

The ARAGON OUTLOOK

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Aragon High School

TikTok U.S. Ban

Claire Dong
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 19, TikTok was removed from Apple's App Store and Google's Play Store, pausing its services. Many users all over the country were worried about what may happen to the app and the community surrounding it.

"I use it all day," said sophomore Madissen van Lingen. "I open my phone and my finger automatically opens TikTok. When I go home, I go 'oh I have homework' and then I just scroll TikTok for three hours."

TikTok, launched in 2017 by Chinese company ByteDance as a short-form-content social media platform, has faced intense scrutiny from the U.S. government. In June 2022, concerns about TikTok employees leaking personal data were raised, prompting national security concerns, and worrying U.S. lawmakers, who believed Chinese officials may be stealing U.S. user data. Despite these concerns, some users remain indifferent.

"Our data gets stolen every day by the American government and everyone in general, so I don't really care to be honest," van Lingen said.

In response to worries about privacy raised in 2022, a bill to ban TikTok gained traction in Congress in March 2024, sparking public outrage. Many Americans flooded congressional offices with calls to oppose the ban. Ultimately, in April 2024, former President Joe Biden officially signed the bill stating that ByteDance had nine months to sell TikTok to a U.S. owner or face the risk of being banned. This nine-month deadline ended on Jan. 19, causing TikTok to be temporarily shut down.

On Jan. 20, President Donald Trump took office and signed an executive order postponing the TikTok ban by 75 days, making the new deadline April 5. He suggested making TikTok into a joint venture, with the U.S. owning at least 50% of the company. This order was a significant shift from his earlier stance of supporting a ban of the app in 2020.

Even with TikTok going dark for less than a day, some students felt greatly affected.

"Some of my friends were genuinely devastated," said junior Hayden Ha. "Personally, I do think it matters quite a bit, but I don't think that people were reacting in a very fair way. I saw a reel on Instagram that was like 'this is the worst decision the American government has ever made,' which is just not true considering all of history. It makes no sense to say that and people are blowing this out of proportion."

Students share Ha's sentiments.

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ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG



The fire over La Cañada Flintridge in Los Angeles County. COURTESY OF FLICKR

L.A. FIRES

Ellen Li
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Starting on Jan. 7, wildfires roared across the Los Angeles area, fueled by powerful winds and dry conditions. The fires destroyed at least 16,000 structures, 40,000 acres and lasted 24 days before full containment, killing at least 29 people in the process. Multiple fires raged, most notably in the Palisades, Eaton and Hurst. The Palisades and Eaton fires are some of the most destructive fires in California's history.

CAUSES

The Santa Ana winds, which blow strong and dry winds through coastal Southern California and northern Baja California annually, have speeds that can go up to 100 miles per hour.

"When that wind happens, it's very dry, so there's no humidity or moisture in the air," said Michael Lambrechts, Captain Paramedic at the Woodside Fire Department. "And then, if the fire is being pushed by [very strong] winds, think of it as a blowtorch. That is what Mother Nature has created essentially: a big, giant blow torch."

Besides the annual Santa Ana wind-storm, global warming also contributed to the severity of the fires.

"We're just seeing the result of climate change," said English teacher Genevieve Schwartz. "I don't remember there being this level of wildfire experience. It's really changed over the years, and it's become more and more

drastic, more frequent and more damaging than when I was a kid growing up in the 80s down there in LA."

EFFECTS

Junior Yasmine Santini from Palisades Charter High School first found out about the fires the morning they started.

"I woke up, and my dad rushed into my room and told me that there were fires in the Palisades and that everyone had to evacuate," Santini said. "So I immediately texted all my friends that I knew that lived in the area, and then we started to prepare to leave my house... Honestly, it was really scary."

Their family evacuated later that afternoon and stayed at a hotel for a little over two weeks.

"My house is fine, but there's a lot of damage from the smoke," Santini said. "We had to replace a lot of furniture and stuff outside. Our pool is completely contaminated. We have air purifiers in every room. It's not the same, but I'm glad to be home."

Palisades Charter High School was burnt by the fires, destroying parts of it and leaving the students unable to return to school. The school has, as a result, transitioned to online learning.

"When I first saw it on the news, I was devastated," Santini said. "I didn't know what to do, because I'm extremely involved in my school, and it's honestly my second home. I'm grateful that my school is still standing in some form."

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Trump's Admin

Naomi Kotani
NEWS WRITER

Over the past few weeks, several of President Donald Trump's cabinet nominees have gone through the process of Senate confirmation hearings. As of Feb. 10, thirteen secretaries have been confirmed.

The Cabinet is made up of the vice president along with fifteen heads of federal departments who advise the president and enact his agenda in the agencies. These cabinet members are given the title of secretary, except for the attorney general, who leads the Department of Justice.

During the hearings, committees have the opportunity to question and assess the candidates to decide if they will be voted on by the rest of the Senate, where a majority vote is needed for a nomination to be confirmed.

The confirmed defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, is a veteran and former Fox News host. Most notably, he will have oversight of the military, which he has said needs to have more of a "warrior ethos."

Some students think that this mindset could have negative impacts.

"I don't want America to fall into something ... where we get into useless wars or wars that don't serve us, just for the sake of showing off our might to other countries," said senior Spencer Coral.

Hegseth has faced criticism due to his repeated remarks about diversity policies and women lessening the effectiveness of the military. He's also been confronted by allegations of misconduct, including sexual assault and excessive drinking habits, which he has denied.

Senior Jose Callejas noted that Hegseth seemed to switch his opinion on women in combat during his hearing.

"That shows the hypocrisy of him trying to change his narrative," Callejas said. "But of course, the committee knows [about his comments], they've seen the videos where he's just stating that. To me, that's crazy."

While Hegseth does have experience from being in the military, he has not spent as much time in government or major leadership roles compared to previous defense secretaries.

"His appointment is Trump pushing the limits, testing the boundaries of his influence," Coral said.

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Los Angeles fires and safety measures taken

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Aragon alumni and University of California Los Angeles student Lipika Goel first heard about the fires from her dad.

"I looked up and in the distance, there was this giant pot of smoke," Goel said. "On Tuesday evening, [my friends and I walked] up to the top of the dorm area. There were other people there too, who were just fascinated by the fact that you could see it."

After the initial shock, Goel decided to pack an emergency bag before returning home a few days later. Other students could not do the same.

"The biggest impact was on students who were out of state because, for them, it's not as easy as taking an hour-and-a-half long flight," Goel said. "I have a friend who's from Virginia, and the fire was getting closer and things were getting worse. We [told them], 'if you want, you can just come [with us] if Virginia is too far. Don't stay on campus anymore. It's not safe.' They were definitely put in a limbo situation. It's a lot of time and effort and money to fly all the way to the East Coast just to come back in four days."

Many students and staff at Aragon also had family members or friends who were affected by the fires.

"I have a niece [in Altadena with her] husband and three kids," said substitute Assistant Principal Bettina Graf. "They live in a house that was declared a historical landmark, and the fire took their street out, except for their house, but it's so smoke-damaged that the whole thing has to pretty much

be ripped apart from the inside out. Their school is destroyed. They're doing online [school] in a motel room in Burbank because everybody is displaced."

Some in the Aragon community have personal connections to the area. Schwartz's son spent time in the Palisades when he was younger.

"I remember his grandmother's house was butted up against a park and we would go to the stream, and he would collect frogs," Schwartz said. "We would go on hikes around there. We would take him to the little shops in the Palisades village parks. He was on the swings. He was playing on the fields. That whole part of his childhood is, in terms of the landscape, erased. And he didn't even live there; I just can't imagine the children who lived there, the people [who] grew up there, having that whole geography of memory just gone."

Dean of students Donna Krause's family resides in the Los Angeles area, and a few of them have found temporary quarters nearby.

"When these kinds of things happen, and you've got family and friends involved, it's so hard not to be there," Krause said. "It's so hard not being able to get on a plane and fly down. You just feel so helpless, you don't know what to do about it. We were told not to get in a car and drive down [but] I wanted to volunteer somewhere."

RELIEF

Justin Werle, Fire Captain at Woodside Fire Department, was deployed to Los Angeles to fight the fires but found that combating them was different

than his previous firefighting experiences due to the extreme winds and lack of communication set up upon arrival. The firefighters had to work 70-plus hours with no sleep and spent the first few days protecting houses, before spending their time helping the community.

"When the fires finally settled down, we helped and assisted," Werle said. "We helped them pick up their yards and fix things in and around their homes that had either blown over or singed or burnt ... It's not just firefighting, it's doing the right thing and having that integrity to do the right thing when no one's watching."

Santini found a different way to help those in her community who are affected.

"I'm really just trying to channel all of my negative energy into

positive energy," Santini said. "That's why my sister and I founded the Pali Strong initiative to help rebuild Palisades Charter High School, because the only thing we can do as students is to help rebuild and help assist the staff in whatever way we can."

Pali Strong has raised around \$23,000 to fund its initiative and has hosted a donation and skincare drive.

"Our donation drive was absolutely huge," Santini said. "We received over 200 bags, and we distributed them to four different local organizations to assist us in relocating the resources to somewhere else that needs it more ... We really want to help Palisades [Charter High School] grow until every-

thing is back to normal."

Pali Strong has plans to work with a local nonprofit called World Central Kitchen and mobilize a food drive as well. Others have joined volunteer efforts to help survivors.

"I have a daughter who lives in LA and fortunately, she was not near the fires, but she has been volunteering practically every day since the fires, handing out clothes," Krause said. "Since all this happened, she immediately went to see where she could volunteer. She goes every day and goes to different places and volunteers."

Relief can come in many forms, including lending an ear and raising awareness.

"[My niece's] mom, my sister, passed away in 2018," Graf said. "Her father passed away several years after that. So she really has no parents down there. So I talked to [my niece] quite a bit on the phone. [They created] a GoFundMe and [I was] just texting and calling everybody that I know to raise money for them. And that's kind of the best support. Her kids text me now [because] they just want to talk to somebody."

PREVENTION

The mid-Peninsula could suffer fires as well, and the Aragon community can learn valuable lessons from the recent Los Angeles conflagration.

"Have a plan with your family," Lambrechts said. "What is our plan if we can't make it back home, where are we going to meet as a family? We can go and meet at Grandma's house or we [can] meet at this Starbucks over here, so we can get together as a family, and now we know we're all safe."

Alongside families preparing for emergencies, Aragon also has procedures for an oncoming fire.

"If [a fire] happened at the school, then there's a fire alarm, and the normal fire drill protocols," said Interim Assistant Principal Clarisse Mesa. "If there's a fire in the community, then there are community safety protocols about where [people should gather for] shelter and evacuation locations."

San Mateo County and its firefighters are prepared in case of a wildfire.

"We all work together," Lambrechts said. "We have annual training that we do during the wildland season. The alarm plan is very robust in San Mateo County ... and every agency will come together to support each other here in San Mateo."

The city also places an emphasis on fire education, doing community outreach and working with different organizations to educate people on wildfire prevention.

"The fire department spends a lot of time trying to educate property owners, whether it's an individual home or a business, on how to prepare against wildfire, how to cut down brush, how to make sure there is no standing dead wood, [and how to] cut down their grasses," said San Mateo's City Council Member Lisa Diaz Nash. "[For] San Mateo, we have an emergency plan for different scenarios, if there's a wildfire from the West, if there's flooding from the north, whatever it [is]."

Students can go to fire.ca.gov, readyforwildfire.org or download Nixle to stay up to date on community information or learn more about fire safety.

READ EXTENDED VERSION ON ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

PALISADES

23,400 acres burned

AUTO
60

KENNETH

1,052

EATON

14,000

LIDIA

395

HURST

800

SUNSET

43

13 new Trump cabinet members confirmed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Through his nomination of Hegseth, [Trump] was seeing how much the Senate would be willing to bend to his will."

Despite the controversies surrounding Hegseth, he was confirmed by a margin of one vote, with the Senate split fifty-fifty and the tie-breaking vote cast by Vice President JD Vance.

Another one of Trump's more contentious cabinet picks is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nominated for secretary of Health and Human Services. This position oversees agencies like the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the federal research agency National Institutes of Health.

Kennedy is an environmental lawyer who ran for president in the 2024 election, initially as a Democrat, but later as an Independent. He helped start an anti-vaccine organization in 2016, Children's Health Defense, which has promoted misinformation and conspiracy theories about vaccine safety.

"It's just so hypocritical when he's endorsing unhealthy behaviors such as avoiding vaccines and conspiracy theories," said freshman Dresden Pham. "If

we have another pandemic or epidemic or some sort of medical disaster in the future, we might be screwed because he's not willing to believe in vaccines. He's not willing to believe in actual safe measures."

On the other hand, senior Nolan Moore commented on what he views as a positive side of Kennedy's stances. Moore believes that he will push for "traditional" approaches to combating diseases, which he said relies more on nutrition rather than medicine.

"RFK doesn't want to get the government telling the parents, you have to get this [vaccine]," Moore said. "He doesn't want

kids to be barred from school just because they haven't been checked up recently. So he wants to give more power

to American citizens ... But still, there has to be some power left for the federal government, because they have more resources for health than parents do."

Another nominee is Linda McMahon for education secretary, who was in charge of the Small Business Administration in Trump's first cabinet.

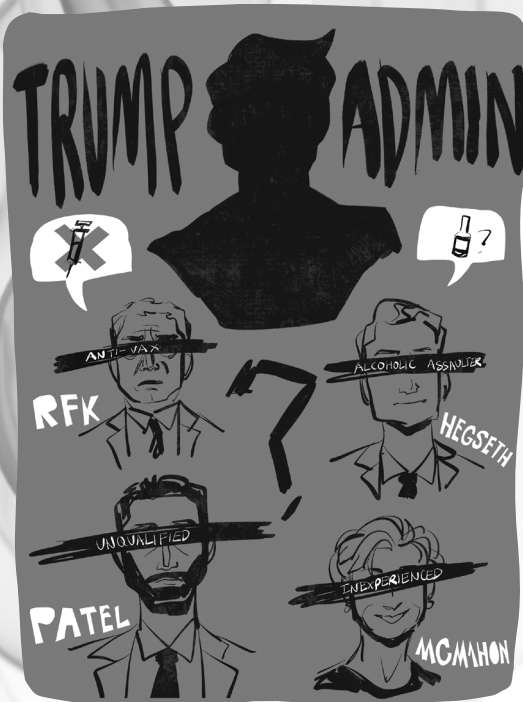
Linda McMahon, former United States Administrator of the Small

Business Administration, is the nominee for Secretary of Education. This role entails supervising the Department of Education, which Trump has mentioned planning to close down. In order to shut down the department, it would have to pass through Congress. This would mean more state control over public education and changes to how federal student financial aid and loan programs are handled.

"There should be some federal grants given to states just to ensure a certain bare minimum level of education countrywide," Coral said. "So that a [public] education in California isn't a complete 180-degree difference from an education in Florida."

McMahon, a co-founder of World Wrestling Entertainment, served on the Connecticut Board of Education for a year and was a trustee for a private university. Other than that, she does not have the same kind or amount of experience in the education field as some who have been in this position in the past.

The remaining cabinet nominees will continue to undergo Senate hearings and voting, the dates for which vary with each candidate.



EDEN KWAN



COURTESY OF JENNY YI

Editorial: more current events

This editorial represents the opinions of 14 out of 14 Outlook editors

As a high school newspaper, the Aragon Outlook places a great emphasis on having healthy political discussions, but we acknowledge and understand the impediments that students may face when trying to reach this goal.

First, the rise of short-form content as the younger generation's main media source has been detrimental to attention spans and the spread of accurate information. Fact-checking efforts are often outpaced by the sheer amount of content circulating these platforms, and many users do not take the time to verify information, allowing misinformation to spread unchecked.

Secondly, as the majority of our school is not yet of voting age, many students do not feel the need to become involved in politics. However, policy choices permeate through several aspects of everyone's lives, whether it be the impending dangers of climate change that make it critical to address it properly, or immigration policies affecting

students within our very own school. Becoming politically aware early on is vital for not only the furthering of our society as a whole, but the development of self-advocacy, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Of course, this is not entirely the fault of students — due to the convoluted nature of politics, it can be difficult to begin initial research — most news articles are not too young

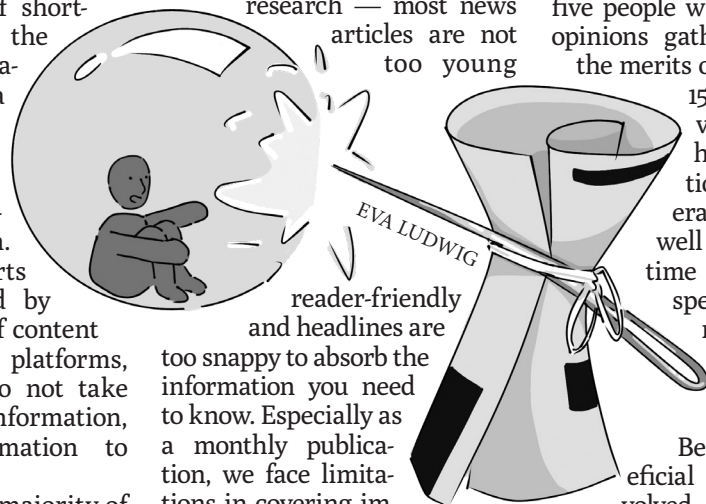
form that is halfway between a full article and a headline.

Staying informed is only the first step, though; meaningful discussions are necessary to shape political understanding and foster community. To encourage such critical thinking skills, the Outlook would like to host a recorded discussion on a prompt related to one of these current events. This will feature five people with a spectrum of opinions gathering to discuss the merits of the prompt in a

15-minute YouTube video. We plan to have this conversation guided by moderating questions as well as having allotted time for everyone to speak in the beginning to ensure fairness, accuracy and accountability.

Besides being beneficial for the people involved, viewers will be able to understand these issues from a high school perspective and hear from their peers. By promoting the spread of this news, we can create a more informed Aragon school community and thus a more informed voter public.

SIGN UP IF YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING!
bit.ly/OutlookDiscussion25



Mock Trial recap

Diya Poojary
NEWS WRITER

From Jan. 21 to Feb. 6, Aragon Mock Trial competed in the 44th Annual California Mock Trial Competition sponsored and administered by Teach Democracy. This year's case was *People v. Gold*, a kidnapping case featuring a Fifth Amendment pretrial argument.

The team has grown in the past few years, so much so that the junior varsity team has used double casting for the witness and pretrial roles, starting last year.

Tryouts are held at the beginning of the school year and help finalize these roles for the varsity and JV teams, further divided into prosecution and defense. By November, the teams have a draft of their content for the case, and focus on practicing their delivery.

"I talk to myself in front of a mirror and practice my hand motions," said freshman and JV attorney Ada Peretz. "It's also fun re-reading the case packet just to practice objections and factual situations."

The team this year also has four attorney coaches, two more than the year before. As practicing lawyers, they meet with the team weekly to refine members' performances and courtroom etiquette.

"I'm a lawyer and sometimes what we do for our jobs isn't always super fun," said attorney coach Carolee Hoover. "You don't get a lot of experience working with younger people that might end up going into that field or being able to share expertise ... So this is an opportunity for me and I love it."

The team also had many scrimmages this year, with schools including Burlingame High School, San Mateo High School and Saint Francis High School in Sacramento.

"[The scrimmages have] helped me prepare for [trials], because I can only guess so much about what they're going to ask me," said sophomore and JV witness Gabby Chan. "So [those gave me] a general idea of what they would cross [examine]

me on and how prepared our team is as a whole."

Rebuttals and objections are a constant point of focus for the team.

"I've had many times where I've been on the spot — I have two minutes to talk, and I'll talk for 30 seconds and I won't know what to say anymore," said senior and varsity pretrial attorney Melody Chen. "I'll stumble and stutter, and it's really embarrassing ... Everyone's looking at you, your judge staring at you ... That humiliating experience is definitely a motivator to not continue doing that."

While the teams received favorable scores in the first round, they did not perform as well in the second round.

"Although our team put in good effort ... it just comes down to scorers liking certain ways to do things better than others," said junior and varsity attorney Tomas Canova. "Some scorers like more aggressive teams, other ones aren't so fond of it."

Attorney coach Jenny Yi believes that confidence was a major obstacle.

"We had a meeting [after the second round] ... telling all the students why they should be confident because they know their facts," Yi said. "They put a lot of time and effort into it ... [Our] students shouldn't lose confidence because of the pressure from other schools. So we try to help them ... recognize their own strengths to build up their confidence."

Outside of practices, the team maintains its bond through frequent Discord meetings.

"It's tradition before a match that we play the games Discord offers in their voice calls," said junior and JV captain Jihye Yi. "It's always a very good team bonding experience because high school is segregated between grades, and that's a perfect time for everyone of whatever grade to get to know their teammates better."

Aragon ended the season placing 6th for both varsity and JV in San Mateo County's South Division,

one of the most competitive divisions in the Bay Area.



MARTIN ZHENG

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CA and SMUHSD launch Trump-proofing effort

Helen McCloskey
NEWS WRITER

In anticipation of President Donald Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20, the state of California and the San Mateo Union High School District took steps to prevent potential actions by Trump toward undocumented immigrants and transgender people.

On Feb. 3, a special session of the California Assembly, requested by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, set aside \$50 million in court cases against the Trump administration and grants for nonprofits that provide legal services for immigrants.

"Sometimes legal action is the only action you can take in this country, so it's a good step," said junior Erin Finn. "The nonprofit [grants are] also a good idea, because it's good to support [immigrants] from the ground up."

However, some think that more should be done.

"Trump wants to stop funding for cities that will help immigrants, [so] maybe California should give more money to those cities," said freshman Sara Chiguchi.

In response to the Trump administration's plans for undocumented people, Superintendent Randall Booker stated in an email to students and families on Nov. 7 that the District will continue to follow its

2016 resolution, instated after Trump was first elected. The District will not collect information about students' immigration status, won't release information unless there is a warrant and will endeavor to make the district a welcoming environment for undocumented students. In addition, staff members have been advised on how to respond if law enforcement enters campus, according to Booker.

"My campuses are not about citizenship or lack thereof," Booker said. "My campuses are about educating students, and if immigration officials want to do their jobs in addressing who they think is undocumented, or apprehending them, not in my schools. We're charged with educating students and keeping them safe, so [arresting students is] in contrast to what we're all about as an educational institution."

If law enforcement enters campus to apprehend a student who could be undocumented, Booker plans to take several steps to avoid students being arrested.

"Immigration [enforcement] hasn't shown up on our campuses [and] I highly doubt that it will happen," Booker said. "[If they did,] I'd want to see [the] warrant that would grant them access to student information. I would pass it by my legal coun-

sel to determine if it's a legally grounded warrant. I would pass it in front of my school board president, and then I'd have to make a decision: whether or not I'm going to abide by the warrant and give the information or not."

With some SMUHSD students fearful of themselves or their family members being deported, the resolution allows people to feel safe, according to SMUHSD Trustee Ligia Andrade Zúñiga.

"We don't know what happens outside of our campuses, we can't control that, but we can control what happens inside," Andrade Zúñiga said. "[The resolution] shows that we care, that no student, no staff member, no person within our school walls will be disrespected. We will do everything we can to protect [undocumented students] and LGBT students."

Trump's executive orders include recognizing people based on either the male or female sex in federal settings, rather than gender, among other restrictions against transgender people. He has also said that he will ban gender-affirming care.

Ethnic Studies, the mandatory semester-long class that teaches students to view history through the lens of those who have been marginalized, could

be targeted as an example of "woke" curriculum. However, since it is a district requirement mandated by California, the course is unlikely to face any changes in the short term.

"Most kids learn their values from their parents. Ethnic Studies is learning about different people and perspectives," said sophomore Mari Solorzano. "It's a place to [have] opinions rather than opinions of your family or the media, but if that were taken away, it would be rare to see somebody with their own opinions."

Some are concerned that the district and California's measures may be unable to prevent Trump's actions.

"When it comes to country-wide trends as a whole ... sometimes the tide of politics impacts everyone, no matter how liberal they may seem," Finn said. "Executive decisions could impact our state, especially if overreaches of power are made [by President Trump]."

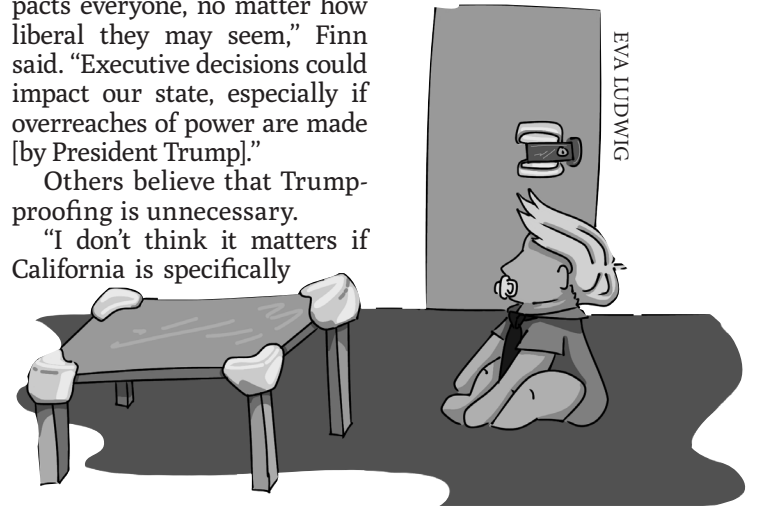
Others believe that Trump-proofing is unnecessary.

"I don't think it matters if California is specifically

designated as a refuge or a shelter for [transgender] people and for undocumented people, because it will always serve as that whether or not it's explicitly stated," said junior Brody Friedeberg. "Living in California, I feel safer than I would in any other state, especially [compared to conservative] states."

Booker notes that the district will continue to watch the federal government's actions.

"I don't think that SMUHSD is the first line of defense when it comes to organizations disagreeing with President Trump's directives," Booker said. "The state legislature in California [and] California laws are going to serve as buffers far before individual school districts have to make certain decisions."



Administration undergoes changes this semester



Dr. Clarisse Mesa

VICTORIA SANTANA

Reika Lam
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 8, Interim Assistant Principal Clarisse Mesa joined the Aragon administration team, assuming the role of Assistant Principal Andrew Hartig, who is currently out on medical leave. Aside from admin changes within Aragon, there have been many shifts throughout the entire San Mateo Union High School District. Don Scatena, previously the Director of Student Services and the Middle College Principal, has left for a Deputy Superintendent position at Burlingame School District, leaving gaps in the district that needed to be filled.

Although she is now in education, Mesa originally received her Bachelor of Arts

in Political Science and Public Policy.

"I have a bunch of educators in different forms of my family," Mesa said. "So I was always exposed to [careers in education], but I didn't think that I wanted to do that as my profession."

However, after participating in the non-profit organization Teach For America, which aims to strengthen education equity and excellence by allowing select college graduates to teach students, Mesa realized that she wanted to change the direction of her career.

Starting out as a teacher, Mesa eventually decided to make the switch to working on school administration.

"When I was teaching, I thought [that] there's so much beyond the classroom

that impacts students' lives," Mesa said. "The systems of what courses get offered, and whether there's transportation for after-school activities, and who gets financial aid for different stuff and all of these systemic issues were things that frustrated me [as a teacher], and I wanted to be able to do something about it."

Following this switch, Mesa held many key roles, including Assistant Principal at both the Palo Alto Unified School District and the Liberty Union High School District. Eventually, her career brought her to this interim position at Aragon, and Mesa began to shadow Hartig in December 2024.

"We started to divide the responsibilities while he was still here," Mesa said. "So it was really nice to get to know [how things work] and have him be able to mentor me a

little bit before he went out on leave."

When she steps into her administrative roles, Mesa aims to bring an understanding of students that is shaped by her own experiences.

"I'm multiracial, and that really matters to me," Mesa said. "That experience of growing up, especially in the Bay Area, is really important to realize ... there's getting to know [students] as individuals and knowing that all students are going through their own formation of identity and belonging, and also working on their academics and trying to [make connections always]."

Valerie Arbizu, who had been the assistant principal of Burlingame High School, and former Aragon principal from 2020 to 2024, has stepped in to be the Interim

Director of Student Services in place of Scatena.

"We were really lucky in that we were able, as a district, to fill most of those positions with people who already worked within the district," Arbizu said. "They've already had an opportunity to form relationships with others."

The district has gone through this before, and Arbizu is confident that the district will succeed.

"It's not the first time [we've had a vast admin change]," Arbizu said. "And I hate to say it, [but] I don't think it's going to be the last time either, just because we're people, and things happen. Nobody has a crystal ball to figure out exactly what's coming, so you work with things the best you can."

Mesa will be continuing her interim position until Hartig returns on April 18.



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Elisa Castillo and Bridgette Martin acting in "Friendship Hurts."

Playwrights Project

Ellie Blakely
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 31, Aragon's Advanced Drama class hosted its annual performance of the Young Playwrights Project at 7 p.m. in the Aragon theater. The Young Playwrights Project is a unit in which students write their own plays, get feedback from peers and then vote on which plays to perform. Students participate in the performance as either directors or actors.

Drama Director Shane Smuin oversees the project and believes it is a unique opportunity for students.

"For a lot of [the students], they've never written a play before," Smuin said. "And they've definitely never heard their own words said out loud by other people, which is a really cool and a little bit unnerving experience."

The first play of the night, "The Silliest Goose," written and directed by senior Isabella Bianco, was a comedic drama that took place on the night of the Goosepocalypse, where geese take the shape of loved ones and kill their victims. The play features a worker whose boss turns into a goose and confesses to the worker that he is his father.

Junior Sophia Rayes' play, "Friendship Hurts," is centered around two teenage girls who struggle to keep their friendship afloat. A dramatic confrontation turns into a friendship breakup as the two realize that they need a break from their messy relationship.

Rayes took inspiration from the complex nature of female friendships.

"It's an experience that a lot of teenage girls go through," Rayes said. "Where they have this friend that they really want to hold on to, but they've outgrown the friendship, so it begins hurting them. I wanted to bring awareness to that and put it on stage."

Rayes also noted the challenges that came with portraying a sensitive topic.

"It was really hard to be mindful of the topic that we're talking about because obviously, my show is very emotional and sensitive," Rayes said. "[By] asking my friends, having people read it for me [and] getting feedback from the class, I was able to gauge what the reactions were and then edit based off of that."

Sophomore Li Jennings' play, "A Really Cool Pair of Shoes," was a pun-filled comedy featuring shoe store employee Ronald McMac, who battles his

manager, Manny Ger, and a customer, Cus Tomer, for a pair of shoes. Ronald emerges triumphant, but when he goes to try on the shoes, they don't fit.

Senior Steven Dominguez, who played Manny Ger, appreciated the caricaturistic nature of his role.

"Manny Ger was a very funny character," Dominguez said. "I got to act lazy, which was very fun. If I wasn't really feeling like it, I could just go on [stage] and it would still be pretty authentic."

"And They Were Coworkers," written and directed by junior Ash Caballero was an enemies-to-lovers romance, featuring two Apple Store employees who get to know each other while stuck in an escape room. Having initially judged one another and made false assumptions, the two realize they are more compatible than they once thought.

Caballero commented on the process of directing a play.

"It felt crazy because I've never done anything like this before," Caballero said. "I don't particularly like being bossy, so that challenged me a little. I tried to say things as nice as possible and guide actors through who their characters are, and give them freedom."

The final play of the night, senior Andrew McColl's "A Hallowed Tempest," was a genre shift after a night of comedies. The play portrays Emery who, frustrated by a lack of changes in the world, seeks answers from the Grand Architect. When the Grand Architect reveals that even they do not have the answers, Emery realizes that their life is in their own hands.

Junior Samantha Green, who played the Grand Architect, enjoyed exploring the complexities of her character.

"[My character was] so complex, so fun to play, [and] they were dramatic," Green said. "It's always interesting to navigate the more emotional parts of that and figure out where the character is coming from."

Audience members appreciated the assortment of plays and greatly enjoyed each performance.

"I love the variety that it had," said freshman McKenna Lindberg. "There was comedy, there was tragedy, there was stuff that actually made you think about life, and it was just overall so entertaining to watch."

Following the conclusion of the Young Playwrights Project, Aragon Drama prepares for "Much Ado About Nothing" from March 20-23.



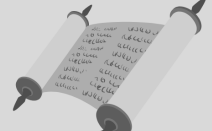
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<p>ONLINE THIS MONTH FEBRUARY</p> <p>Spring sports previews</p> 	<p>Features</p>  <p>Situationships Domestic abuse part 2</p>	<p>News</p>  <p>Dr. Jones report</p>
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Leadership sustainability commission hosts trash sorting event. FELIX MA

New climate projects

Yang Yang
NEWS WRITER

Recently, many climate projects have been implemented to better improve the school environment, including the tri-bins, bamboo utensils and electric charging in the parking lot.

"Everyone leaves trash everywhere, [which is] making the seagulls come," said sophomore

Haley Lau. "[The seagulls start] eating food that's not for them, it leaves the campus a really big mess after lunch and then the staff has to clean it up [which is] a lot of extra work for them ... People [littering] food [is also] really disrespectful to the people making the food [and] wasteful."

There are now new additions of tri-bins on campus for the purpose of encouraging students to properly sort their trash. The tri-bins have three different colors: blue, black and green with symbols that represent recycling, trash and compost, respectively.

Further, during the November sustainability week, plastic utensils were changed to bamboo utensils; the same change will be made in April for Earth Week.

"I prefer [bamboo utensils] better than plastic ones, but the only downgrade is that you get a woody taste when you bite into your food," said freshman Sofia Cabrera. "Other than that, they're perfectly fine ... [and] they are a really good alternative for plastic."

Currently, there have only been small changes, but in the future, there will be more and larger projects.

"[One] initiative is to put in newer, more efficient solar panels at Aragon," said Greg Moretti, Advanced Placement Environmental Science teacher and Aragon's representative on the district's sustainability committee. "They'll cover the entire student parking lot with solar panels [and] we'll have at least three Electric Vehicle charging stations in-

stalled either this semester or over the summer ... eventually we'll have 12 EV charging parking spots on campus ... to make it easier for people to use electric vehicles."

Clubs like One World Club also contributed to these causes.

"I was motivated in seventh grade by Greta Thunberg and it opened my eyes to climate change" said senior Julia

Del Mundo. "Lots of people are uneducated about it and don't know how to solve it, or think they have to make a huge impact. But small things can add up to one big impact if we all come together ... The [club] name in itself is [how] we have this one world that we need to save together."

Many other Aragon students were also involved in building these environmental projects, requiring many negotiations and preparations to successfully conduct them.

"It took a lot of effort to instate even just small initiatives for green sustainability projects," said senior Matthew Lau. "Especially when I went to the board to present my group's initiative, the main concern was

the financial impact of instating compostable or biodegradable foodware. We weren't able to fully instate that, but we were able to do small actions that were sustainable, but also feasible. We've implemented the condiment dispensers where you pump the ketchup, mustard and ranch to mitigate the usage of plastic condiment wrappers."

As climate crises become more prevalent, there will be more projects implemented in hopes of addressing these issues launching in the new 2025-2026 school year.

Poking around: body modification

Oliver Levitt
FEATURES WRITER

There are countless forms of art: one can paint, sculpt a statue, write a song or even put art on one's body through piercing or tattoos. At Aragon, students embrace body art for a variety of personal reasons.

"Most of my piercings I got because I liked how they look," said senior Miller Elliot. "They're not super permanent, so if I like their look, I can [get behind the idea of putting] it on my body. For my tattoo, I knew what I wanted to get for years beforehand. I got my lucky number, which is 13 [tattooed] in Roman numerals on my side."

As a way to express himself, senior Kade McKenzie's choice to get a piercing took much consideration.

"For a long time I thought I wanted a piercing, [but] I just didn't know what I wanted to get," McKenzie said. "They actually depend on facial structure, and some piercings match people better [than others] ... I really wanted one in my ear and I thought [the rook] was super cool. For the eyebrow piercing, I just felt a connection."

However, junior Jack McNeely had a less-planned process in getting piercings and a tattoo, involving a friend's assistance.

"I have a tattoo on my left, inside of my ankle, and it's a stick and poke," McNeely said. "It's a title of a CD on an album from a band I like ... I was looking for an opportunity for change in my life, something that made me unique [and] more for me. You don't really have a lot of control about your body, so it was cool to have something that [made me think] 'I did that, and it makes me look awesome.'"

Despite the unplanned nature of his tattoo, McNeely wouldn't change his choice.

"I don't regret any of them," McNeely said. "I feel for a lot of people, they would have regretted the tattoo, because now I'm not as into the band as I was [at the time]. But for me, it feels like a memento of that time in my life. Years come and go and you just forget them so quickly. I don't remember much of my childhood, but because of that memento on my body, I will always remember at least a little bit of freshman year and those friends that I had ... and just who I was as a person. It'll always remind me of how I've changed as a human being."

The art of tattooing has also expanded to many students.

"I'm an artist and for this last Christmas, my dad got me a tattoo gun because he thought it'd be an interesting idea for me to improve on

art in different ways," said junior Danny Renal. "He has a lot of tattoos, so he's interested in it. I [thought], 'I should try it out, see how it works,' because it could also be a job [for me] ... I watched Ink Master [and] I [thought] 'wow, it's really cool how you could create this image on someone's body.' I've always been interested in forms of art that aren't just painting."

However, there are many unique challenges that tattoo artists face.

"[I've told people] 'when it's legal for both of us, I can give you a tattoo,'" Renal said. "You make one wrong mistake and the customer is not going to be happy, and you're going to feel really bad because it's permanent. If you ever watch a video of someone tattooing, they're not stressed because [they've been doing] it for a long time, but there's a lot of mental

a fashion trend now, rather than an indicator of sexuality," McNeely said. "For tattoos, there's definitely still a huge stigma. [People often say] for job interviews 'don't show that you have a tattoo,' or 'don't show tattoos around little kids.' Those are very big stereotypes that are pushed and they seem very bogus to me."

In addition, religion can play a role in one's decision to get body art.

"My dad's side isn't religious at all and my dad has a lot of tattoos on his body," Renal said. "But my mom's side is very religious, especially my grandma and grandpa; they do not like tattoos. Even when I brought up to my family I got a tattoo gun, they were all very shocked. I believe it has something to do with having your body cleansed and a tattoo is not cleansing. Also, a lot of people think some tattoos look satanic which isn't good for a Catholic family. It's your body, and unless it's harming you ... it should be okay if you really want one, but you just have to know it's permanent and that it's a very serious matter."

Although many factors play a role in one's decision to body-art, piercings require consent under 18 years old and tattoos are illegal under 18.

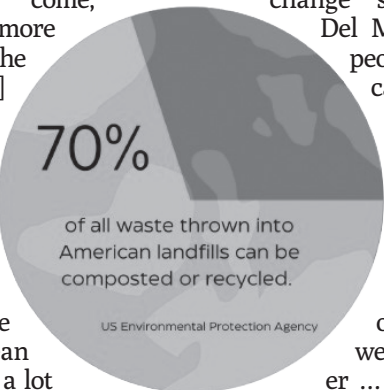
"I don't really like the restrictions," McKenzie said. "I understand why they're there, but I know if my dad didn't consent, I would have just got it from a sketchy, non-professional person. People who want piercings, most of the time, will get them. [For] people who [aren't in] high school [yet], I understand a restriction there. But once you start to be able to make decisions for yourself, in high school [as] a teenager, you should be able to get a piercing without consent."

However, other students agree with the legal restrictions.

"It's a pretty fair limit because while you're living under your parents' household, you should probably do what they want you to do," Elliot said. "You're only 18. You can do whatever you want from that point on, but you should also really consider if you want this on your body for the rest of your life."

Ultimately, making the right decision in getting body art depends on each student's unique perspectives.

"It's hard to know whether a tattoo or a piercing is going to be something you like in the long run," McNeely said. "I'm one of those people that has such a specific mindset to life, and it's 'the next day isn't guaranteed, so why not take a risk? Why not make that choice?' I may end up hating this tattoo in a couple years, but I may not survive a couple years, so while I like it now, might as well do it."



The world is on track to reach 3.1 degrees Celsius warming by the end of this century

United Nations Emissions Gap report



EVA LUDWIG

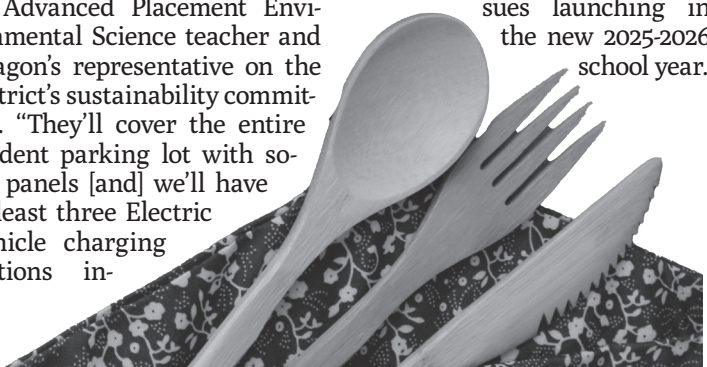
stability you need to have to compose yourself."

Not only can giving tattoos be a stressful process for the tattooer, but many feel concerned about the possibility of social consequences of getting a tattoo or piercing.

"People may see me in a different light because of [my piercings], not that I've ever been necessarily a menacing individual, but the piercing doesn't make me seem the most approachable," McKenzie said. "I have worried about [finding] work with a facial piercing, but I quickly realized as time moves on people are becoming more and more accepting of expression and just having one piercing isn't too crazy."

Aside from social consequences, stereotypes surrounding piercings and tattoos remain problematic.

"In recent years, [the piercing based stereotyping] has gone down. It's more of



To invade or to not invade: question about privacy online

Antonio Mangano
FEATURES WRITER

The short-lived ban on TikTok has brought online privacy into sharp focus, raising concerns about how personal data is collected, used and exploited. From scam calls to data brokers, personal information faces numerous threats online.

Online privacy is the concept of keeping personal data safe while online or using the internet. However, many people remain unaware of how vulnerable their data may be. According to Pew Research Center, 72% of Americans say that they have little to no understanding about the laws and regulations that are currently in place to protect their data privacy.

"The internet is as safe as you can make it," said sophomore Anjali Kalyan Krishnan. "There are certain things you can do to make your experience safer, like not sharing your information."

With personal data at large, scam centers can access personal phone numbers of many people, sending calls to individuals and commonly portraying themselves as customer service agents from large companies.

Though they are illegal in the United States, scam calls remain widespread and increasingly sophisticated, thanks to advancements in artificial intelligence.

"I know of some people who have received [spam] calls where [the calls] sound exactly like someone they knew on the other end, and they're demanding a ransom," said senior Ruhi Mudoj. "Those are definitely dangerous because those [calls] usually prey on the elderly or even children."

Similar to scam calls, scam texts are also very common, especially among younger generations since people have started to learn to not trust calls that aren't familiar. These messages often exploit recent activities, such as package tracking, by sending fake texts claiming additional fees are required.

In addition to scam centers, data brokers are people

who make money by unlawfully collecting online personal data and selling said information to companies

save your information, and then they give it to the advertiser, and then data brokers can get your information from advertisers," Kalyan Krishnan said.

While some data brokers operate legally by using public information, others unlawfully access private data, creating serious privacy concerns. Even when data brokers use public information, their activities can feel invasive. Protecting personal data from unauthorized use remains critical, regardless of the legality of their methods and the information that they get, even if it's public and has already been on the internet.

Many cases involve cookies, which grant users full access to a website's content.

"Honestly, for most people, they just accept [cookies] as a matter of convenience," Mudoj said. "Because in the European Union, for example,

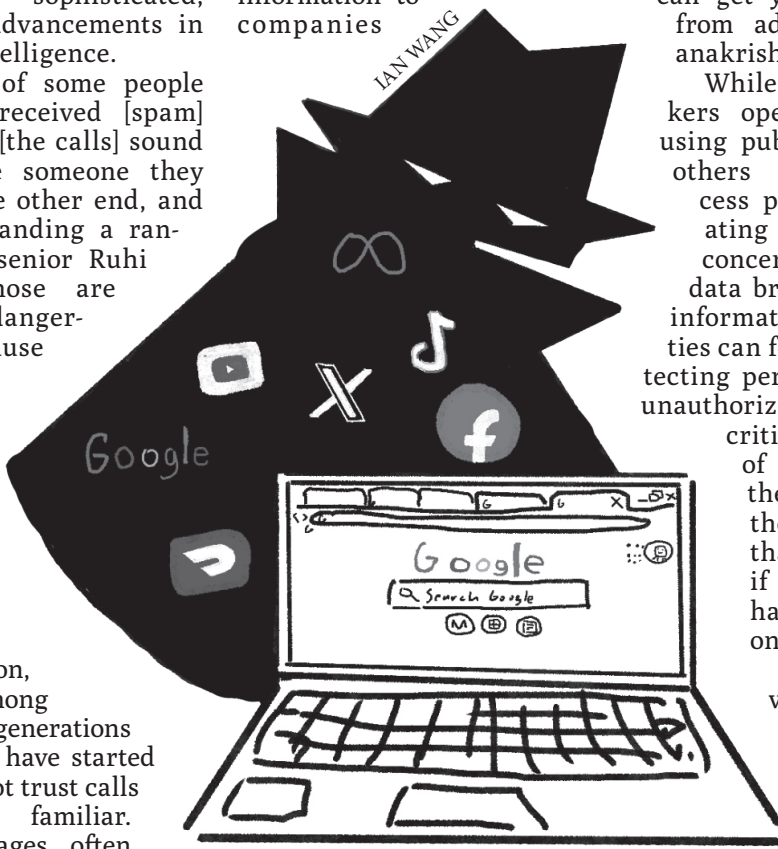
they have regulations that mandate [websites] to ask you about cookies."

Cookies themselves aren't harmful, but when accepting them on a website that isn't common or trustworthy, they can open a gateway to scammers and data brokers.

"Make sure to do research and be vigilant," Mudoj said. "If you're going on a website, be aware that there may be certain scams or [data brokers that] may be trying to use your information. Right now, data is a very valuable currency so people are willing to pay a lot for it."

Online privacy protections are stronger for Californians than most other Americans. In October of 2023, Gavin Newsom approved the California Consumer Privacy Act, also known as the DELETE Act, which places limitations on the data brokers' access to user information.

With background information covering why online privacy is important, people should be aware of what's going on with their information. Whether it's accessed by data brokers or scammers, keeping information to oneself should always be a legitimate concern when being online.



for various reasons, like marketing and advertising.

"There are certain things in social media where they

The deadly misinformation pandemic in the media

Allinah Zhan
FEATURES WRITER

Recently, Liam Rensley, a CEO on the Forbes 400, has officially announced his decision to acquire TikTok. He intends to rename it Y, and soon, American citizens will be able to doom-scroll with no worries of a ban in the future.

Of course, Liam Rensley doesn't exist, and TikTok isn't going to be renamed. This is easy to fact-check, but many still fall for similar deceiving stories that seem plausible at first glance.

Part of this is due to the rise of social media in the past few decades. According to the Pew Research Center, over half of U.S. adults use social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok as news sources.

"[As social media] becomes more mature, there are people out there who are very aware that they can get their messages out," said history teacher Jonathan Felder. "Especially with the current president being elected, he's pointing out fake news all the time and using social media in an unusual way ... There's a lot of people out there who aren't so concerned about what impact they're actually having on people. They'll just say whatever they want to say to accomplish something."

Specifically for TikTok, at least half of Gen Z see news daily on the platform, and around 15% regularly get news from there. This makes TikTok incredibly influential among teenagers and young adults.

"[The videos on TikTok are] really short, so they can't put every detail in there," said sophomore Lisa Yau. "That could make people misunderstand what [the post is] trying to say. Everyone's used to short videos and getting information really fast, so no one wants to actually go search about the news."

This issue is further complicated by the way some news accounts present sensationalized content to generate more publicity and likes.

"If you're trying to get your videos to have a lot of likes, you have to make your language very [inflammatory]," Yau said. "I can easily believe them because they make it sound so real, and their language is so aggressive. [Sometimes,] people start arguing in the comment section, and if I say, 'Shouldn't we see if it's actually true?' I get attacked."

The effects of misinformation are widespread, from politics to medicine to world-

wide events. For example, after the 2020 election, Donald Trump claimed that the election was a fraud, leading to the January 6th Riot.

"The evidence, especially from multiple states recounting their ballots and even the vice president certifying the election, proved that the 2020 election was not rigged," said sophomore Laura Wang. "I believe that Trump, due to political reasons, ... used his media attention to tell his supporters to 'march to the capital,' and they followed his words to do exactly that. His words caused extreme violence in the capital ... The power that biased information has over people is truly insane."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation fueled anti-Asian sentiment. Global crises create a lot of chaos and uncertainty, making them prime opportunities for false narratives to spread online.

"Everyone first thought it was because of monkeys, then bats and then they [blamed the] Wuhan people," Yau said. "No one really knows why it was caused and everyone just

started attacking Wuhan. As a Chinese person, I was scared when there was Asian hate here in America."

This fear and scapegoating was amplified by many public figures who fueled the misinformation, as well as some general distrust surrounding the science of the pandemic.

"Trump said COVID-19 was to be completely blamed on the Chinese," Wang said. "He even called it Kung Flu. When there is COVID-19 or any other pandemic, we need to be united and work together to protect the weakest members of our society, not start complaining

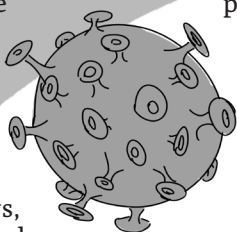
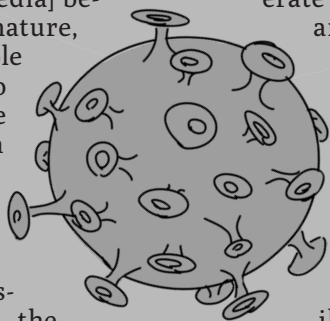
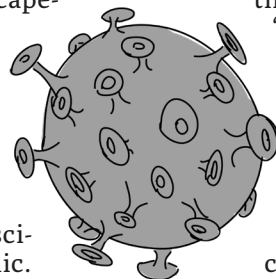
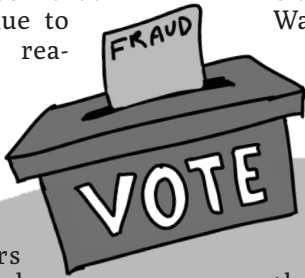
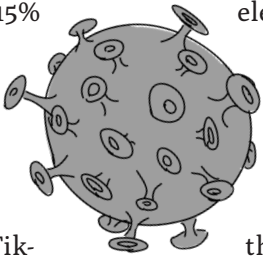
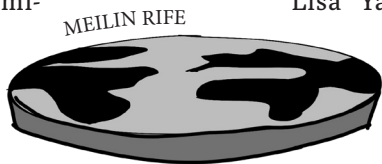
that vaccines are poisonous when people have worked so hard to create them to protect all of us."

Misinformation fuels societal division, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs due to confirmation bias and eroding trust. In fact, previous exposure to misinformation increases the chances of people believing it according to the American Psychology Association, creating a harmful cycle.

"[Misinformation] can potentially break friendships apart if two people believe vastly different things," Wang said.

"They start arguing, and then they just split apart if they refuse to compromise. In America right now, the Republicans and Democrats believe vastly different things. The whole country is split apart between two different views on these issues, [creating] a lot of partisanship."

Misinformation, especially on social media, plays a key role in shaping public perception and can often deepen societal divisions. It fuels misunderstandings across crucial issues in everyone's daily lives, from politics to health, which notes the importance of finding trustworthy sources for information.



CELEBRITY CRUSHES!



Camila Cabello
 “I think she has such an insane face card matched with a lot of talent, [which is] super attractive!”
 Neeharika Kumar (11)



Gordon Ramsay
 “Gordon Ramsay’s creativity and dedication to his passion in getting people to meet his expectations is inspiring.”
 Elizabeth Yuan (10)



Johann Sebastian Bach
 “He’s handsome and wrote Piano Concerto No. 5 in F minor. I don’t know why it hasn’t charted on billboard yet.”
 Marina Wiedmann (10)



Emma Stone
 “She’s an absolute multi-talented queen — [she’s] a wonderful actress, producer and singer (everyone should watch La La Land) and she’s also beautiful. What’s not to love?”
 Erin Finn (11)



Aubrey Plaza
 “Aubrey is the most gorgeous person I’ve ever seen — also the funniest and the most entertaining actor I’ve had the pleasure of watching.”
 Maya Patnaik (12)



Matthew Gray Gubler
 “When he’s on [screen,] it’s hard to know if I’m focused on his great acting, his terrible dad jokes or his [beautiful] face.”
 Maria Medina Dussan (11)



Voted Aragon’s favorite rom-com, “10 Things I Hate About You” (1999) stars Julia Stiles as Kat, an aloof feminist, and Heath Ledger as Patrick, a bad boy who is bribed to pursue Kat. Initially rebuffing Patrick’s advances, Kat is eventually won over through serenading and paintball. When Kat finds out Patrick was bribed, she recites the movie’s titular poem, a list of reasons she both resents and loves him. The film ends happily as Patrick wins Kat back over with an earnest speech and Fender Stratocaster guitar.

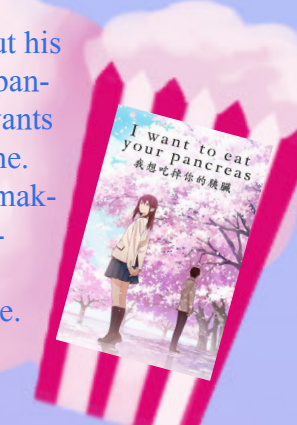


Aragon’s second favorite rom-com is “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before,” a 2018 film based on Jenny Han’s novel. Lara Jean (Lana Condor) habitually writes love letters to crushes, which she hides until her younger sister, Kitty, finds and mails them out. To hide her feelings for one crush, Lara Jean enters a fake relationship with a former crush, Peter (Noah Centineo). Soon, the two actually fall in love. The film resulted in two sequels and a spin-off following Kitty, titled “XO, Kitty.”



Aragon’s third favorite rom-com, “La La Land” (2016) features Ryan Gosling as Sebastian, a struggling musician, and Emma Stone as Mia, an aspiring actress. The two meet and fall in love while pursuing their dreams, with Seb working to open his own jazz club and Mia writing her one-woman play. “La La Land” explores the fragile balance between maintaining love and chasing aspirations. It earned six Oscars, two Grammys and a variety of other awards.

Based off of a Japanese novel of the same name, “I Want to Eat Your Pancreas” (2018) is a story about a boy who finds out his popular classmate is dying from a pancreatic illness. She jokes that she wants to eat his pancreas, hence the name. The pair become close friends, making the ending ever more heart-breaking. The film grossed \$6 million worldwide.



“Love Actually” (2003), set during Christmastime, is an anthology that follows 10 couples with unique messages about love. In an ensemble cast, various characters experience love in different ways: Mark moves on from Juliet after she gets married to Peter, Jamie proposes to Aurélie in broken Portuguese and rocker Billy confesses to his manager Joe. It was nominated for the Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture and remains a classic rom-com to this day.



MOVIES ABOUT LOVE!

Romeo & Juliet

West Side Story (1957)

This musical, which premiered on Broadway in 1957, follows the rivalry between the American Jets and Puerto Rican Sharks, two gangs in 1950s Manhattan. Tony, a former Jet, falls in love with Maria, the sister of a Shark. Their tragic love is based off Shakespeare’s play, with violence between the gangs and Tony dying in Maria’s arms. West Side Story won two Tony Awards in 1958 and has had two film adaptations in 1961 and 2021.

Romeo and Juliet (1968)

This movie adaptation, starring Leonard Whiting as Romeo and Olivia Hussey as Juliet, quickly became incredibly popular, making over 30 times its budget. In 2023, though, the two main stars sued Paramount Pictures over alleged sexual abuse claiming director Franco Zeffirelli coerced them into a nude scene despite being underage. The pair lost their lawsuit. Yikes!

Romeo and Juliet (1597)

An early work of William Shakespeare’s, Romeo and Juliet was published in 1597 and narrated the tragedy of two lovers from opposing families in Verona, Italy. After facing the trials of violence, arranged engagement and exile, Romeo and Juliet poison themselves when their plan to reunite fails. In the centuries since its release, it has become one of Shakespeare’s most famous works, spawning numerous adaptations.

& Juliet (2019)

& Juliet is a musical following an alternative storyline for Romeo and Juliet had Juliet not taken her own life in the end. In this new story, Juliet explores her identity and womanhood in experiences outside of Romeo as she ventures out of Verona. The musical premiered in September 2019 at the Manchester Opera House before moving to the more famous West End stage and has been recognized by the Tony and Laurence Olivier awards.

Bare: A Pop Opera (2000)

Written by Damon Inrabartolo and Jon Hartmere, Bare: A Pop Opera debuted at the Hudson Theatre in Los Angeles and follows students at a Catholic high school, debuting in 2000. It follows a tragedy framework in which the two lovers, Peter and Jason, must hide their relationship while Jason pursues a popular girl in an attempt to conform. Upon being outed, Jason and Peter’s relationship tragically ends Romeo-and-Juliet style as Jason overdoses on drugs and dies.

Gnomeo and Juliet (2011)

An animated spin on the classic story, this 2011 film depicts the love story between Gnomeo and Juliet, two gnomes from rival gardens who hide their romance from their families. Unlike in the original play, the film ends with a happy ending as Gnomeo and Juliet marry after being accepted by their families. A box office smash, the film made over five times its budget, received nominations for the Annie Awards and Golden Globes and even led to a sequel called “Sherlock Gnomes.”

Valentine - Laufey

You Belong With Me - Taylor Swift

Lovefool - The Cardigans

Marry You - Bruno Mars

Dark Red - Steve Lacy

Fade Into You - Mazzy Star

I Love You Jesus - Trisha Paytas

Sofia - Clairo

Lovers Rock - TV Girl

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Graphics: Alexa Sterry, Lillian Huang, Audrey Wang

Layout: Alexa Sterry



This Spotify playlist is a list of Aragon’s favorite songs about love and romance. For the full list, scan the QR code!



Eight going on eighteen: kids getting older younger

Ceylon Liu
FEATURES WRITER

During early 2024, social media users were inundated with thousands of parody videos about the current largest epidemic: Sephora kids. From pre-teens to as young as six years old, young girls around the country have seemingly been restoring the economy through their purchases of Lululemon leggings, drunk elephant skincare and Sol de Janeiro perfume sets.

As the parody videos of Sephora kids persist, there are many fingers pointed at a variety of sources for this plague: social media influencers, parents failing to set appropriate boundaries and even other kids all contribute to an entire generation acting far older than they are.

"The majority of influencers on social media [are] in their 20s, and the narrative [online] is only around

them," said junior Evie Stern. "There's not really good representation for pre-teens and younger children, so they just liken themselves to the adults they see online."

Parental figures also play a role in this development.

"[Parents] just want their kids to like them because they've been placed in this situation where they replaced parenting with friendship, so they want to keep their kids happy," said senior Kasey Guerra Dorsa. "[Think back to] when you were really little and you really liked your parents and then when you become a teenager, you start to become embarrassed of them. When their kids are transitioning, one way

[for parents] to get [their kids] to like them more is to support their leap in maturity."

This desire for many girls to act older could also stem from expectations they face at younger ages.

"There's more pressure [on girls] to be beautiful and mature," Stern said. "Adults are always saying that girls are more mature for their age, while for boys it's much more excusable to be chaotic. I see that with my own little brother. He's eight years old, and all the girls in his class are kind of expected to be the role models of the class while the boys just go feral and the teachers are like, 'Oh, he's eight.'"

However, others find that boys also face similar expectations.

"[Boys] might experience [the pressure] to act tough [and to] not talk about their feelings because they need to man up," said freshman Angelie Cruz Pantoja.

With more influencers recently creating content aimed at a younger male audience, these strong views of masculinity may be transferred to a younger age group than before.

"Andrew Tate is pushing a certain aesthetic and a very specific agenda of what he thinks that masculinity should be," said senior Janak Bhuta. "These influencers are in their 30s or 40s, so

they have a lot more life experience, and they've defined what they want

[masculinity] to be themselves. But people who are younger that might not know better might just adopt that [mindset and] start practicing that at a young age."

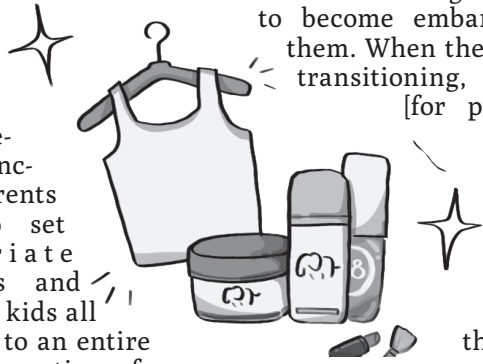
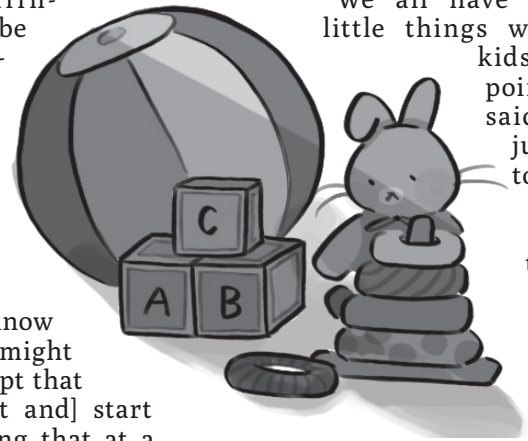
With many factors that play a role in the desire to be older, many students find it alarming.

"When [kids] start out young and they're trying to act more mature than their age, ... [they] lose out on [their] childhood," said senior Malia Choi. "Childhood [is a time where] you can be free to do whatever you want, and then when you're older ... you have more responsibilities. [Kids are now] missing out on that fun time when you could just have fun with your friends."

However, some find it hypocritical to judge kids' responses to the causes.

"We all have annoying little things we did as kids at some point," Stern said. "You just have to let them figure out their way through the funky years and grow into a mature person. There's no way to really avoid it. I don't think we should critique kids for that because they're learning and growing ... I don't even love kids that much myself, but it feels wrong to hate on them for wanting to buy Drunk Elephant. They're teen girls [and] 10-year-old girls."

With many children having the desire to grow older, the causes of this development, including social media, pressure and expectations go unnoticed and continue to impact children's self-esteem and actions.



Misrepresentation of Palestinian's suffering in Western media

Jannah Nassef
NEWS WRITER

*This column represents the opinion of the author.

Ideally, we would like to believe that the media and news we watch is objective and unbiased to understand the world around us. It has become increasingly evident that this is simply not the case, especially concerning Western media's coverage of Israel's illegal invasion of Palestine.

The coverage of Israeli attacks on Palestinian families, civilians and children has been biased. The horrific case of Muhammed Bhar, a young Palestinian man who had Down syndrome and autism, and required constant care from his family, reveals Western media bias against Palestinian suffering and killings. The Israeli military raided his home on July 3, 2024 and let their militant dog attack him. They then locked him in a secluded room and drove his family away at gunpoint. His family returned to his decaying body a week later.

Middle East Eye headlined this, saying "Gaza: Palestinian with Down syndrome 'left to die' by Israeli soldiers after combat dog attack." Turkish news network Anadolu Agency wrote, "Gazan man with Down's syndrome mauled by Israeli army dog, left to die, family says." The BBC headline read "The lonely death of Gaza man with Downs syndrome." In the BBC's headline, it was phrased as if it was an unfortunate turn of events.

Data scientists Dana Najjar and Jan Lietava conducted a study on the BBC, observ-

ing hundreds of articles posted by the BBC, and noticed a "systematic disparity in how Palestinian and Israeli deaths are treated." Diction like "massacre", "slaughter" and "murder" were solely used for Israeli deaths, while the words "killed" and "died" were almost always used for Palestinian deaths. Family relations, such as "mother" or "son" were more inclined to be associated with Israelis rather than Palestinians. The constant lack of context and proper coverage reveals blindspots in reporting by Western media.

The Israeli government has repeatedly said that their goal is to "eliminate terrorists," and Western media repeats their claim regarding "self-defense." However, that is not the case.

"[The Israel Defense Forces] would beat people, including women ... for being out," said Maya, a Palestinian Muslim with family in the West Bank. "They'd sometimes shoot people [down]. [I] would try to sleep, and [I'd] hear people screaming for their lives. [Sometimes,] they'd break into houses. They killed one of my cousins when I was there. One time, my mom was trying to come back from my uncle's house, they [aimed a] sniper at her in the taxi, and then threw a smoke bomb at them."

Similarly, Western media primarily reports on Palestine resistance groups attacks over Israeli assaults. The displacement of Palestinian people by Israeli

violence is downplayed and normalized with language that primarily portrays them as aggressors. A 2003 analysis by media law scholar Susan Dente Ross found that in the two years after Sept. 11, one-fifth of New York Times editorials expressed a belief that both sides were equally harming innocents while also disproportionately blaming Palestinians for causing violence. That pattern has echoes today.

"As the genocide has been going on [I've been] hearing about news from [my fam-

ily]," said Yasmeen Sultan, a Palestinian-Iraqi teenager who has family in Gaza. "[I've] been hearing [stories about] buildings dropping on them [and] them having to evacuate their homes and live in tents, and then hearing that ... as they were hiding out in a school, it got bombed and some of them died ... It's constantly portrayed, not even just the media, [but] in school [as well], as a two-sided thing. Palestinians are [portrayed as] terrorists, and that Israel had to defend themselves ... Propaganda ... has changed the way everyone views it, so now everyone's scared to speak about the truth."

Furthermore, stereotypes about Palestinians fit neatly into already established anti-Islam and Arab narratives preached by Western media, including misconceptions about Islam, especially regarding violence.

"Don't answer violence with violence," said Sheikh Ala Al Deen Al-Bakri, a prominent Muslim religious leader in the Bay Area. "Allah said to push a bad deed with a good deed, and it shall push back with good deeds ... We should not whatsoever get involved in violence to make our points ... we don't answer wrong with wrong."

Muslims are not allowed to harm any animals, non-combatants, use fire, cut trees, burn homes or harm civilians. The only justification for any violence is self-defense initiated by another party

intending to harm or kill as written in the Quran.

Fight in the cause of Allah only against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors. (Surah Baqarah, aya 190 "The Cow, verse 190", "The Quran")

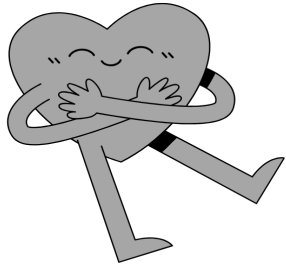
By bombing hospitals, cutting off electricity, water, food, Israel is implying that the entire population is a threat and full of terrorists and implicitly calling all Muslims and Islam itself a threat. Since Palestine is a majority Muslim country, Western media has taken advantage of the already established negative reputation of Islam and Muslims, and used it to justify Israel's actions.

In the end, every nation, republic, democracy and dictatorship built on racism and facism will fall. The current ceasefire would have not been possible without boycotts, protests and awareness. The Israeli and American governments would not put as much effort to silence pro-Palestinian voices if they did not matter. Western media would not incorrectly report and cover up the truth of Palestinian suffering if their stories were not powerful. Boycott, protest, have productive and respectful conversations with opposing sides, be understanding and most of all, trust in Allah (The All-Mighty). I leave with a beautiful quote of the Quran, which has given me, and many others, hope in times of great distress.

Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond to evil with what is best, then the one you are in a feud with will be like a close friend. (Quran, 41:31)



Dueling opinions: Valentine's Day



Kyra Hsieh
FEATURES WRITER

The essence of Valentine's Day is best captured in the story of its namesake, Saint Valentine — a priest who secretly married couples despite Emperor Claudius Gothicus's decree forbidding young men from marrying so they could be sent to war. Defying the emperor's orders, Saint Valentine was eventually executed. At its core, this is what Valentine's Day is about: loving fearlessly, no matter the circumstances.

Today, Valentine's Day is often associated with gifts — love letters, bouquets of flowers, chocolates and teddy bears. While some view these traditions as overly commercialized, the act of giving is ultimately about expressing care.

"Some people that oppose consumerism say that [Valentine's Day] was created by greeting card companies and companies that sell chocolates and flowers," said junior Sevara Saidova. "But if you think about it like that, then any other holiday where you give gifts, like Christmas, [can be considered consumerist]."

Besides, the significance of a gift is not the amount of money that is spent, but the thought behind it. Senior Jeremy Lim highlights the importance of paying attention to one's partner and friends, emanating the core of Valentine's of caring and showing appreciation for their loved ones.

"When you're in a relationship and [your partner] sees something they really like, you remember that," Lim said. "[My girlfriend and I] were shopping at Target together, and she [said] she really liked these candles, so I'm planning on getting her that ... She's also been sending me videos of people making their own bouquet of flowers, so it would be cool to buy some of her favorite flowers and put in the effort to

actually make a bouquet, versus just buying a normal bouquet."

Valentine's Day has also evolved to be more inclusive. Historically, mainstream portrayals of the holiday have been very heteronormative, with advertisements consisting of the "ideal" heterosexual couple and Hallmark cards that assume pronouns and stereotypes. However, as societal norms shift, so does the recognition of diverse relationships. While there is still progress to be made, the growing acceptance of queer relationships helps redefine Valentine's Day as a celebration of love in all its forms.

Valentine's Day is the perfect time to show appreciation not only to one's partner but also to one's friends. Galentine's Day, Valentine's new sister holiday, is celebrated a day earlier than Valentine's Day on Feb. 13. Originated in 2010 from the show "Parks and Recreation," it's all about celebrating female friendships, and can be an alternative to Valentine's Day for single girls.

Some girls plan activities with their friends to decorate cookies, have brunch, make tote bags or have a tea party. Overall, it celebrates a great day of not just romantic love, but platonic love.

"[My friends and I] are either going to be getting together for a meal or make some type of arts and crafts, which is a common theme at Galentine's," Saidova said.

Valentine's Day is a wonderful holiday. Although it may seem like an over-commercialized holiday to the misanthropic and cynical viewer, its heart lies in showing love and care for loved ones.

Zack Li
FEATURES WRITER

In 2024, the National Retail Foundation estimated that consumers spent over \$14.2 billion for their significant others on Valentine's Day, making it the third priciest holiday in the U.S. Meanwhile, comments such as, "is the fifth floor high enough?" or "there's a romantic attraction between my mouth and a

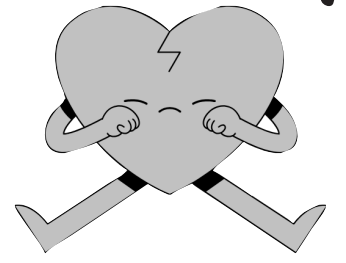
shotgun right now" litter couples' posts on social media every Feb. 14.

For a holiday originally associated with simple paper cards up until the 19th century, Valentine's Day and its romantic themes have undoubtedly been watered down by corporate commercialization and the toxic standards social media sets for relationships.

Valentine's Day gets its name from a saint and martyr executed by emperor Claudius II with the same name. Handmade paper cards sent between lovers inspired by Saint Valentine's farewell letter before execution

signed "Your Valentine" then rose to become the tokens du jour of the holiday; yet nowadays, mass-produced Hallmark cards and big, flashy gifts come to mind at the thought of Valentine's Day.

"So many people value gifts by their cost ... there are people out there who won't appreciate your gift unless it's expensive," said sophomore Baron Zhang. "I personally love handmade gifts ... [because] it's truly a show of affection. People have really started to get the wrong thought [about] why gifts are important."



With the average consumer spending over \$185 on Valentine's Day in 2024, almost \$8 more than the average in the past five years, the pressure to keep up with rising spending expectations has come to impact many.

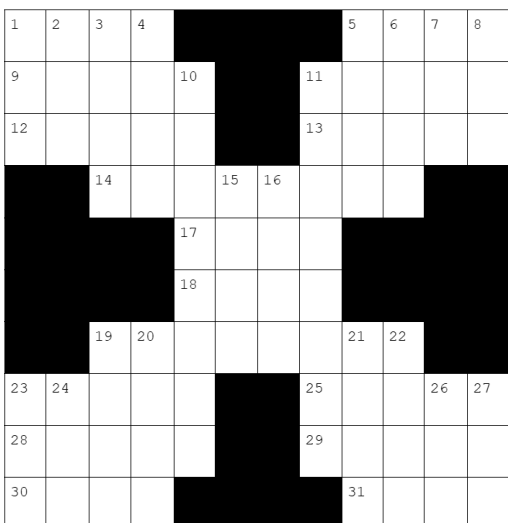
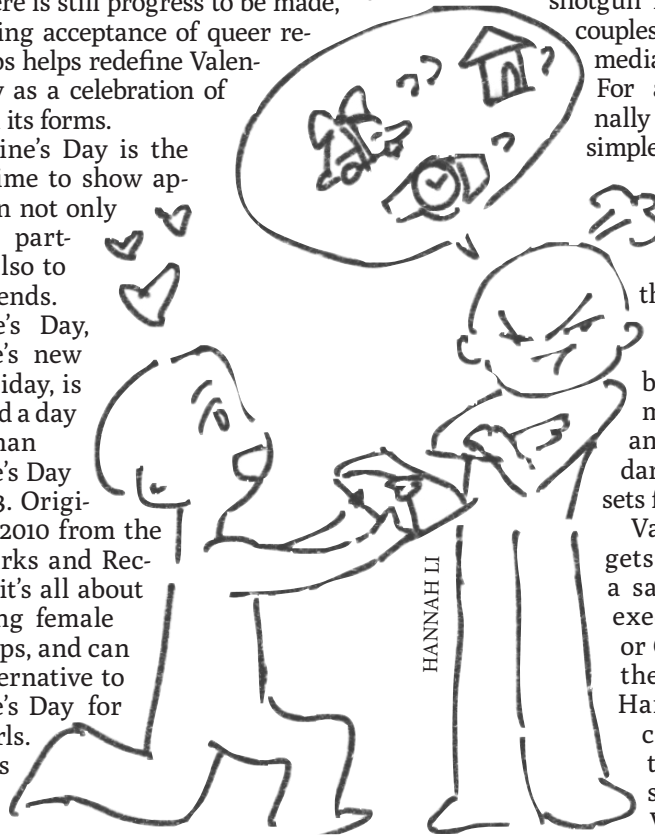
"I always like to give [my mother] a little letter explaining what I appreciate about her, and little treats," said sophomore Ramon Luna. "[But] one time I felt a lot of pressure to buy this really big Squishmallow and I couldn't afford it. And I felt guilty for not being able to get it."

This theme of "proving" love on Valentine's Day applies also to social media, where exposure to only the positive and desirable side of relationships creates unrealistic relationship standards and breeds relationship status insecurity.

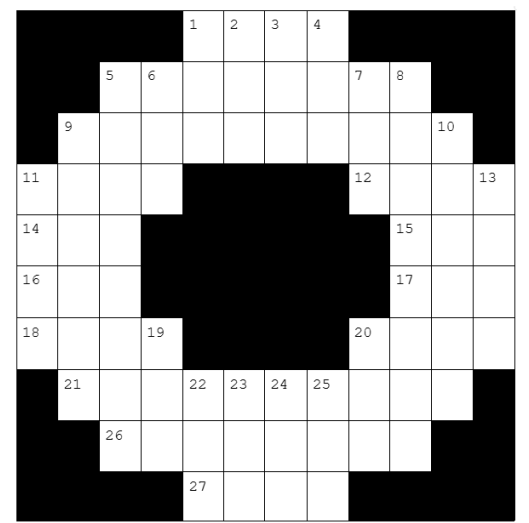
"Social media influences people to [think that] having a significant other is just something to flex to other people," Zhang said. "A lot of people get together right before Valentine's Day just to have someone to [spend time with], so they don't feel left out."

This tension can actually lead to more breakups than usual; a 2019 survey conducted by YouGov found around 10% of adults experienced a breakup on or in the days before Valentine's Day, with another 10% reporting that they felt lonely on Valentine's Day.

Of course, there is still meaning to be found in the small, heartfelt gestures undictated by the expectations of big corporations and online personas — not all hope is lost for the holiday about celebrating love. Acts of kindness, quality time spent with a loved one and bringing back handwritten cards are just a few ways romantics can uphold the spirit of Valentine's Day.



To our readers - happy
Valentine's Day
XoXo ♡
The Aragon Outlook



- DOWN
1. Org. that aids veterans with disabilities
 2. "Young and Beautiful" singer Lana _ Rey
 3. Modern meetcute: "Add me on _"
 4. The kissing disease
 5. Funk era dance move: the _
 6. BTS fanbase nickname
 7. Made-over transfer student in 17-Across
 8. "Blue hour" Korean boy group
 10. Bart Simpson's best friend
 11. Year with extended Black History Month
 15. An ox's burden
 16. What might cause one to exclaim "Olé!"
 19. _ before the storm
 20. ITZY song about being "cray-cray-crazy in love"
 21. Casino machine for triples
 22. What the shape of this puzzle might mark
 23. Anti-disease federal agency, abbrev.
 24. Career & CTE coordinator Queenie _
 26. Chocolate kisses corporation trading code
 27. Hometown of Lil Jon, 2 Chainz or Latto, for short

- ACROSS
1. Subject of Rihanna's "S&M"
 5. Unit of power represented by W
 9. Long-tongued Spiderman nemesis
 11. Mustachioed anti-thneed activist who spoke for the trees
 12. Energy drink brand with flavors "Cosmic Stardust" or "Kimade"
 13. K_ the Frog or H_ crab
 14. Historic Mormon marital practice
 17. Type of earring Regina George forbids Gretchen Weiners from wearing
 18. Word repeated alongside "La-la-la" in Tyler the Creator's "See You Again"
 19. 1995 rom-com starring plaid-clad SMHS alum
 23. Total mayhem
 25. "Tate Speech" or "Joe Rogan Experience" - examples of _ male podcasts
 28. _ de leche
 29. What a rooster does best
 30. Invisible pattern, according to dad jokes
 31. "We'll chat again soon" in a text

- DOWN
1. Possible answer to "how are babies made?"
 2. Word preceding premarried name
 3. Brain and spinal cord system, for short
 4. What you might skip on YouTube
 5. Sara Bareilles hit with misleading name
 6. Orange County city Santa _
 7. Subagency of the US Dept. of Energy, for short
 8. Flowery shade
 9. "Rent" ballad: "Light my _"
 10. Not just nicer, but the _
 11. Crazy chica
 13. "That's the way, son!": "_ boy!"
 19. Freudian sense of self-worth
 20. Riot Games-run esports tournament, for short
 22. Expression of wellbeing that sounds like multiple choice option
 23. Measure of economic health which California alone ranks 5th in, for short
 24. "Mr. Blue Sky" group, for short
 25. _pet, friend of Ms. Piggy or the Swedish

- ACROSS
1. Historical Andean civilization with capital Cuzco
 5. "_ haze" by Taylor Swift or "_ Marriages" of Golden-Age Hollywood
 9. Declaration revealing a sin, crime or crush
 11. Sung-through Pixar short about volcano love story
 12. Largest and most populated continent
 14. Soulmate synonym: "The _"
 15. Supernatural substance: _-oplasm
 16. Holographic discs that may be played in a Walkman
 17. "Darling," "Sweetheart," or "Honeybear": _ names
 18. Bitter succulent: _ vera
 20. Blackpink rapper with solo hit "MONEY"
 21. Type of ring that may cost 3 months' salary
 26. "_ , babe!" passive-aggressive Chappell Roan ballad
 27. Genre of 20-Down

ALEXA STERRY

Central Cee “Can’t Rush Greatness” ... literally

Ashley Tsui
FEATURES WRITER

On Jan. 24, British rapper Central Cee released his first studio album, “Can’t Rush Greatness.” Honoring his nearly decade-long career and passion for music with 17 tracks, Central Cee discusses a variety of personal topics and even vulnerably expresses emotions.

Known for singles like “Loading” and “Day in the Life,” the rapper’s fame reached new heights in 2023, after “Sprinter,” a collaboration with British rapper Dave, charted at number one for 10 weeks in the United Kingdom. With the release of his premier studio album, Central Cee comes back with catchy and perceptive tracks, yet fails to make the splash he hoped to.

The first song, “No Introduction,” starts the album strong, with a unique instrumental and lyrics that call out those who looked down on him before fame and now try to get his attention. The flow and overall lyricism are decent, but it would’ve been nice to see more explosive power or variety in the vocal tone for the opener. The instrumental to the next song, “5 Star” felt similar to “No Introduction,” beginning an unfortunate theme of repetition.

The third track, “Gata,” stood out due to the collaboration with Young Miko, a Puerto Rican artist. Most notably, the track blends Spanish and English and was executed well. The unique beat and instrumental complimented both languages well and similarly, the two vocal tones blended cohesively together.

“St. Patrick’s” was less interesting with bland lyrics such as “after the show, go home / don’t trust these ****, I ain’t tryna have groupie sex.” The track discusses his negative experiences with dating and, though an understandable message, the aggressive tone and rhythm didn’t click.

“GBP,” an abbreviation for the Great British Pound features rapper 21 Savage, contrasting United Kingdom and United States street culture by talking about the necessity of money.

This song is followed by “Top Freestyle” and “Up North,” both showcasing innovative beats and instrumentals. Both contrast Central Cee’s childhood and current life, but “Up North” does this on a deeper level, such as in the line “the results from the doc came

back / And they said that I got the imposter syndrome.”

The next two tracks, “CRG (feat. Dave)” and “Limitless,” employ more solemn tones. “CRG” reflects on both rapper’s pasts and the difficulties that come with fame, while “Limitless” talks about Central Cee’s childhood and his desire to support his family. Both songs express his vulnerability appropriately, though it would’ve been nice to hear more emotion in his voice.

“Now We’re Strangers” and “Truth In The Lies,” which features American rapper Lil Durk, take Central Cee’s emotional reflections another step further. The songs look back on past relationships and reveal the rapper’s regrets and the pain of a break up.

This sentimentality is contrasted by the next track, “Ten,” a collaboration with British rapper Skepta. The song calls out gold diggers and slackers and has a catchy refrain that features clever repetition with the word ten.

This is followed by two previously released singles, “BAND-4BAND” and “Gen Z Luv.” The former features American rapper Lil Baby and showcases both artists’ success and wealth, while the latter reflects the impact social media can have on the beginning of relationships. Both feature catchy lyrics and captivating instrumentals that can quickly turn into earworms.

“Walk In Wardrobe” and “Must Be” bring back the solemnity, talking about the instability of life. With a variety of emotions showcased, both songs were insightful, strongly depicting the complexity of human relationships.

The album closes with “Don’t Know Anymore,” where the rapper echoes previous themes of his difficult childhood and reflects on how his life could’ve been different, powerfully bringing the album to an end and leaving listeners with a candid idea of his life experiences.

Overall, there was clever wordplay in each song and strong beats, but it was a bit one note. While there were a variety of thoughtful themes and messages, there was too much overlap between ideas and not enough experimentation. There was also little emotional variation in his voice and rawness in the rapper’s vocal tone, overall

earning a three stars out of five.

OUR OUTLOOK



AMY SHERALD: AMERICAN SUBLIME EXHIBITION PREVIEW

Truly sublime: Amy Sherald

Gemma Albertson
FEATURES WRITER

When one first enters the Amy Sherald: American Sublime exhibition in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, they are instantly greeted by grey faces. Each of Sherald’s stylistic choices hold meaning: bright colors, flat backgrounds, playfully patterned clothes and grey skin, as if the race of the subjects has been removed from the portraits themselves. After surveying the entirety of the exhibit, another stylistic choice emerges: All of Sherald’s subjects are Black.

This focus on Black portraiture began when Sherald noticed the sheer lack of representation, especially in more elegant spaces like fine art, pop culture and other forms of media, in comparison to the violence the Black community is so often stereotyped to be surrounded by. Her aim is to depict Black people in everyday life, where the Black community has been so often omitted from.

“[Sherald] didn’t see herself reflected in portraits that were showing American history, and so she seems to be working to rewrite that narrative,” said museum-goer Alisha. “Seeing how she’s placing people in these very normal American situations, and drawing on these iconic American figures like cowboys and beauty queens, that’s really, really poignant.”

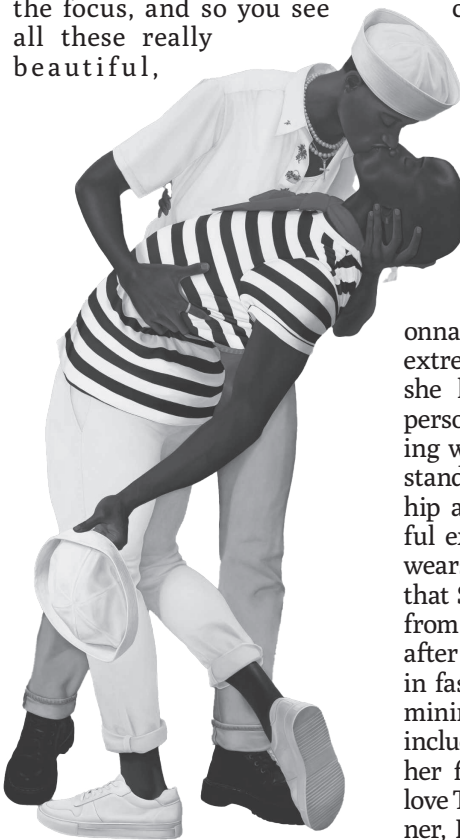
The title of the exhibit, “Sublime,” refers to something of excellence and grandeur. By portraying American history whilst using Black subjects to convey a feeling of awe, Sherald relays a clear theme; there is beauty in America, and so much of that beauty comes from Black involvement. Sherald’s focus on Black portraiture in American spaces or themes isn’t to attack history as we know it — it’s to celebrate the past through inclusion of Black figures.

“[Sherald is] trying to deracialize, and so sublime seems like a good word to help people get in that mindset,” said museum-goer Randi Wexler. “She paints for everybody. That’s her desire; to show Black Americans as just like the rest of us.”

Sherald also focuses on re-entering Black representation into American history. At the beginning of the exhibit hangs “What’s precious inside of him does not care to be known by the mind in ways

that diminish its presence (All American).” The portrait depicts a man in stereotypically “American” clothes: a cowboy hat, a collared shirt patterned like the American flag, blue jeans and a large buckle with a horse. Sherald’s works often feature symbolic names drawn from poems or literary works. The words “All American” at the end of the title, as well as the outfit, imply that this piece is about having an identity that is often called into question because it is not deemed “authentic.”

“[Sherald is] really working to minimize race as the focus, and so you see all these really beautiful,



vibrant colors and details that you hone in on where you’re really not thinking about race,” Alisha said. “It’s people, it’s humanity ... I hope everybody can see some aspect that they can relate to in the world.”

Further into the exhibit, one sees another example of this reintegration of Black figures into our past. “For love, and for country” instantly captures one’s attention with the sheer size of the painting. It stands at a whopping 123 1/4 x 93 1/8 inches, taking up the entirety of a wall. Its power as headliner of the exhibit is clear.

In the painting, Sherald reimagines the famous photo of a soldier kissing a nurse on V-Day, the end of World War II, replacing the subjects with two Black sailors embracing one another in a loving kiss. With her subject focused style, Sherald forces the viewer to

acknowledge the censored African-American and LGBTQ+ contributions in the war effort. The two sailors also wear more modernized forms of a “classic” sailor outfit, which possibly alludes to how the change in times and norms gives way to a wider coverage of who exactly makes up our nation.

“[Sherald] addresses [race, gender and sexuality] in a very interesting way,” said museum-goer Isabelle. “There was one painting of this man, and ... the title was, ‘Guide me no more’. It was a man dressed in Western colonial clothing with a boat. [There’s] significance [with] slaves being brought on a ship and then being represented in that way ... As much as we like to think that race is talked about, it’s really not.”

Sherald’s paintings comment on the present as well, seen in her full-body portrait of Breonna Taylor. Sherald dedicated extreme care into ensuring that she had encapsulated Taylor’s personality by frequently speaking with Taylor’s mother. Taylor stands, with her hand on her hip and a strong, slightly playful expression on her face. She wears a long, flowy blue dress that Sherald had commissioned from a Black female designer after hearing of Taylor’s interest in fashion. While her jewelry is minimal, Sherald made sure to include an engagement ring on her finger, as a symbol of the love Taylor shared with her partner, Kenneth Walker, and what could have been had the past played out in a better way.

Through the painting of Breonna Taylor, one is able to see just how much love Sherald puts into her works. Each piece has a message to be shared, which is carried both through the painting itself, and the highly symbolic titles. All in all, the Amy Sherald: American Sublime exhibit was a beautiful one. Every single piece carried a story with it, and it was fascinating to see the character of each subject drawn out through clothing and subtle expressions. Sherald’s opinions and sentiments are infused into each piece as well, which makes for a fascinating experience as one tries to understand the meaning behind the pieces. I can say, with a resounding “yes,” that this exhibit was worth seeing.

OUR OUTLOOK



Ohio State crowned college football champs over Notre Dame

Adya Tewari
SPORTS WRITER

On Jan. 20th, the eighth-seeded Ohio State Buckeyes (13-2) clinched the 2025 college football national championship by winning 34-23 against the seventh-seeded Notre Dame Fighting Irish.

The Buckeyes won their last national title at the end of the 2014 season, in the first year of the four-team playoff. Their latest championship comes during the inaugural 12-team playoff.

Before the title game, Ohio State defeated the 9th-seeded Tennessee, followed by the first-seeded Oregon and the fifth-seeded Texas. Ohio State lost to Oregon earlier in the season, with the playoffs giving them a way to avenge that loss. The Irish defeated the 10th-seeded Indiana in the first round, followed by the second-seeded Georgia and the sixth-seeded Penn State.

The new twelve-team playoff format became the subject of critics. Many questioned the automatic bye given to the four conference champions, pointing out that all four of the teams with a bye lost.

"All the teams that got the bye [week], they all lost," said senior Ian Chang. "I don't think it's a good system, but I think they're going to change it."

Others commented on how the bye week might take away the edge that the higher-ranked teams have.

"The best way to practice is in-game, you can't practice for actual game day conditions,"

said sophomore Alexander Hernandez. "So by giving these teams a bye, they were set up for failure."

In addition to the conference champions being eliminated, many critics were concerned with the amount of blowouts.

"I feel like they should take into consideration the strength of schedule," Hernandez said. "More [Associated Press] rank wins, stronger opponents. You can have a good undefeated record, but if it's against weaker opponents that

doesn't really equate to a nine and three record of AP ranked teams."

Both Ohio State and Notre Dame played impressively in the championship game. In a dominant first drive, Notre Dame went for 75 yards in 18 plays, converting two fourth downs. One key player was Riley Leonard, Notre Dame's quarterback, with nine carries and a rushing touchdown in the first drive.

"Ohio State's defense was getting exposed on Notre Dame's opening drive because they ran the same thing on both fourth downs and Ohio State still couldn't stop it," said sophomore Taylor Workman. "Having nine

carries in a single drive as a quarterback is crazy."

Following Notre Dame's opening touchdown, Ohio State scored three touchdowns on three consecutive drives, with two receiving touchdowns by Jeremiah Smith and Quinshon Judkins and a

national championship game," said junior Javier Del Rio. "He hasn't really had the opportunity to throw the ball much until the playoffs, where the pressure was all on him, and he did really well."

The Buckeyes continued their momentum in the second half, scoring on the opening drive with Judkins' 70-yard run and rushing touchdown, bringing the score up to 28-7.

In the next drive, the Irish turned over the ball on downs after a fake punt that ended in an incomplete pass. The Buckeyes were stopped short of a

touchdown on this drive, settling for a field goal to bring the lead up to 31-7.

On Notre Dame's next possession, Jaden Greathouse scored a 34-yard receiving touchdown.

Following Greathouse's touchdown, the Irish converted for two points, reducing the gap to 16 points.

"Greathouse really got their momentum going with the touchdown in the second half," Workman said. "Their offense was making explosive plays and Ohio State's defense was struggling to stop it."

The Buckeyes continued to struggle scoring touchdowns after the opening drive in the second half with wide receiver Emeka Egbuka fumbling the

ball around Notre Dame's 20-yard line. This allowed Notre Dame to gain the ball back, however they came up with no score after a missed field goal on fourth and goal at the 9-yard line with about nine-and-a-half minutes left in the game. This left the Irish in a 16-point deficit.

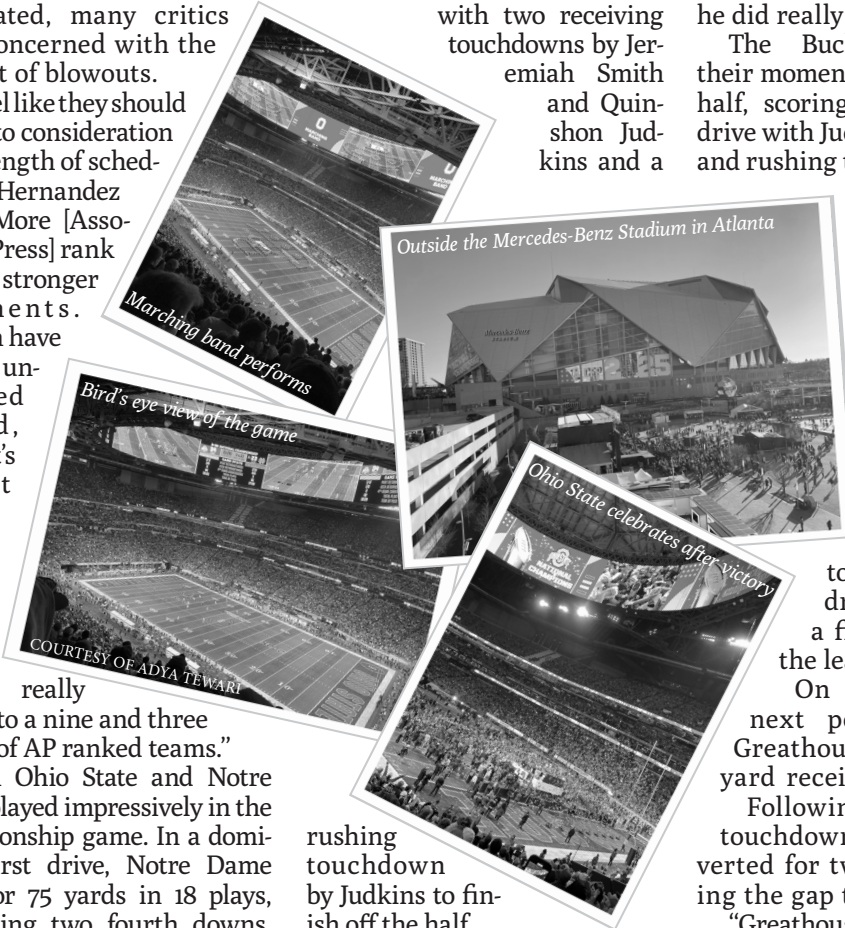
"They should have gone for it because that was their only chance," Chang said. "The missed field goal was the final nail in the coffin for Notre Dame."

Ohio State was forced to punt on their possession, allowing the Irish to have the ball back. Greathouse scored again, this time a 30-yard receiving touchdown. The Irish went for two and got it, bringing the score to 31-23.

The Buckeyes bounced back however, with Will Howard completing a 56-yard pass to Jeremiah Smith on third-and-11, who was brought down around Notre Dame's 10-yard line. Smith's catch secured the win for the Buckeyes with around two minutes left in the game, allowing them to make a field goal and widen their lead to 11 points with around 30 seconds left.

While it may need some reformatting to make it more fair, the expansion of the playoffs allows for a wider variety of champions that truly reflects the best team in college football.

In the 2025 season, teams like Ohio State and Georgia look to face significant losses with seniors graduating and athletes entering the transfer portal. However, they are still expected to be main contenders for a national title next year, along with teams like Texas, Penn State, Notre Dame and Oregon.



Opinion: should athletes go where the money goes?

Claire Qi
SPORTS WRITER

In 2022, Cristiano Ronaldo signed a contract with Saudi Arabia that would pay him approximately \$213 million per year in salary. Recently, that contract was extended to expire in the summer of 2026. In terms of yearly salary, Ronaldo's with Saudi Arabia is the highest in sports history. However, before Saudi Arabia, Ronaldo was primarily a European player, playing with Manchester United, Real Madrid and others.

The issue of loyalty and whether to stay on the same team or go to a different one for a higher salary has always been a controversial issue. While it's nice to stay with your team, many athletes are tempted by the potential of higher income or better leagues. To further that issue, some athletes choose to play for a different nation for the sake of competing at a higher level or getting better pay.

The truth is that no athletes should be condemned for leaving their teams for profit or even for leaving the country. As professional athletes, there is a right to choose what leagues or teams they play for.

Additionally, for most athletes, income is one of the highest priorities because athletes have a shorter career compared to just about any other job. An injury can mean the end of their whole career. Even without an injury,

athletes generally retire at around age 34, with careers usually not lasting longer than 10 years.

While athletes usually have a higher annual salary than some professions, they have to retire earlier than most professions. If an

athlete didn't have enough income when they were active, retirement life can be hard, especially if they need to support their family.

"For instance ... a teacher needs to get as much pay as they can because they have to pay [for] mortgages and kids," said physical education teacher Linda Brown. "It's the same for [athletes]. Now they

have a lot of money, [but] they have the same needs that we all have in that they have families that they have to provide for, and that may be an extended family."

Changing teams is also very common. The average National Basketball Association player plays for 2.51 different teams over the span of their career. National Football League quarterback Josh Johnson

has played for a record 14 teams. It is the norm to play for more than one team and only 67 NBA athletes out of around 4,800 have ever played for the same team for the entire span of their career.

Those who believe athletes should stay loyal to their original teams state the emergence of professional athletes who play not for the game but for profit as a reason. They are afraid that the magic of sports will

be ruined by athletes who compete not to improve, but for money.

"If you're just doing it, like Ronaldo, just so you can get more money, like hundreds of millions," said sophomore Noah Prasso. "He already has enough, then I think that's unnecessary, and he should just go for a team where he'll have a better fan base."

This, however, is not a valid reason because even if athletes play for money, they

can only get profitable contracts if they demonstrate great performances.

An example of a situation in which playing for a different country would be completely acceptable is in case of the Olympics. During the 2024 Paris Olympics, despite playing for the San Antonio Spurs in the NBA, Victor Wembanyama played for the French team.

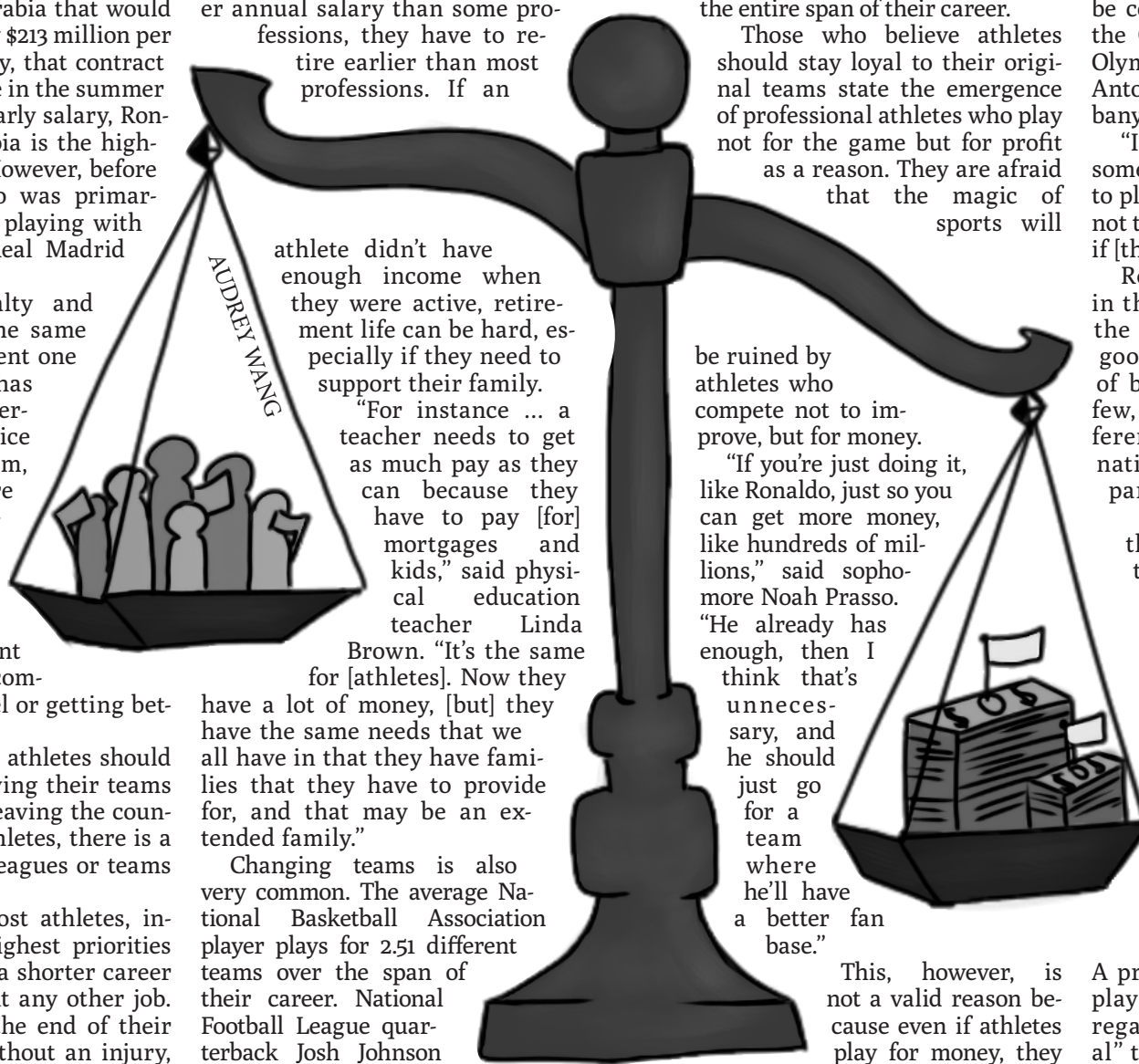
"I don't see a problem ... that you go somewhere else and say, 'Hey, I'd like to play for you,'" Brown said. "If you're not the best in your country, especially if [that athlete] has dual nationality."

Representing a different country in the Olympics is a good idea when the country an athlete is especially good at the sport they play. Instead of being unable to get into the top few, that athlete can play for a different nation, both improving the nation's results and being able to participate in the Olympics.

Despite inciting some concerns, the transfer of athletes between teams or nations in the pursuit of profit and a higher level of playing is reasonable and even beneficial. Athletes who change teams do not harm the professional sports world in any way and deserve to be recognized for their excellent skills and allowed to earn more as well as play in better leagues.

It is troubling that anyone would condemn athletes for wanting a higher salary when everyone else has that desire and acts on it.

A professional athlete is justified to play for whichever team they want, regardless of whether they stay "loyal" to original teams.



BADMINTON

Sora Mizutani
SPORTS WRITER

Aragon badminton finished last season with an impressive 10-2 record in the Peninsula Athletic League Bay Division, placing second right behind Carlmont.

This year Aragon's badminton season is kicking off with a new head coach, Christopher Zografos. No stranger to the coaching scene and the Don community, Zografos coached baseball, basketball, volleyball and most recently Aragon football, before taking on badminton. While badminton is something new for him, he is eager to help out the players alongside other coaches.

"[I'm] lucky to have a good staff with me: returning coaches from last year," Zografos said. "My main goal is to help the students in any possible way I can help, making sure things are in order for them to have a smooth, fun, successful season."

In the lead-up to this season, former players have been working outside to prepare.

"Since summer and until now, I've been signed up for club [badminton]," said junior Kevin Ho. "I've been playing a lot after a recommendation from a former teammate, and it's helped out a lot since. I've improved a lot, according to some of my other current teammates."

Another former player who went undefeated in the district has been working non-stop.

"Training is usually two to three hours, two to three times a week," said junior William Ye. "[In the drills,] we restrict ourselves from doing certain shots so we focus on other ones."

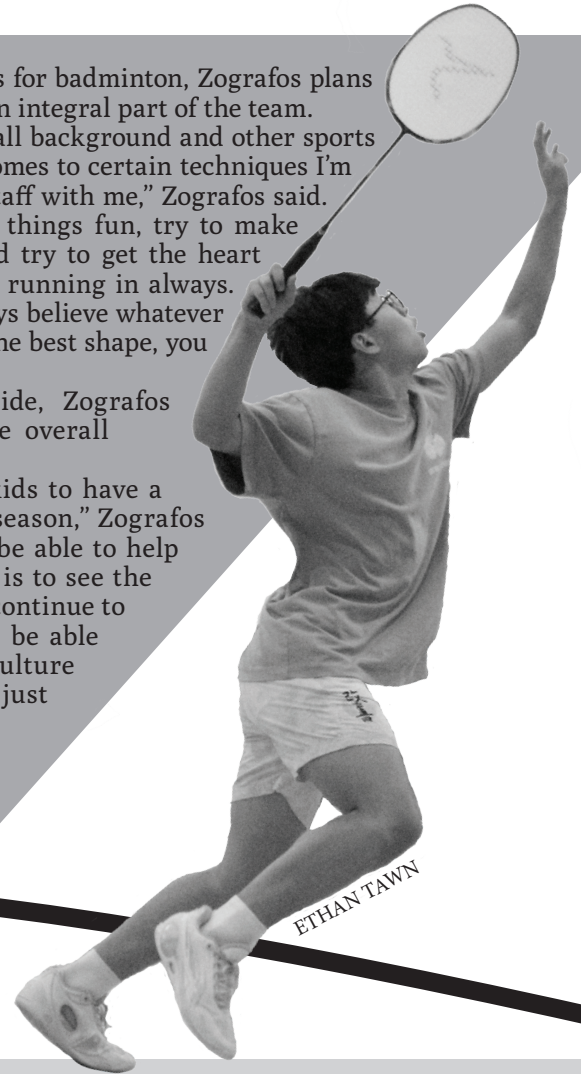
As the season begins for badminton, Zografos plans to make conditioning an integral part of the team.

"Coming from football background and other sports background, when it comes to certain techniques I'm lucky to have a great staff with me," Zografos said. "We're trying to make things fun, try to make things competitive, and try to get the heart pumping and get some running in always. [This is] because I always believe whatever sport it is, if you're in the best shape, you always have a chance."

Technical goals aside, Zografos also wants to improve overall team connection.

"I really want the kids to have a great experience this season," Zografos said. "I want them to be able to help each other ... My goal is to see the team camaraderie, to continue to build for freshmen, to be able to lean on seniors ... culture wise, and ... every day just get 1% better."

The team's first league match will be a home game against Hillsdale on March 6 at 4 p.m.



ETHAN TAWN

BASEBALL

Quinn Shirley
SPORTS WRITER

Ending last year's season with a record of 15-11 overall and 9-5 in league, the Dons baseball team head into the new year with big goals.

Despite having a winning record, the team was overwhelmed with their performance last year, hoping for better results this season.

"We underperformed with the talent we had," said senior pitcher Dalton Kane, "We weren't a bad team at all, we were third overall in the league and I thought we should have been better than that."

Senior pitcher Josh Jacobs, who committed to play college baseball at Claremont McKenna, attributed last year's rough season to the lack of experience on the field.

"We had a lot of juniors that were playing and starting, and we only had a few seniors," Jacobs said. "Majority of our team were juniors that didn't have any varsity experience."

However, he feels that will translate to a stronger performance this season, as many of the players now have a year of experience under their belts.

"We have the experience and we have the talent again this year to be able to go far in whatever [Central Coast Section] division we are in and [the Peninsula Athletic League]," Jacobs said.

Kane agreed, having high hopes for this season.

"We should win the league," Kane said. "Hopefully go far in CCS, but definitely to win the league is our number one goal."

The Dons' strong returning talent, especially on the pitching mound, will prove to be a valuable asset in achieving this feat.

"Our defense is really good, pitching and in the field," Jacobs said, "Our pitching has stayed the same, and we have a few new guys that can contribute, but the main guys are the same."

Offense is a different story, as it has been unpredictable in the past.

"Hitting, historically, has been kind of up and down," Kane said, "It's hard to tell because it's only been a few days and we don't know where we are yet."

The game to win will be the team's yearly matchup against Carlmont High School, a top competitor for the Dons.

"Carlmont is our biggest rival," Jacobs said, "We play them once instead of our usual two game series so it's a lot more tense so I am hoping that we ... really dominate."

The baseball team will play its home opener on Feb. 20 against Archbishop Riordan at 4 p.m.



ANNA HE

SOFTBALL

Quinn Shirley
SPORTS WRITER

Aragon girls softball heads into their upcoming season off of an outstanding performance last year, ending with a Central Coast Section championship win and a record of (7-7) in league and (15-13-1) overall.

Last year's success came after a rough start to the season, but after turning it around, the team went on to blow away expectations in the playoffs.

"The season started off kind of rocky," said junior Destiny Garcia. "But towards the end, we started focusing a lot more, which led us to a CCS victory."

They head into this year with a clean slate and a very different team, having no seniors on the roster.

"[We're] really young," said sophomore Taylor Workman. "There's a lot of freshmen, we graduated six seniors last year, so the varsity team's gonna look a lot different but that's gonna give us a chance to build the program for the next couple years."

Despite the lack of upperclassmen on the team, Workman feels confident in the talent they do have returning.

"Overall, our ability to play catch seems like it's better than last year," Workman said. "We have pitchers this year,

last year we didn't have any coming in, so that's also a strength."

Garcia is also feeling optimistic as she has already seen an improvement in areas the team struggled with last season.

"The strengths of the team are communication and hitting," Garcia said. "Our communication last year was kind of off a little bit, and our hitting this year is really good."

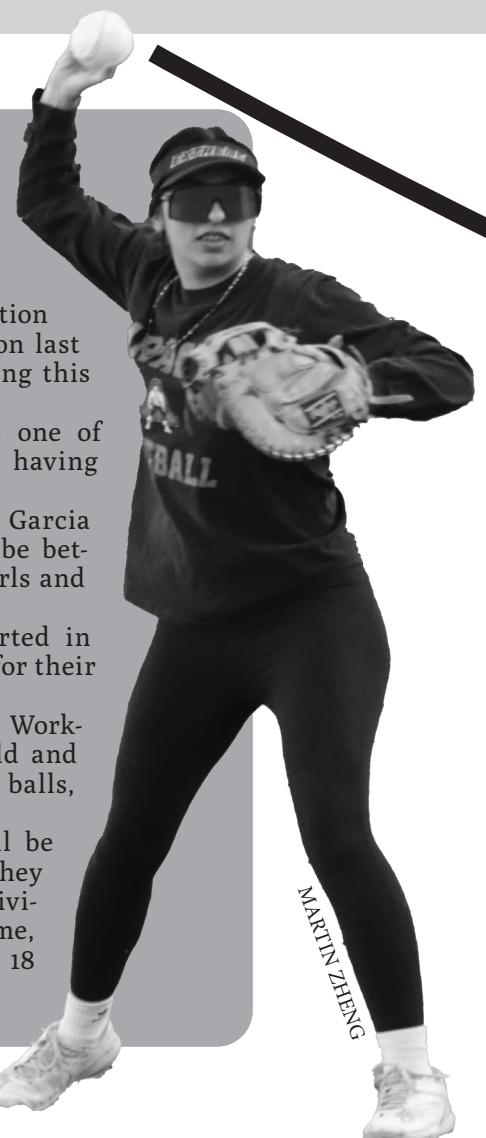
Like Workman, Garcia sees this year as one of building and development, as they navigate having only three upperclassmen on the team.

"One goal is building up the new talent," Garcia said. "We're good, but everyone can always be better ... so we are working with the younger girls and building them up."

This player development has already started in practice, as the team is beginning to prepare for their first game.

"Usually we start with a throwing drill," Workman said. "Then after that we go into infield and outfield where we take ground balls and fly balls, and then sometimes we will take live at bats."

A big game for the Dons this season will be their match against Kings Academy, where they will face a pitcher committed to playing Division One softball in college. In the meantime, they will prepare for their first game on Feb. 18 against Mercy at 3:30 p.m.



MARTIN ZHENG



TRACK AND FIELD

Charlie Henderson
SPORTS WRITER

Aragon's track and field program was on the cusp of greatness last year, falling just short of their goals to win Peninsula Athletic League championships on both the boys varsity and girls varsity teams. While the boys won the PAL championship, the girls captured the Bay Division crown but fell just short of the PAL title.

As they reload for the 2025 season they look to fill some of the gaps that were left by graduating seniors last year. With the addition of a new coach to the staff and the return of a few key athletes from last year, the Dons enter the season with high aspirations.

"We're striving to win the championship in all divisions," said head coach Greg Alvarado. "The goal is to repeat for the boys and regain for the girls."

This goal seems in reach for the Dons, as the program has been dominant in the past half-decade.

The varsity boys team has won the PAL crown in three out of the past four years and the varsity girls team has won the PAL crown in two of the past five years. Their last program sweep of the PAL meet was in 2021.

Many of the athletes within the program contribute their recent success to the tight-knit community nature of the program.

"A lot of my teammates are my friends," said senior hurdler Marcus Rife. "We all compete and push each other."

This community of people all striving to do their best has been crucial in continuing the winning legacy of the program as older athletes within the program look forward to seeing the younger athletes develop over time.

"I'm looking forward to seeing the younger athletes succeed and see their dreams," said senior pole vaulter Fernanda Aceituno. "I want to see people fall in love with the sport like I did."

The selflessness and closeness within a sport like track and field may be surprising to some, as it may seem like an individual sport. In actuality, each athlete works individually towards a common team goal and every member of the community is extremely important.

The Dons will look to test their preparations in a home scrimmage against Woodside on Feb. 25 at 3 p.m.

BOYS TENNIS

Sora Mizutani
SPORTS WRITER

Last year, Aragon boys tennis had a season to be remembered by winning the league championship for the first time in 20 years, sweeping the league 14-0.

Head coach Dave Owdom sees this year as promising as well, with the team losing only one starter from last year.

"Our strength [for this year's team] is [that] ... we basically have everybody back," Owdom said. "So, if they stay healthy, we should have a good season. I could put all three of my doubles last year together again this year [and] I have all my one, two, three singles back and only lost number four."

Junior Darrin O'Brien also sees a lot of advantage in the transition from last year's team.

"Most of our team are juniors and seniors, and we have played for almost all three, four years al-

ready, so we have lots of experience," O'Brien said. "We know how it goes, and we also know how most of what other teams will be playing like and what the level is."

The team is not resuming from where they ended last year, as senior Akbar Beg, who went to the second round Central Coast Section Individuals last year, has put in more work since then.

"I've gotten better since last year," Beg said. "A lot of it is on footwork, mostly because it's about efficiency. [In addition,] I've been trying to focus on my consistency and a lot of emotional control because that's really important: your mental strength."

This year's goal for the team is to repeat what they accomplished last year.

"We have the talent," Owdom said. "Teams are all going to be good, and they're all going to be shooting after us. Boys tennis has gone to CCS for ... the last 12 to 13 years. So that's always a goal: making the tournament. And then I have a couple of individuals that I'm hoping will go on to get the CCS individuals and Akbar Beg last year won the singles title in our league, so to see him repeat that [is a goal]."

The first league match is away against Hillsdale on Feb. 25 at 4 p.m.



SWIMMING

Phoebe Harger
SPORTS WRITER

With the arrival of spring sports, the swim season is officially underway, as coaches and athletes are preparing for a season of competition and growth. While the first meet of the year is not until March, swimmers have been in the pool since Feb. 3, working to connect with new teammates and rebuilding their endurance.

According to head coach Bill Barthold, this season is unlike any before.

"This is the largest sign-up number that we've ever had," Barthold said.

"Last count was 104 swimmers and we typically get around 70 every year since we don't cut anyone."

While the rise in the number of swimmers is certainly exciting, it also requires more efficient management of pool time by coaches, as well as the conditioning of additional swimmers in preparation for the upcoming season.

"It's a matter of getting to know the new swimmers and getting them conditioned and working on their technique," Barthold said. "The challenge is if they haven't been swimming then we have to get them ready in basically a month's time."

Despite having lost many key seniors, the returning athletes are confident in their ability to step into leadership roles and maintain the same strong team dynamic as last year.

"Last year a lot of people were willing to take on leadership roles, but they also knew when to take a step back and help other people step up," said senior Keira McLintock. "I'm pretty confident that the seniors this year will be able to fill that role and keep up not only team spirit but also our scores."

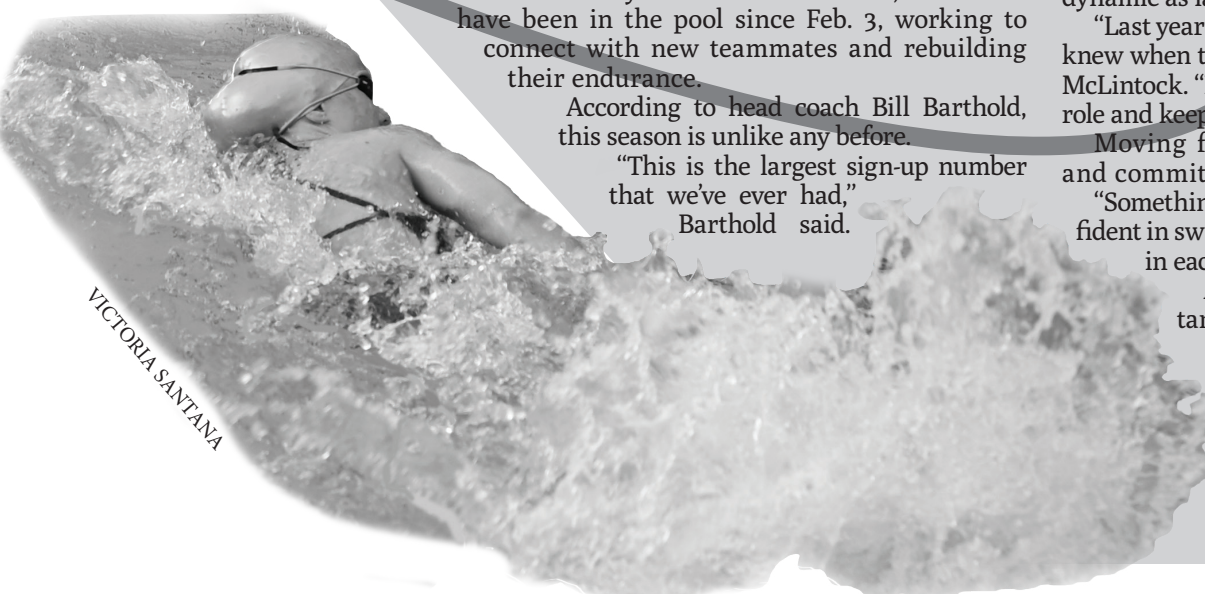
Moving forward, the team is focused on two key aspects: confidence and commitment.

"Something we can improve on from last year is having everyone be more confident in swimming in all of the events and making sure we have enough people in each event at the meets," said junior Lily Anagnoson.

Along with building confidence, Barthold emphasized the importance of dedication.

"The biggest thing we need to work on is commitment," Barthold said. "I don't expect them to be the fastest in the world, I just want them to be the fastest they can be. And that takes commitment."

With the first meet set for March 7 hosting Carlmont, the team continues to work hard in the pool, hoping to kick off the season with a win.



ATHLETES OF THE MONTH

Nominated by varsity coaches

BARON Zhang (10)

Wrestling

6-2 in PAL Bay division; co-captain

"He is very dedicated to wrestling. He values technique and puts in a lot of work with the team ... [as well as] spends a lot of time improving off-season."

-Nyla Garrick (11)

JASPER Caffo (12)

Basketball

2nd highest scorer in PAL Ocean division

"He loves the lights and the competitive parts of the game. He's a big time scorer who scores at all three levels. He's matured a lot and does what he needs to do to help his team win."

-Hosea Patton, varsity head coach

POUYAN Sheikh (12)

Soccer

10 goals, 11 assists in 16 games; co-captain

"He is the type of player to never stop working. The minute he steps on the field there is nothing on his mind but soccer. That infectious mindset doesn't just define him as a player, it solidifies him as a leader."

-Charlie Birkelund (12)

SIERRA Troy (12)

Soccer

Leading scorer; 2x All-League First Team

"She is a tireless worker who leads by example and you can tell she enjoys playing the game of soccer because she always has a smile on her face."

-Michael Flynn, varsity head coach

SOFIA Dioli (12)

Basketball

118 points scored in season; captain

"She is a versatile player where she can play a shooting guard or a forward. She is the true definition of a teammate, puts others before her and builds others up."

-Kristie Hala'ufia, varsity head coach



COURTESY OF ARAGON WRESTLING

IVAN HAGER

DARRA MCCLINTOCK

LIAN WANG

IVAN HAGER