands around the city — areas where temperatures are a lot higher than surrounding areas.

"These islands cause heat illness, which can kill people, especially elders. If there are no trees, more heat islands will appear," Wilde said.

Although Wilde fully supports the regulations that help maintain trees, she admits there are good reasons for exceptions to strict policies for tree removal:

Wilde recalled having to remove three large trees in her front yard that were impeding plans to create a driveway during a remodel.

While she and her husband cut down three trees in total, the couple planted 20 more to replace them, with some in the yard and the rest along the fences. The trees were planted away from problematic areas such as development and plumbing.

"We felt horrible taking down those trees," Wilde said. "I told my kids: Each of those trees took 30 years of growth to become big, beautiful trees, and it takes us only 20 minutes to knock it down. So every time you remove a tree, there should be a lot of consideration whether you need to do it."

Currently, Saratoga offers a list of native trees, including redwoods and oaks, as a replacement for trees that are cut down. These trees must be consistent in value and a similar species as previous cut-down trees. If a new tree cannot be accommodated, homeowners can plant trees off-site or make a payment to the City Tree Fund. Trees are valued based on the size of the tree, as determined by the arborist.

However, Wilde believes that the city gives "outdated" information about which trees are suitable as replacements. For example, redwoods need coastal fog to survive and are not native to areas far from the coast, like Los Altos and Saratoga.

"We need to reconsider what we plant; we need to rethink the list of species that do well in this area," Wilde said. "I'm not an arborist, but why can't we look to Arizona, [which has similar soil

compositions to California], and see what grows well there?"

Another supporter of Saratoga's tree city regulations is Moon, who fell in love with trees as a child, when he would spend much of his freetime in forests making campgrounds with his friends.

As an avid lover of trees, Moon supports the city's strict regulations prohibiting their removal, referencing their ability to provide shade and help clean the surrounding atmosphere. Rather than cutting down trees, he offers a simple solution: Build around them.

"You don't have to make a clear cut to make a building," Moon said. "You can just build around them. It's not an unreasonable request; it's just that a lot of developers want to build real fast and cutting everything makes building faster."

Moon has seen how Saratoga's tree protection policies have had positive effects, especially since residents must replant two trees for each one removed. Hence, the city loses little greenery. For example, only 39 trees were removed in the 2020-2021 school year,

while 436 trees were pruned, an alternative solution that requires a much less arduous approval process.

Tree hazards can compromise safety

According to South Bay real estate agent Diana Ye, the abundance of trees in Saratoga neighborhoods contributes to its rural feel and is one of the main reasons why it is such a desirable city to live in.

"Trees make people feel like they're going home," Ye said. "They feel more comfortable and relaxed."

She said properties with large heritage trees typically sell for 3% to 15% above those without them.

However, the placement of trees is also important: Ye cited the \$200,000 decrease in price of a \$2.5 million Cupertino home due to the close proximity between the house and a large oak tree.

The debate between removing trees and ensuring residential safety is a common problem for homeowners like Jean Lundeen, who lives along Pierce Road. Lundeen's safety has been threatened by several oak trees with sudden oak death, a type of tree disease caused by a fungus-like plant pathogen that causes them to unexpectedly fall over. As of September, five of six trees have fallen in her neighborhood.

In 2000, a sick oak tree brought down the power lines of a 100-year-old barn, which caused dangerous sparks. Later, another oak tree fell over and hit a car. The driver barely escaped without getting injured. These trees are often dead before the homeowner notices and contacts an arborist, Lundeen said.

While most of the dangerous oak trees near Pierce Road have fallen since then, a few of them are still growing and homeowners haven't been able get permission from the city

arborist to cut them down: According to Lundeen, if the arborist can't determine whether a tree has sudden oak death, they will recommend not cutting it down.

When asked to comment, the city said residents could submit samples of the tree for free to UC Berkeley's SOD Blitz Project, which tests samples from residents and posts a map of positive and negative cases.

Despite the potential harms caused by the oak trees, Lundeen still believes that the strict protection for heritage trees adds value to Saratoga's homes and environment.

"I think we should try to keep all the healthy trees alive," Lundeen said. "But people should be allowed to replace certain trees that compromise their safety." ♦



Ye, South Bay real estate agent.

falconfigures

39 trees removed in 2020-21

436 trees pruned in 2020-21



TREE CITY USA

\$62K

city's annual tree maintenance budget

All graphics by LYNN DAI

Golfer reflects on mentality of practicing alone

By IsabelleWang

While many sports like soccer and basketball involve teamwork among players, golf is one of the few that focuses on individual improvement and practice. Sophomore Sarah Lim has played golf for four years, and practices three to four hours most days at San Jose University Spartan Complex. Along with holding the No. 1 position in the school's girls' golf team, Lim plays golf competitively: She has placed seventh out of 78 players in the Notah Begay National Championship Louisiana and third out of 19 players in the Mountain View Junior Championship.

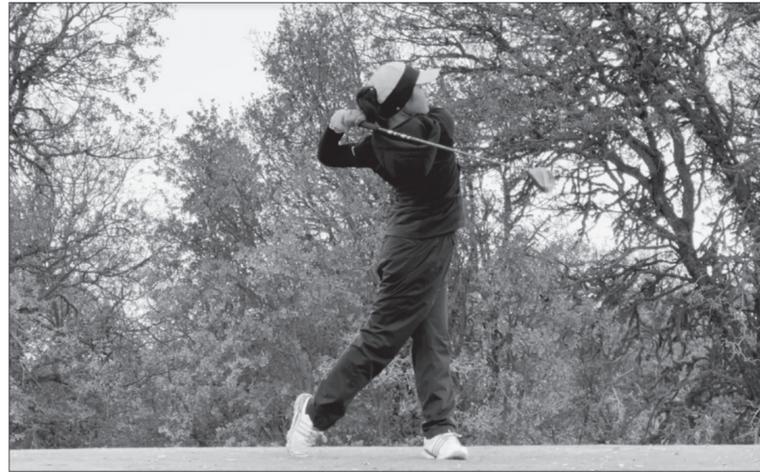
Lim grew up an active athlete, having played soccer since she was 6. However, a bad foot injury at age 10 ended her soccer career.

"I was in a tight spot for about five months, when I couldn't do anything since I couldn't walk," Lim said.

Lim's interest in golf was sparked in sixth grade when her dad invited her to play for fun. Her first tournament was two years after her introduction to the sport.

"It's a lot more pressure playing in tournaments, since you have to stay mentally focused for the five to six hours you're playing," Lim said.

An extremely technical sport, golf requires tons of repetition and precise coordination. Once Lim practices a shot to the point



Sophomore Sarah Lim finishes her shot at Hunter Ranch in Paso Robles during her practice session on Dec. 3. Courtesy of SARAH LIM

of perfection, she repeats it at least 20 times in multiple sets to get the muscle memory needed for competitions. She also builds her mental strength through practice, as she constantly receives constructive criticism from her mentors.

Often, Lim records her shots on video so she can watch them over with her dad and coach.

With each course around seven to eight miles, Lim keeps in shape to stay focused during the sets by occasionally running once a week.

A key factor of staying mentally focused is also making sure she isn't tired while playing.

Before her practices, Lim often creates a plan on what to work on, such as specific shots she needs to improve. With the long practice hours, she listens to pop music to keep herself focused. Lim finds that keeping a consistent schedule and constantly pushing herself even if she isn't performing at her best helps her stay motivated.

Typically, Lim's mom drops her off at the complex and she practices by herself. Lim tries to use time efficiently until the complex closes.

"To make sure I actually practice, it's helpful to create a plan where I practice for three hours, rather than [telling myself I'll] practice from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.," Lim said.

Lim also creates a flexible schedule, allowing her to practice almost daily. Since the course is a 30-minute drive from her house, she occasionally practices at home

if she needs to prioritize her school work. In her backyard, Lim keeps a golf net for practicing her shots.

When playing at tournaments, Lim gets the "usual jitters," from the pressure of performing well, but she has learned to maneuver around the initial nervousness.

"If you can't control your emotions [during tournaments], your performance will begin to spiral downwards, and it's really hard to get back up once you get too emotional," Lim said.

Taking too many shots into a hole or shooting poorly can result in a defeated and frustrated mindset, increasing the likelihood of future missed shots. To prevent this, Lim finds that chatting with other players lessens her stress. Because tournaments are played in groups of three or four, players get to interact with each other. This, along with tournaments spanning over a few days, helps Lim concentrate more during her shots.

"If you don't do well on the first day, you can always improve throughout. It also causes less stress sometimes, since not all of the pressure is on one day," Lim said.

With emotional support from her school teammates, Lim says she has become more focused on her shots rather than scared of missing them.

"You can meet a lot of fun and cool people [during tournaments], and you end up seeing them at a lot of competitions," Lim said. ♦

Squash athletes find tight-knit community

by SaachiJain & DanielWu

For some, the word squash brings to mind pictures of a bland vegetable. Yet for juniors Neal Malhotra and Dhruv Nemani, it carries an entirely different meaning: a sport, a family and a lifestyle.

Characterized by its lightning fast nature and technical movements, the indoor racket sport consists of two players hitting a tennis-like ball at high speeds against a wall, hoping to prevent their opponent from returning the ball after one bounce.

The ball travels incredibly fast — with one professional player's shot even reaching more than 175 mph, the same velocity required for a Boeing 747 jumbo jet to take off, and faster than racket sports like tennis.

Malhotra's was exposed to squash at age 12 after a successful run in tennis, where he qualified to compete at the national level. Curious to try a new sport, Malhotra's friends brought him into the squash scene, practicing with him at the Bay Club in Santa Clara and allowing him to learn the basics.

"I immediately fell in love with the sport," Malhotra said. "Given how unique and dynamic squash is, it really falls into its own category of racquet sport."

Unlike most sports where competitors often have little connection, Malhotra said that due to the small size of the squash community, players often connect with one another on a personal level, creat-

ing a sense of family.

Nemani's exposure to sports also began with tennis; however, because he was always on the smaller side, he found it difficult to sprint across the large court and later switched his focus to squash.

It was a good move. Nemani plays squash at the national level, traveling to areas like Seattle and Rhode Island. However, his national ranking dipped slightly in recent years, which he attributed to a lack of practice and attendance of tournaments during the pandemic, highlighting the rigor that comes with competitive squash.

"During the pandemic, I practiced less than I would've in a normal year," Nemani said. "Coming back, I've resumed a semi-normal practice routine. I go to an academy in Redwood Shores for group lessons three times a week and practice solo

three times a week in Santa Clara." Prior to the pandemic, Nemani was ranked 40th in the U-15 division. Now that his age group has leveled up, he is ranked 80th in the U-19 division.

Nemani wishes that the sport can grow in popularity to levels similar to tennis or badminton. He said that its low following could be due to the lack of proper court infrastructure and various expenses that come with playing at the national level.

"The community is very tight-knit and friendly," Nemani said. "I'd love to see it expand and grow in the coming years, as squash is just such an incredible sport that is fun for everyone of all ages." ♦

energy drink SHOWDOWN

<p>Rating: 5 Falcons</p> <p>#1</p> <p>BODYARMOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 21 grams of sugar - 90 calories - 560 mg of electrolytes - 16 oz. bottle <p>Marketed as a natural and healthy alternative to popular brands like Gatorade, the taste of BodyArmor is more soothing compared with Gatorade, which left a rather unpleasant artificial aftertaste. It is more diluted and offers a greater dosage of those key electrolytes.</p>	<p>Rating: 4 Falcons</p> <p>#2</p> <p>POWERADE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 21 grams of sugar - 80 calories - 190 mg of electrolytes - 28 oz. bottle <p>Powerade's taste is very punchy, but may be a little too sweet at times. Since each bottle contains 21 grams of sugar, there is a lot of mean excess sugar. However, you get a noticeable boost in energy. Except for the relatively higher sugar content, Powerade is a great choice of an energy drink.</p>
<p>Rating: 4 Falcons</p> <p>#3</p> <p>GATORADE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 34 grams of sugar - 140 calories - 350 mg of electrolytes - 12 oz. bottle <p>There are seemingly infinite options to choose from with a popular energy drink like Gatorade. While Gatorade's flavors are diverse with choices for everyone, they aren't exactly the healthiest option. The added excess sugar and extensive usage of artificial sweeteners negates the benefits from the added electrolytes.</p>	<p>Rating: 3 Falcons</p> <p>#4</p> <p>PRIME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 grams of sugar - 20 calories - 710 mg of electrolytes - 16 oz. bottle <p>PRIME has posed itself as a major rival to established sports drinks companies like Gatorade and BodyArmor, but, in general, their flavors are hit or miss due to an inconsistency of sweetness between flavors. It also contains extremely high amounts of electrolytes, with over 700 mg of potassium.</p>

All graphics by LEYNA CHAN and ERIC SHI

BOYS' BASKETBALL

Falcons strive to recapture magic of Gunn victory

by GeorgeHuang
& ZackZhang

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

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

COACH Mike Davey

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

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



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

and swished a 3-pointer. Later, after being fouled, Berkowitz-Sklar made two free

throws, and the crowd erupted with excitement. It was an unlikely comeback. The

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

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

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

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

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

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

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Falcons face six tough losses, CCS prospects unlikely

by ChristinaChang

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

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

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

lost 63-44 against Monta Vista on Jan. 26; lost 51-41 against Lynbrook on Jan. 19; lost 60-34 against Los Gatos on Jan. 17; lost 48-44 against Leland on Jan. 14; won 45-42 against Homestead on Jan. 12; lost 54-36 against Palo Alto on Jan. 10; and lost 54-42 against Homestead on Jan. 5.

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

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

with the short time they've had here in the program."

Due to injuries, along with their small 8-person varsity roster, the team has had a rough time closing out games, Rivera said. While the Falcons often keep up with opposing teams initially, players often get tired as games progress, resulting in widening score gaps.

To improve for future games, he emphasized consistency.

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

To make CCS, a team must win half their

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

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

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

"A lot of these girls have been tested quite a bit as far as outside noise and the wear and tear of the months-long season, but I don't think any of them have ever given up," Rivera said. "They show up, they work out and they put their best foot forward." ♦

GIRLS' SOCCER

In De Anza League, team faces difficult uphill battle

by VictoriaLin
& IsabelleWang

After joining the higher De Anza division this year, the girls' soccer team has experienced a rough first half of their season. The Falcons have a record of 2-3-1 as of Jan. 23.

They lost 3-0 to Santa Clara on Jan. 23, beat Palo Alto 3-1 on Jan. 18, lost 3-0 to Homestead on Jan. 13, lost 3-0 to Mountain View on Jan. 11, tied Los Altos 0-0 on Jan. 9 and beat Gunn 3-1 on Jan. 6.

"Our pre-season (the games that took place in December) was kind of rocky but I think we've recently found that drive and passion to play in our games," senior wing and team captain Aleks Verga said. "When we won our first game against Gunn, it gave us a big morale boost."

As opposed to an offense-oriented strategy like last year that allowed alumni Anjali Nuggchalli, Lauren Yarrington and various other offense players increasing opportunities to score and ultimately led them deep into CCS, the Falcons changed their formation this year in order to focus on their defense as the level of play has become a lot higher in the upper division.

Last year, the team played in a 4-3-3 formation. This year, the team shifted into a 5-3-2 formation consisting of five defenders that stepped up to fulfill the needed po-

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

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

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

JUNIOR Jiah Jung

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

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

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

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

BOYS' SOCCER

Despite hiccups, the team works toward a comeback

by VictoriaLin
& DanielWu

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

The Falcons tied 0-0 in their game on Jan. 24 at home against Fremont. They won 4-3 vs. Lynbrook on Jan. 17 during an away game and lost 1-0 against Monta Vista on Jan. 13. The Falcons loss against the Monta Vista was attributed to Saratoga underestimating their defense, which enabled the Matadors to slot a goal in near the end of the match.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sinton

Athletes turn to trainer Caitlin Steiding for their injuries

by KathyWang

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

"I liked being able to help people, so when I was looking at going to college, I thought more about how I could get into a job with sports and medicine," Steiding said.

Steiding's high school athletic trainer and P.E. teacher introduced her to a sports medicine elective in her senior year. In the class, she learned about the causes of different injuries, taping procedures and how to apply those skills in labs.

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

ATHLETIC TRAINER Caitlin Steiding

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

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

apply to four-year colleges as well as jobs after graduating college. In addition, Ohkubo's kinesiology class allowed her to work hands-on with sports teams on the first day of school.

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

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

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

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

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



Athletic trainer Caitlin Steiding (center) poses with members of the football team on Oct. 20.

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

At football games, the helpers carry and fill water jugs, mixing Gatorade and occasionally tending to injured athletes.

"Pretty much anything Caitlin wants, we do," Murphy said. "If she's a little busier or she's helping someone else, we'll help her whenever she needs."

Specifically during the football season, Steiding would work with the students by first going through a checklist of supplies for sports games, then delegating different tasks among them and going over who is doing what task when on the field.

Both Murphy and Sadeghi started helping Steiding after learning about it from their friends. Throughout their time with her, the two were able to meet new people, earn volunteer hours and form tighter

bonds with the athletes they assisted.

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

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

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

One teacher's journey toward muscle, strength and health

by SamBai
& AidenYe

Physics teacher Matthew Welander teaches high-level science classes that demand thorough preparation and deep concentration. But his work days begin in a place not typically associated with the concepts he teaches: a local gym.

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

In college, he occasionally lifted weights with friends when his busy schedule allowed. Although Welander now wakes up in the morning to go to the gym, he used to have a more sporadic schedule, going whenever he felt like he had time and often taking long breaks.

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

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

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

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

"It was just easy to remember," he said. "You break your workout routines into

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

Since then, he has deviated from following five by five by five exactly. On some days like arm days, he does six exercises instead: three bicep exercises and three tricep exercises. His favorite type of exercises are tricep exercises such as dips, cable pushdowns and overhead cable tricep-extensions, as through his experience, these exercises isolate their target muscles the best.

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

"This eventually started bothering my

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

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

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



Welander

Despite challenges, dance team strives toward Nationals

by MichelleWan

With the new semester in full swing, the dance team has transitioned into its competition season, a time when they attend local contests across the Bay Area and then head to Nationals in Anaheim.

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

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

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

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

Though the team regained a coach with the hiring of Jackson in 2022, preparation for the season has not been the smoothest. Through the many difficulties of the past three years, dancers have found it difficult to adjust to the constant changes in team dynamic, especially with a new coach.

The shift in leadership left the team feel-

ing anxious about their incomplete dances, causing competition to reel in even more added stress, according to Andersson.

"The one thing that has kept us going is the bond and pride we have for every single girl on the team."

SENIOR Avani Gupta

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

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

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

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

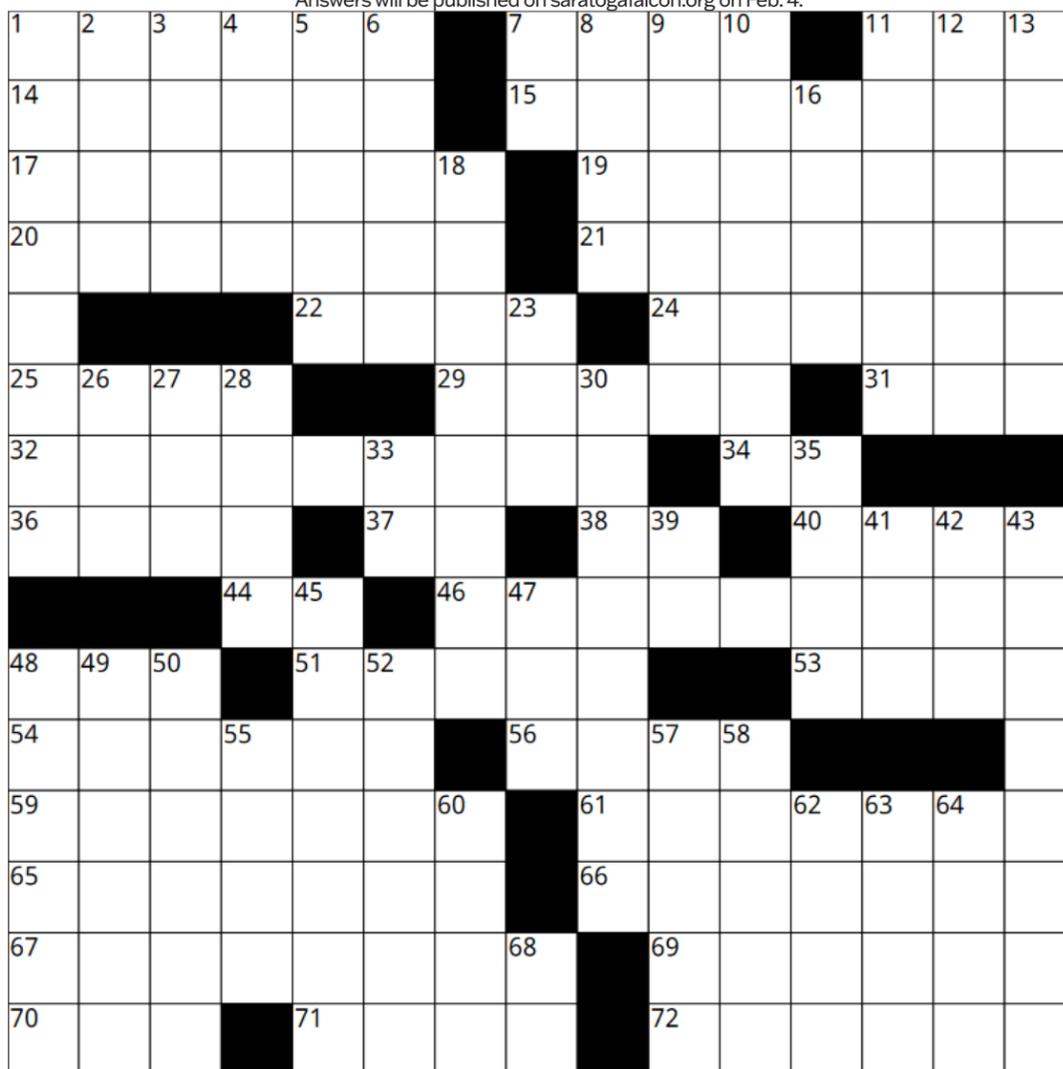
The Falcon Crossword: Early 2010s web games

BY Christopher Chen

- ACROSS**
- 1 Cleveland Cavaliers forward
 - 7 A double reed woodwind instrument
 - 11 Stage name ___ Rida
 - 14 Broadcasting now
 - 15 The final Club Penguin party before its discontinuation, the ___ Party
 - 17 Virtual pet website owned by NetDragon
 - 19 Fixes the spine of a book
 - 20 Raised without synthetic chemicals or hormones
 - 21 MCU Doctor _____
 - 22 General ___ Chicken
 - 24 It's nice ___ you
 - 25 Blame, responsibility
 - 29 Sew again
 - 31 Certificate of deposit
 - 32 Grater and lemon
 - 34 First word babies learn
 - 36 525,600 minutes
 - 37 Pixar Movie with balloons
 - 38 Too strong, needs nerfs
 - 40 Hopefully liveable
 - 44 Help teachers grade homework and take attendance, usually
 - 46 National Geographic MMO
 - 48 Chinese for book
 - 51 Team Fortress 2 character shipped with Heavy?
 - 53 Japanese spear
 - 54 Dated word for prostitute
 - 56 An action with your tongue
 - 59 Store of weapons
 - 61 Expression of frustration at someone: ___!
 - 65 Often performed by worms
 - 66 Collection of many (usually) unrelated things
 - 67 Pasta meaning "little tongues" in Italian
 - 69 Mitsubishi ____, also known as Colt ____
 - 70 An initiative by the UN for

- sustainable stock exchanges
 - 71 Enough human sacrifices to ___ a dragon
 - 72 Possessions and money
- DOWN**
- 1 Board game that usually ends in crying and yelling and hoping for jail
 - 2 Extraordinary individual
 - 3 Probably hosted on Tumblr or Wordpress
 - 4 Dua ____
 - 5 Scheduled time and place for something to happen
 - 6 Plural, abominable snowman
 - 7 Instinctive sound of pain
 - 8 Spitting ____
 - 9 Heroine of Swan Lake
 - 10 Controversial 90 Day Fiancé star; alternatively, a binding decision plan for the Rhode Island Ivy League university
 - 11 Desert fox
 - 12 Past tense, stuck deeply
 - 13 Plural, beginnings; alternatively, ___ and rimes
 - 16 ___ Hemsworth
 - 18 Paper pad used to keep score
 - 23 Equivalent to general or flag officer, but works for the US federal government
 - 26 Formerly called (especially for maiden names)
 - 27 ___ Thurman
 - 28 Bogo ____
 - 30 Philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium, centered around resilience and virtue
 - 33 Also be romanized as "tsu"
 - 35 Can be used to describe large eyes that can see well
 - 39 Liz Truss's role, at least for two months before defeat by lettuce
 - 41 6th album by Steely Dan
 - 42 Jim Davis's ___ field
 - 43 Devices that give off

Answers will be published on saratogafalcon.org on Feb. 4.



- 45 something
- 47 0
- 48 Loose shoulder covering, plural
- 49 Vice president 2020-2024
- 50 Bearlike
- 52 Gender-neutral expansion of et al.
- 55 Surname, ice hockey player known for the Michigan Goal
- 57 Claw of a crustacean
- 58 A Sacramento cannabis dispensary
- 60 40 days of solemn observance
- 62 "Off the wall"
- 63 Dragon-type Pokémon, Salam ____
- 64 Realization - Oh, ___ it
- 68 A popular major at UC Berkeley: ___CS ◆

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

BY Amy Luo

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

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

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

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

ones truly privileged were found on my bed.

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

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

for the trip back.

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

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

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



topten

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES

- 10** Weekends/holidays. You want me to stress about homework during break? (I'm sorry, I'm kidding; I'll turn it in whenever you want for a good grade.)
- 9** 6 p.m. To all teachers who do this, I'm genuinely curious: do you do this on purpose? Or has your grading ability been possessed by the ancient soul of a sleep-deprived vampire?
- 8** 9 p.m. I just feel bad for all the band kids who end practice when these assignments are due.
- 7** Midnight. I feel like I'm having a heart attack whenever I open Canvas to submit my paper and see that it was due at midnight.
- 6** 3 p.m. After school? A decent time, but that means I'll probably forget to click submit after I get back home.
- 5** 3 a.m. Mixed feelings. It's not as common of a due date, so I might accidentally think it's due in the evening on that day, thus turning in my assignment late. However, it's also later than midnight, meaning I have more time to work on it.
- 4** 11:59 p.m. A classic. You can't go wrong with 11:59 p.m. When I see a paper assigned, I'm going to expect it to be due at 11:59 p.m.
- 3** 8 a.m. Amazing. I can stay up as late as I want and will still (probably) finish it on time.
- 2** Beginning of next class. So I can procrastinate until I end up doing it during my other classes? Yes please.
- 1** End of next class. The best of the best. I don't have to work on it the day before and I'll be able to work on it in class? Sign me up.

>> Nicole Lee