The Aragon Outlook

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900 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo, CA 94402

Aragon High School

ARAGON'S HOMECOMING DANCE

Anais Delune
NEWS WRITER

On Sept. 26, Aragon held its annual Homecoming dance with more than 1,000 students in attendance. This year, the dance featured a New Orleans-inspired theme, "Night at the Bayou." Many guests said the theme reminded them of "The Princess and the Frog."

"It was really cool, [though] I don't see a lot of people doing it," said freshman Mihir Raghavan. "The theme could have been a bit less niche and more wide."

The dance was held at a new location: The Alexandria, a corporate meeting space that also acts as an event venue in San Carlos, instead of Devil's Canyon Brewing Company, which was the venue last year.

"We chose The Alexandria because it has a beautiful outdoor space," said Dance Commission Head Anna Dioli. "It has two big rooms so if you are not into dancing you can just go into the other room and [play] games, but it's all still cohesive."

The space allowed guests to move freely between the dance floor, the outside area and a room that contained eating areas and games for students to play. A popular activity was taking photos at the photo booth, where a line of students often stretched from one end of the room to the other.

"I loved doing the photos," said junior Melissa Magness. "I liked that they had that option for those people who didn't want to dance."

In late spring, Dance Commission released a form allowing students to vote on the homecoming theme and give suggestions for the dance.

Dance Commission had to make a few last-minute decisions after facing difficulties with the weather.

"We had to move the photo booth inside as the backgrounds for the pictures were blowing in the wind," said Leadership Adviser Lindsay Bussey. "Initially we wanted the 'HOCO' marquee signs to be outside but they kept falling over. We had to tape all of the outdoor decorations to the tables to keep them in place."

The event had a wide selection of food available — a mix of entrees, appetizers and drinks, including truffle parmesan fries, pigs in a blanket and mozzarella sticks.

"The food this year was pretty good, overall," Magness said. "It seemed like a good variety of finger foods. I do wish that there were some more inclusive options for people with food allergies, though, since I know that some of my friends are gluten free, and I don't recall there being many options for them."

This year, Dance Commission chose a new DJ for the dance.


AIDAN KASTEN

"The DJ was a big highlight for me, since there were some better songs played than usual," Magness said. "Oftentimes at these dances, there are repeated songs throughout the night, or songs that are not fitting what the students are feeling in the moment, like when the DJ plays a slow song right after a really fast-paced dance song."

Even so, some students had mixed feelings about the song choices.

"[The DJ should] play more memorable or well-known songs because there were some songs that nobody could sing," said freshman Sean Ke.

Other students mentioned areas for improvement.

"$50 was a lot for the ticket, and [I] wish the [decorations had] stayed a little more on theme, especially with the price point," said freshman Mandy Liu. "[While] I understand why they charged us that much, for the price, there are some things that I was a little disappointed in. Overall it was still fun and I did enjoy the dance."

The next dance will be Winter Formal on Feb. 6.



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MI NGUYEN

Editorial: Traffic Safety

Centerspread: Maxxing


DJ TOWNSEND

META LAWSUIT SETTLED WITH TIME LIMITS FOR MINORS

Ronen Paynter
NEWS WRITER

On Aug. 26, a coalition of 51 attorney generals from U.S. states and territories finalized a first-of-its-kind $17.1 billion settlement with Meta Platforms Inc., resolving a federal lawsuit which concerned the addictive platform design of Facebook and Instagram. Under the terms of the agreement, Meta must implement a list of safety measures for minors: a two-hour combined time limit for both Facebook and Instagram, more advanced age verification, restricted use between midnight and 6 a.m. and hidden public "like" counts and beauty filters by default.

There are also several precautions in place. The time limits will not be able to be circumvented by signing onto different accounts or devices, and a parent must provide formal consent in order to override any of these features.

"I love Instagram," said sophomore Anaya Bhalla. "A lot. I love social media and I love connecting with my friends on those platforms ... if they put time limits on Instagram, that would suck."

The state attorneys and Meta officials faced off in the U.S. District Court for Northern California. Meta was presumed not to be liable for harmful content posted on its platforms due to section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, so the states built their case instead against the structure and algorithms of the platforms. Their legal strategy partially relied on leaked corporate documents, which revealed that Meta was aware of how their platforms caused sleep deprivation, anxiety and depression among teens.

Meta's implementation of several terms was contingent upon competing platforms TikTok and YouTube adopting the same restrictions. The two-hour time limit will be specifically restricted to one-hour each for Instagram and Facebook and night usage will be limited from the longer timeframe of 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. if the other companies implement the limitations. Moreover, 30% of the total $17.1 billion will be withheld until wider implementation occurs and similar fines are paid by TikTok and YouTube.

Greg Moretti, biology and Advanced Placement environmental science teacher was contacted to be a juror on the trial, but was turned down the night before it was scheduled to occur. He believes it was because of his experience as an educator.

"As a teacher, I responded [to the defense team] that I see the impacts of social media use on education every single day," Moretti said. "If students are distracted in my class, they're on their phones, getting notifications from social media apps."

A study by Springer Nature highlights that out of 1,360 high school students surveyed, 59% of them spent more than three hours on social media daily, while 68% of them didn't believe they were influenced by social media.

An article published by the Cureus Journal of Medical Science found that teenage brains were highly susceptible to social media addiction, as algorithms designed by machine learning models create highly personalized feeds, which can be described as "loops of desire." These loops happen when the brain's reward systems are targeted by algorithms, causing a release in dopamine and a following desire for another dopamine source.

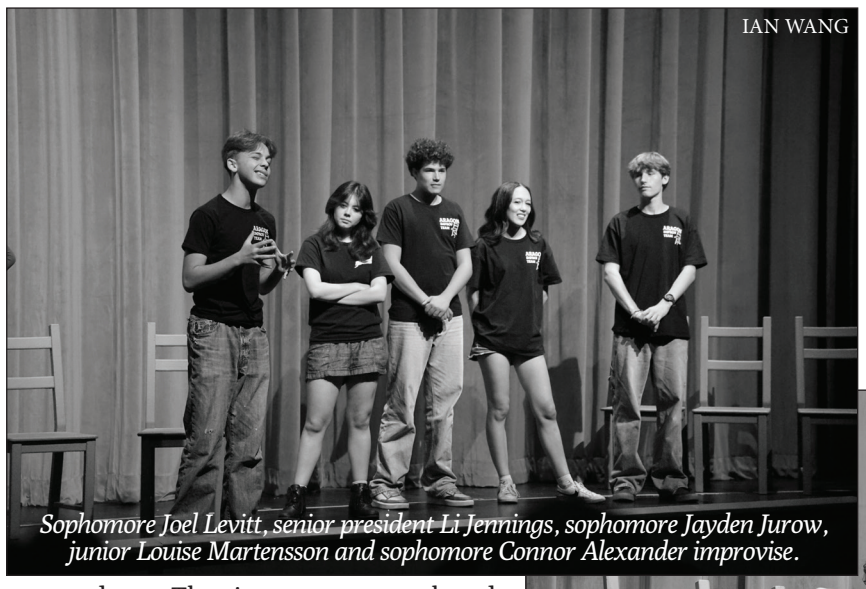
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Aragon Improv Team presents first show of the year

Khoi Nguyen
NEWS WRITER

The annual Returners' Improv Show was held by the Aragon Improv Team on Sept. 18.

"[Improv is] like theater, but we make it up on the spot," said junior and AIT member Louise Martensson. "We want to balance having a good storyline and nuanced characters with comedy and some action."


IAN WANG

Sophomore Joel Levitt, senior president Li Jennings, sophomore Jayden Jurow, junior Louise Martensson and sophomore Connor Alexander improvise.

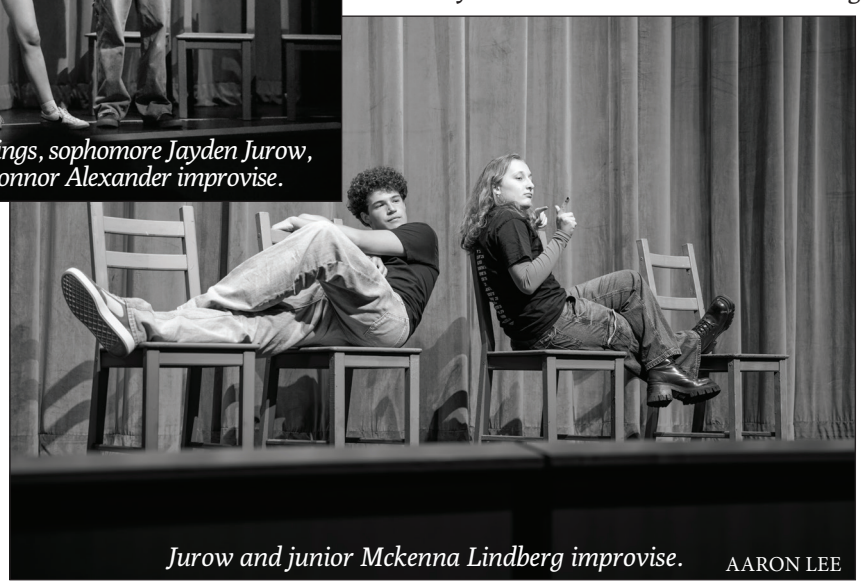
Without lines to guide them through a scene, improvisers must make decisions onstage to proceed with the story. There were two forms of entertainment performed during the show: short-form games and long-form scenes.

"For games, they're a really good warm-up for long-form," said senior and AIT President Li Jennings. "It helps you practice saying whatever comes to mind in a pretty low-stakes manner ... But for long-form, it's important to remember what happened in previous scenes, what was said [and] who people are, so you can build on the foundation of what's already there and continue to progress."

The show started around 7 p.m., immediately kicking off with a game called "Town Hall," where the audience was asked to bring up any issues in the area. AIT members in the crowd volunteered to address the problems, while portraying different characters like Luigi from Super Mario and the Hare from the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare."

The improv team played various other short-form games after their introductions. During "Pillars," two actors played out a story while two audience volunteers onstage had to decide the next phrase that would be incorporated into the story. Later, in "Character Swap," a group of actors played distinct characters but swapped their roles whenever an AIT member clapped, with the topic of two elderly people reuniting after years apart. Another short-form game was "New Choice," where the improvisers changed the direction of the scene about underground spelunking when they heard the clap.

"My favorite game was 'New Choice,'" said senior Michael Chen. "It was really funny how the whole tone of the story immediately changed with a single clap. It was pretty absurdist."


Jurow and junior Mckenna Lindberg improvise. AARON LEE

After the short-form games, the team performed a series of long-form ones, which are montages of uninterrupted skits about one theme. The topic suggested by the audience and chosen by the members was "lamp," and as a result, the members created scenes of two members attempting to use helium to touch a ceiling lamp, a group of moths taking rehab for their addiction to light emitted off lamps and many more.

"The best part was [that] everyone was really skillful," said senior Brandon Lin. "They'd get a random word from the audience, and then they'd be able to create this whole story or little skit off of it, and just be really creative."

Junior Rui Liu agreed that the show was entertaining.

"I [could] tell that they were quick with their responses, and they managed to connect all of the scenes really well," Liu said. "It [seemed like it was] scripted, even though it's not. I enjoyed it [and] it was fun and impressive ... I liked how they pulled people from the audience to come up [on] stage or to participate in the game."

The AIT had six returners participate in the show, as the six other members from last year graduated.

"I thought having a small team would make it a lot more difficult, but it actually allowed us to explore a lot of new opportunities we possibly couldn't have with a larger team," said sophomore and AIT member Jayden Jurow. "I thought [the show] went really well, had good comedy and was all around very solid."

Jennings believes improvisation provides many opportunities to grow one's personal skills.

"Improv is such an amazing thing," Jennings said. "It's not just about theater. It's about the community, it's about being open to new ideas. It helps with your critical thinking and your adaptability to anything that life throws at you. It's such a beautiful art form, and it goes really underappreciated."

After tryouts were held for the team, all new and returning members performed in the New Improviser Improv Show on Oct. 9. The next show held by AIT will be on Nov. 3.

Community college bachelor's degree duplication

Max Feng
NEWS WRITER

On Sept. 18, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 2694 and Senate Bill 960 into law. The legislation aims to allow community colleges to duplicate degrees, meaning the institutions can offer bachelor's degrees already available at nearby California State University or University of California campuses. Currently, community colleges in California mainly offer associates degrees and certifications, whereas four-year universities mainly offer bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees.

Before the legislation was passed, duplication was allowed only if there was a proven workforce need. The degrees would not take potential students away from applying at a UC or CSU, even if those students lived in rural areas where community colleges, but not state universities, were nearby, according to EdSource. Bachelor's degrees not offered by a UC or CSU were permitted to be created.

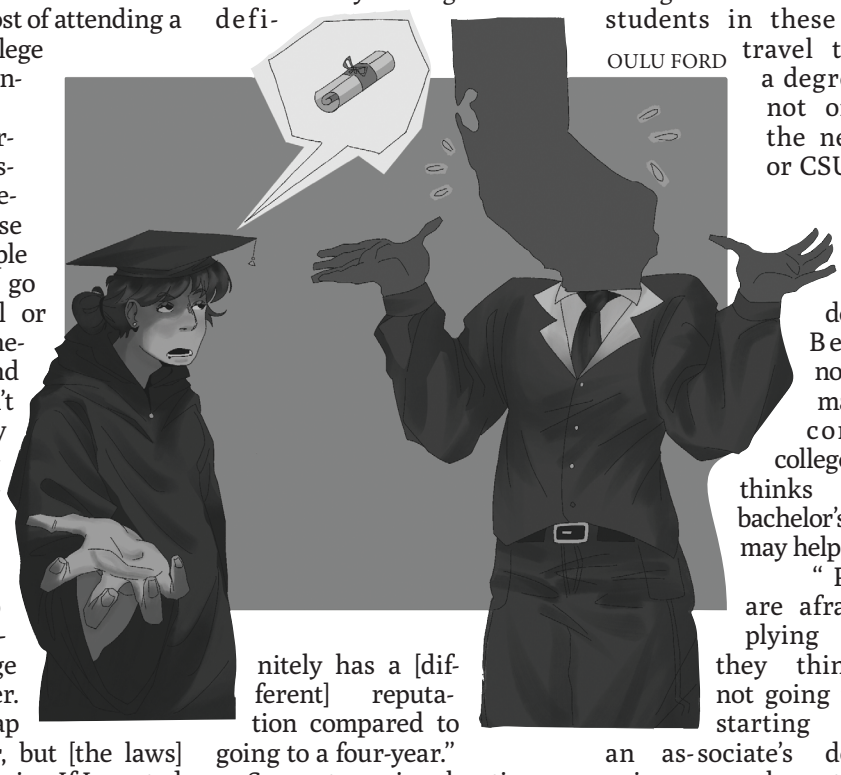
With the new laws, duplication will be allowed if the UC or CSU that the degree is being duplicated from is outside the community college's local service area, and regional duplication will be allowed if the respective UC or CSU does not have enough spots to accommodate all of its applicants for a major.

Proponents of the laws believe they will make education more financially accessible, noting the difference in cost between community colleges and state universities. The average tuition of an in-state UC student for the 2027-28 school year is projected to be $16,278, according to the UC admissions page. To attend a CSU, the estimated tuition per year for in-state students is $6,838. On top of this, fees for books, food and more are likely to increase that number. While financial aid is available, the cost of attending a community college is $1,238 for in-state students.

"Any opportunity for accessibility is awesome because there are people who want to go back to school or want to try something new, and maybe you don't want to ... pay so much money for [a bachelor's degree]," said senior Mavis Nguyen. "Getting to do it at a community college is much easier. I'm taking a gap year next year, but [the laws] make my life easier. If I wanted to come back [for college] and didn't [want] to worry about tuition, I could be like, 'I want to pursue this bachelor degree [at community college].'"

College of San Mateo student Cameron Trio noted how future Aragon graduates may see it differently.

"Coming from Aragon, I feel like [many] people are wealthier and can afford a four-year [college]," Trio said. "A lot of people, what [they] seek [from] college is not just the degree; it's also the experience living in the dorms [and] meeting new people. Also, [there's] prestige. A lot of people say [attending] community college definitely has a [different] reputation compared to going to a four-year."


OULU FORD

Supporters view location as another advantage. They believe that students who can't afford to move will be able to earn bachelor's degrees at a much cheaper rate.

"We're very fortunate in the Bay Area [that] we have a big concentration of institutions all within about a 10 to 20 mile radius," said CSM President Dr. Manuel Alejandro Pérez. "Opportunity abounds in these spaces. But that's not the case in rural parts of California, where the nearest UC or CSU is well over 40 to 50 miles away. We're trying to offer something that is [not] far too great of a distance for students in these areas to travel to [obtain a degree that] is not offered by the nearest UC or CSU."

Local community college student Darren Benavente notes a stigma around community college that he thinks the new bachelor's degrees may help alleviate.

"People are afraid of applying because they think you're not going to get far, starting off with an associate's degree or going somewhere that's easy to get into," Benavente said. "If you don't get into Stanford or a UC then you're immediately doomed. That's what a lot of people thought in my grade when applying [to college]. But [they] don't realize what community college has to offer ... and definitely with the exposure of bachelor degrees in community college, it'll be a lot more popular."

Another concern is whether community colleges are well-equipped to offer bachelor's degree coursework.

"Certain degrees would be really hard to implement at community colleges, at least at CSM," Trio said. "I'm doing engineering, [and] there's a [website] that most transfer students use to see what classes they need at a UC or CSU. CSM [doesn't] offer ... a lot of classes [for that major] ... compared to if you went to a four-year [college]."

However, Pérez does not believe that this will be an issue.

"When it comes to conversations around academic excellence, I am in no way concerned," Pérez said. "There are ways in which, from an institutional sense, our [California community] colleges are all held to a very high standard."

As a result of new laws, the community colleges on the Peninsula are faced with a decision: whether or not to increase their bachelor's degree offerings.

"We'll definitely look at the bill carefully and methodically and with great intention," Perez said. "We're having conversations with our faculty, with our district leadership, to talk about opportunity. Whether that results in us actually pursuing something is far too early to tell right now."

The legislation will officially take effect on Jan. 1, 2027.

City moves to increase pedestrian safety

Ellie Blakely and Naomi Kotani
NEWS AND FEATURES EDITORS

A vehicle operated by an Aragon student struck an Aragon sophomore at the intersection of Alameda de las Pulgas and Aragon Boulevard on Sept. 14, sparking an outpouring of calls from the community for improved traffic safety measures at the intersection.

The victim of the incident, London Walker, was walking in the crosswalk during the pedestrian signal when the driver of a truck turned left into the crosswalk and hit her, sending her several feet.

"I [saw] the front of the truck, and I don't remember it hitting me or feeling pain at that moment," Walker said. "I just remember hitting the ground, my head and my whole left side, and then seeing people around me."

Sophomore Erin Gage was crossing with Walker and witnessed the incident. She initially thought the driver was inching forward while waiting for pedestrians to finish crossing, a common occurrence at the intersection.

"Then I saw [the driver] start to speed up, and I looked for [their] face, [for] eye contact, and [they were] looking down," Gage said. "I saw the top of [their] head so I thought maybe [they're] on [their] phone, then I saw [them] start speeding up more. I was like, '[they're] not gonna stop for me.' My instincts kicked in and I started running ... I didn't call out [to warn Walker] because in the heat of [the moment], my reaction [was just to run]. I heard the big thud of the car hitting [Walker] and ... the screech of [the] tires. She flew off the crosswalk, probably seven feet."

In response to the incident, local traffic and pedestrian safety advocacy group Move San Mateo organized a community meeting on Sept. 19 near the site of the collision. Attendees discussed changes they wanted the city to make to improve traffic and pedestrian safety, including prohibiting right turns during red lights, adding an additional pedestrian signal to Aragon Boulevard, increasing or isolating pedestrian crossing times and narrowing lanes on Alameda, a measure that has been shown to generally reduce vehicle speeds.

There was unanimous support for increased safety measures at the meeting, although some community members disagreed about specific implementations.


Walker is treated by first responders.
COURTESY OF RACHEL HORWITZ

Following the meeting, Move San Mateo and Aragon's Parent Teacher Student Organization put together a letter residents could send to City Council, urging local leaders to address the issue. The PTSO also created a newsletter to parents and staff titled "Dons Community Action," specifically focused on advocacy in the Aragon community. At a City Council meeting on Sept. 22, many residents and local leaders spoke in favor of the proposed changes.

The Outlook obtained an email Diaz Nash sent to the PTSO co-presidents to the PTSO co-presidents and other attendees of Move San Mateo's meeting late on the evening of Oct. 7 informing them of several changes approved for the area. The changes, which Diaz Nash said are expected to be completed by early November, include a pedestrian-only crossing time for east-west crosswalks, no right on red signs for all right turns in the intersection, centerline hardening on Alameda, daylighting — the removal of parking and other objects that could reduce driver visibility on corners — and increased presence of traffic enforcement officers.

The recent collision is not an isolated incident; several have occurred at the intersection and students agree the crossing feels unsafe.

"Cars do go quite fast down there sometimes, especially when no one's there," said senior Jasmine Tam.

There is a wider pattern of drivers hitting pedestrians at intersections across San Mateo, some of which have resulted in pedestrian fatalities.

"It's been a chronic problem, but it's only when there's an incident that people feel moved to action," said San Mateo Union High School District Board of Trustees Vice President Jennifer Jacobson. "It's unfortunate that it takes an incident where somebody gets hurt in order for people to take action, in order for the city to start listening."

Although advocates have been calling for the city to take stronger action on what they describe as dangerous intersections for over ten years, the amount of incidents concentrated in recent years has prompted a more intense push for improved traffic safety measures.

"We've been waiting long enough, and the community has talked about Alameda safety for over a decade, and it upsets me that we're still talking about it today," Kim said. "This cannot happen to anybody else, whether it be a student or a community member. This change needs to happen now."

Editorial: more traffic safety measures

This editorial represents the opinions of 12 out of 14 Outlook editors

After an Aragon student was hit by a truck on Sept. 14, many community members rallied together to advocate for improving traffic safety around campus, including the organization Move San Mateo, the Aragon Parent Teacher Student Organization and the San Mateo Union High School District Board of Trustees.

In response to the incident, Move San Mateo proposed many initiatives to San Mateo City Council to increase traffic safety. After reviewing Move San Mateo's proposals and PTSO's suggestions, on Oct. 7, City Council sent an email informing the advocates of actions they will be taking, including short-term proposals to be implemented by early November and longer-term plans. The Aragon Outlook appreciates this effort and encourages City Council to apply more of the suggested initiatives, as safety around campus is of utmost importance.

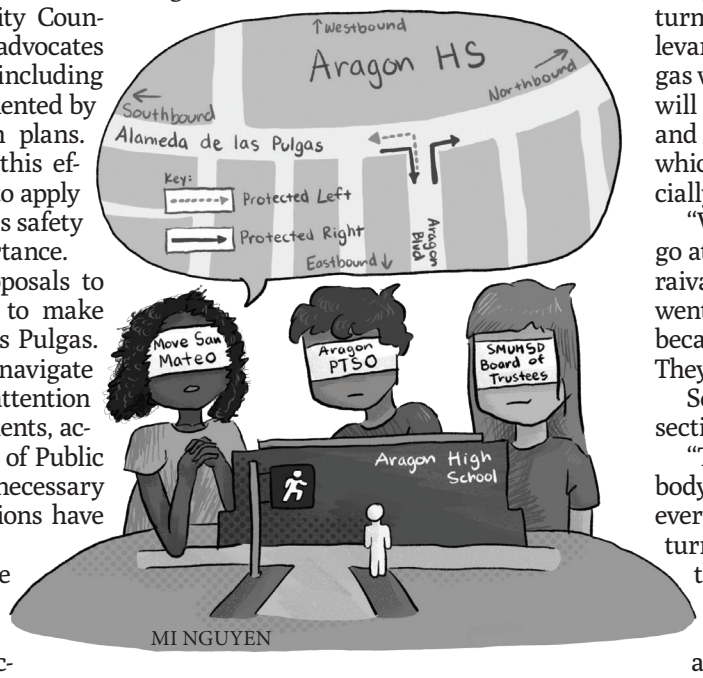
One of Move San Mateo's proposals to improve overall traffic safety is to make lanes narrower on Alameda de las Pulgas. Narrower lanes cause drivers to navigate more cautiously and pay more attention to the road, which decreases accidents, according to a John Hopkins School of Public Health study. This is especially necessary for the Aragon area, where collisions have occurred multiple times.

Moreover, this is an inexpensive yet effective way to increase pedestrian safety.

"[Lane narrowing] can be accomplished at the same time as the city performs regular, periodic repavings, which is already budgeted for," said Move San Mateo co-lead Max Mautner. "[It] can be [as] simple as the city [just] deciding [where] to paint the lines on the road."

Although a suggestion from Move San Mateo included increasing the pedestrian crossing time, which would make pedestrians more visible to drivers, the Outlook does not agree; rather, we believe the existing pedestrian crossing time is sufficient at approximately 28 seconds, as increasing this window may cause excessive traffic without sufficient benefit.

"We have plenty of time to walk," said senior Sristi Sharma. "There's a lot of people who need to drop off their children and [Alameda de las Pulgas] is their way of getting out of there. If [there's] not much time for the cars to go, it would cause more sense of urgency between the cars, like wanting to leave faster and potentially hitting someone."



MI NGUYEN

In addition to most of Move San Mateo's initiatives, the Outlook recommends the PTSO's suggestion of a crossing signal on the north-south crosswalk on Aragon Boulevard be implemented by the city. Right now, the city is not planning to install this signal, because "robust signal modifications" would be required, according to the recent email from City Council. However, the establishment of this signal is necessary to better protect pedestrians on the Aragon side-street from turning cars and to decrease danger. Moreover, the Outlook believes this pedestrian signal should be exclusive, with no other cars allowed to turn during the crossing.

Finally, two of the proposals of Move San Mateo that City Council has said they are aiming to finish by November include no right turn on red and exclusive left. First, signage will be posted for every right turn in the Aragon-Alameda intersection to indicate the no right on red. Second, an exclusive pedestrian crossing with cars unable to turn left while traveling from Aragon Boulevard to southbound Alameda de las Pulgas will be enforced. Both of these measures will decrease the likelihood of pedestrian and vehicle collisions within crosswalks, which the Outlook greatly supports, especially in light of the September incident.

"When the walk sign turns on, the cars go at the same time," said sophomore JP Saraiva. "I was crossing the street and the car went at the same time and I had to back up because I saw the car coming toward me. They just honked at me and kept going."

Senior Sarina Jain agrees that the intersection was a significant issue.

"There's so many accidents [that] somebody gets hit or injured in that crosswalk every year," Jain said. "Cars have a hard time turning left at that intersection because there's so many people crossing during when school starts and ends. Having a designated time [will] let those cars be able to actually [take] a left turn, as well as [allow] pedestrians [to] not be worried about any cars turning in there."

The Outlook believes traffic safety around Aragon is a critical ongoing issue that must be addressed with real structural change as soon as possible. These proposals will greatly protect pedestrians from potential harm and ease the flow of safe traffic in the area.

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Candidates face off in SMUHSD trustee elections

Renee Ren
NEWS WRITER

In November, voters will elect trustees for the San Mateo Union High School District from areas one, three and five. Trustees are elected to represent their community and govern the district body as a whole over four-year terms. Their main responsibilities include setting district policy, hiring and overseeing the superintendent and approving the budget.

In area one, covering San Bruno and part of Millbrae, incumbent Teri Chavez is running unopposed.

HARRIS VS. JACOBSON

In area three, which includes the Hillsborough and Highlands areas, incumbent Jennifer Jacobson is running against Diana Harris, a San Mateo-Foster City School District teacher.

Jacobson is the current vice president on the board, and is running for her second term after winning an uncontested race in her first term.

"I've learned so much [and have gained so] much institutional knowledge," Jacobson said. "It takes a long time to ramp up and learn the system, [learn] who all the people are and what are all of the initiatives that the school board is involved in and working on ... so that's why I want to run for a second term."

In her first term, Jacobson worked alongside the other board members to accomplish tasks such as establishing athletic study hall for sophomores, reinstituting Measures of Academic Progress as a district-wide academic proficiency testing method to better measure students' academic proficiency, pushing for an AI task force, an increase in career pathway related courses and the district-wide phone ban.

In February 2025, the San Mateo Daily Journal reported that SMUHSD Teachers Association President Craig Childress had called for Jacobson to be censured for advising community members at a board meeting who were concerned about content in Ethnic Studies to report it to administrators or the Office of Civil Rights.

In 2025, the SMDJ reported that Jacobson delayed a SMUHSD board meeting where the trustees put in place district-wide policy in compliance with a state law that allows transgender student athletes to compete in sports categories consistent with their gender. At the meeting, she mentioned the Hillsdale girls lacrosse team losing to a team whose star player she called a boy, though Jacobson ultimately voted for the policy.

"That's not something our school board has jurisdiction over because it's a state law," Jacobson said. "That's our district policy and I have no say as a single board member to change this. I voted yes to approve that policy, and I want all of our students regardless of their gender identity to feel that they belong on our campuses."

Jacobson's goal for her next term is to continue working to continue or expand those initiatives, such as continuing the Empowerment Through Action program and increasing career pathways.

Jacobson has been endorsed by former SMUHSD trustees Peter Hanley and Linda Lees Dwyer, and the North Coast States Carpenters Union.

Meanwhile, Harris hopes to bring both the perspectives of an educator and a parent involved in the SMFCSD Parent Teacher Association to the Board of Trustees.

"There's no one [on the current board] who's a teacher and knows what it's like when [board] decisions come down and affect the classroom," Harris said. "A lot of times the people making decisions don't think of how it will actually look, and they overlook a lot [of things. A] teacher's point of view would be very helpful and help us smooth out some potential bumps in decision making."

Harris also wants to continue existing programs and establish them as more permanent means of supporting students, and also aims to bridge the gap between the board, parents and students.

"I'm really focused on [engaging] people who don't have access to the school board and that kind of information," Harris said. "[I'd] really like to set up regular [meetings] like listening sessions at different high schools to talk with students, teachers and parents [to] get a sense of what their concerns are [and] what their questions are."

Harris has been endorsed by current trustees Greg Land and Ligia Andrade Zúñiga, the SMUHSD teacher's union, SMUHSDTA, the San Mateo Democratic Party and other organizations.

"[Harris is] really connected [to] the community," said Giancarlo Corti, Aragon SMUHSDTA representative and Advanced Placement Psychology teacher. "It's nice to have an educator on the board, so the fact that she's a teacher, even though it's elementary or middle school, is a good voice to have. She understands educational issues, and we don't have a teacher on the board [currently]."

PROCTOR VS. ROSENBAUM

In area five, which covers Foster City, former two-term SMFCSD trustee Alison Proctor is running against parent Kimo Rosenbaum for the position after longstanding trustee Robert Griffin decided not to run for reelection.

Rosenbaum hopes to bring the perspective of a parent to the board. He said the decision to run came as he felt the time was right. Rosenbaum's campaign is centered around technology and use of technology in schools, and he advocates for a looser cell phone policy.

"I've been going to the meetings," Rosenbaum said. "Almost every time, [I've made] public comments about how the cell phone policy cuts off a lot of things without the district having an answer. I [didn't] like ... the way the board decided on the cell phone policy and the way they're talking about AI. [Speaking] at the board meetings isn't enough, [so] if I get on the board, maybe I can make [the policy] better."

Proctor brings the perspective of a parent as well.

"I'm mainly focused [on] ensuring that every student knows there's a path to success," Proctor said. "When I was in high school, the only path anyone talked about was going to a four-year college, [but] there's so many different ways that [students] can be successful in life, and I want to make sure that every student knows that."

Proctor takes a different perspective on the cell phone ban to Rosenbaum.

"Overall, the idea is right," Proctor said. "Sometimes what's best for us isn't always what we love the most, but having a distraction-free environment is what is the best environment for [students' learning and social life]."

Proctor is also endorsed by the SMUHSDTA, as well as the San Mateo Labor Council and Trustee Greg Land.

"She's really well respected," Corti said. "[SMFCSD has] a very difficult district. It's big. There's lots of diversity in their district, especially economically, and they've had to handle some difficult things that she handled really well. She's always been a good communicator and a good listener."

Students highlighted what they would like to see in the trustee candidates.

"Students are the people who are being directly affected by all of these rules," said senior Catherine Tsao. "Whoever is chosen [should be] able to reflect the students' needs and wants, [as well as] able to actually make a difference that supports everyone."

Trustee terms for areas 2, encompassing Burlingame and parts of Millbrae, and 4, covering southeastern San Mateo, will expire in 2028.

Jennifer Jacobson



COURTESY OF JACOBSON

- Running for a second term
- Endorsed by former SMUHSD trustees Peter Hanley and Linda Lees Dwyer
- Goals: strengthen Empowerment Through Action and career pathways
- Has made comments many see as anti-transgender

Diana Harris



COURTESY OF HARRIS

- SMFCSD teacher and parent
- Endorsed by trustees Greg Land and Ligia Andrade Zúñiga, the SMUHSDTA and the San Mateo Democratic Party
- Goals: community "listening sessions" at different high schools, strengthen Empowerment Through Action

Supreme Court blocks Trump's mail-in voting order

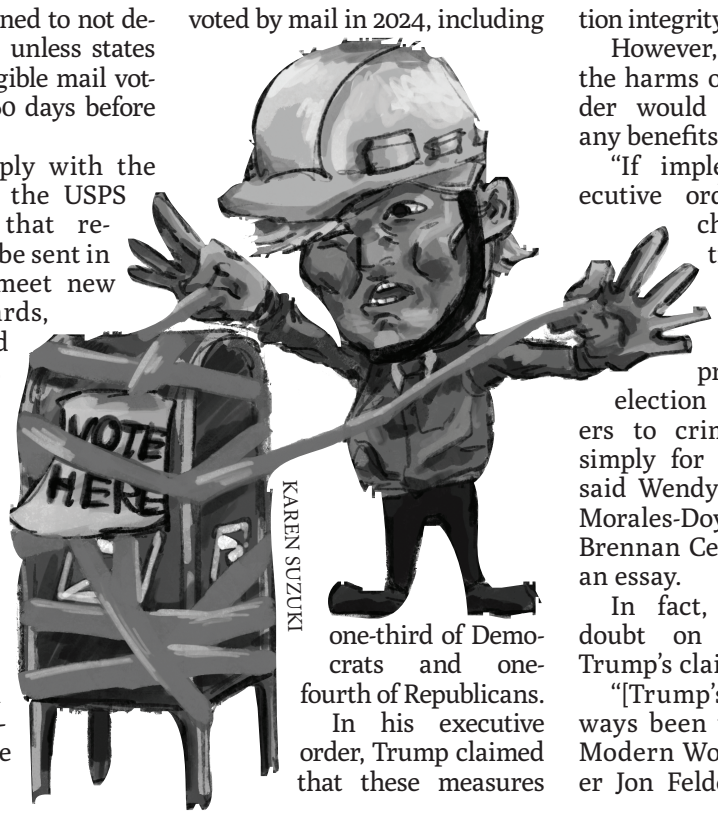
Ryan Li
NEWS WRITER

On Sept. 14, the Supreme Court blocked the United States Postal Service from implementing President Donald Trump's executive order to limit mail-in voting.

"[The purpose of the] Supreme Court is to keep all these crazy things from happening," said junior Jaydon Li. "You can't just have the president say whatever he wants and get what he wants ... It is good that the Supreme Court is stopping that from happening because [they] know that this is a decision that was so abrupt [and] might not be thought through."

Earlier this year, on March 31, Trump issued an executive order that instructed the Department of Homeland Security to collect lists of citizens and prohibited the USPS from delivering mail ballots to voters that don't appear on the list. The order also threatened to not deliver voter ballots unless states submit lists of eligible mail voters to the USPS 60 days before the election.

Later, to comply with the executive order, the USPS released rules that required ballots to be sent in envelopes that meet new design standards, which included unique bar codes for every ballot, and mandated that states upload a list of participating voters in advance. The USPS would not have delivered ballots that didn't meet the design standard or belong to someone not on the list.



KAREN SUZUKI

Almost a third of Americans voted by mail in 2024, including one-third of Democrats and one-fourth of Republicans.

In his executive order, Trump claimed that these measures were necessary to ensure election integrity and prevent fraud.

However, some experts say the harms of the executive order would have outweighed any benefits.

"If implemented, the executive order would inject chaos into our elections, block eligible American citizens from voting, undermine voter privacy, and expose election officials and others to criminal prosecution simply for doing their jobs," said Wendy Weiser and Sean Morales-Doyle, writers at the Brennan Center for Justice, in an essay.

In fact, some have cast doubt on the validity of Trump's claims.

"[Trump's] claim has always been voter fraud," said Modern World History teacher Jon Felder. "Going all the way back to the 2020 election, which Biden won, [Trump] claimed the reason that Biden won was because of voter fraud, and so he's brought that narrative forward. It's hard to know what his intention is, but [trying to] gain an advantage in the election in this midterm election seems likely."

Opponents to the rules argued that complying would have increased costs and caused confusion for election officials, voters and the USPS. In addition, they argued that the USPS' refusal to deliver noncompliant ballots would have caused disenfranchisement as states wouldn't have enough time to comply with them. Trump's policy also had the potential to eliminate mail-in voting in states that don't give voter data to the USPS.

CONTINUED ONLINE AT ARAGONOUTLOOK.ORG

Flock cameras: concerns over local surveillance

Diya Poojary and Addie Rose
NEWS AND FEATURES WRITERS

On your drive to school, a small black camera mounted alongside the road can be easy to miss. But the cameras throughout San Mateo County are capable of recording much more than just a passing moment.

These cameras, distributed by security company Flock Safety, use Automatic License Plate Reader algorithms to read letters and numbers on a vehicle's license plate, as well as determine its make, model, color, location and the time it was recorded. This information is then stored in a searchable database that allows law enforcement to use the information during investigations.

For students who drive around San Mateo County every day, that means that an ordinary drive to school, practice or a friend's house could leave a digital record of where their vehicles were seen. Just around Aragon, there are three Flock cameras surrounding the campus.

The cameras are used to help law enforcement solve crimes and locate stolen vehicles and missing people. But their growing presence has raised questions about privacy, data retention and who should have access to information about people who are not suspected of a crime.

Flock Safety, an Atlanta-based company founded in 2017, has become more widespread as a large provider of ALPR technology across the country. In explaining the benefits of Flock cameras, the company website provides the statistic of over 10,000 missing people being located through use of the cameras and that "42% of Flock customers recovered more than half of all stolen vehicles in their jurisdiction," as stated on their website.

When a car passes a Flock camera, the system automatically records information about that vehicle, detecting up to 75 feet away. According to Flock, information is immediately sent to a cloud-based database, where it is compared with law enforcement watch lists containing vehicles associated with stolen cars, criminal investigations, warrants or missing person alerts.

The cameras are also part of networks, meaning if the same vehicle is caught by multiple cameras, investigators can use those records to determine when and where the vehicle traveled. Flock claims that this is one of the biggest reasons why law enforcement uses this technology.

If police were looking for a stolen vehicle, they do not have to rely on an officer happening to see it. An ALPR system can send an alert directly to officers as the cameras detect the vehicle.

The San Mateo Police Department says on their website that they specifically use ALPR technology as a tool for locating stolen vehicles, missing persons and violent felons.

"ALPR information is an investigative lead; it does not by itself establish that a crime occurred or that a particular person committed a crime," said SMPD Police Lieutenant Steve Casazza in an email. "Officers are expected to independently verify information and develop the appropriate legal justification before taking enforcement action."

But the cameras don't only record vehicles of suspected criminals. They capture all vehicles that pass the camera. This distinction is the root of the privacy debate.

As of March 30, more than 528 ALPR cameras were deployed throughout San Mateo County. They are used by municipal police departments and by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office. The county's 17 law enforcement agencies using ALPR systems include departments in Burlingame, San Mateo, Foster City, Daly City, Redwood City, Hillsborough, Menlo Park and other communities.

The city of San Mateo operates 66 Flock cameras, according to an August San Mateo Grand Jury Report.

This means that students may pass Flock cameras as they drive to school without realizing their information is being tracked. For some students, the cameras represent an extra safety measure, but others may be more concerned about the amount of information being collected and how it is being used.

"Officers are using Flock cameras for uses that aren't necessarily what they're meant to be used for," said senior Anjalika Khare. "A lot of people have compared these Flock cameras to that of a surveillance state, where everybody's being watched, everybody's face is being monitored, people are being tracked, people are being unnecessarily caught for things because an AI or someone monitoring the cameras is [misinterpreting] what they're seeing."

These concerns are not unfounded; The Washington Post reported in August that at least 50 law-enforcement officers have been accused or charged with using their access to Flock's data inappropriately, for uses such as stalking ex-partners, people from their personal lives and others not suspected of crimes.

The American Civil Liberties Union argues that this technology could affect a person's freedom through perceived First Amendment violations, and should only be used if the vehicle is on a legitimate watch list.



A frequent concern about ALPR cameras is what happens to the data after a camera records it.

In order to find out, San Mateo County's Civil Grand Jury recently investigated how local agencies operate ALPR systems, releasing its findings in August. They reviewed the county's 17 law enforcement agencies that operate ALPR systems, which includes more than 580 cameras. They examined agency policies, audit reports, contracts and data-sharing practices.

One concern brought up by the report involved data sharing between law enforcement agencies and private university security departments. The Grand Jury found that most of the agencies it reviewed shared ALPR data with the university departments without establishing whether those departments were public agencies under California law.

The Jury called for stronger oversight and more consistent policies so agencies can maintain public trust, while balancing safety and privacy. SMPD has since begun reviewing their own practices based on the investigation's results, specifically with regards to the ALPR policy and operating procedures.

"The revisions are intended to more clearly address [the concerns outlined by the Grand Jury]," Casazza said. "We also believe policies involving rapidly evolving technology should not remain static. We will continue to review our ALPR practices as technology changes, laws are updated and we identify opportunities to improve accountability and transparency."

Additionally, SMPD has reduced the number of agencies with which it previously shared Flock's data, working with a more limited group of law-enforcement partners. Flock has also made several changes to its own policies and technologies in response to the growing concerns about privacy and misuse.

In August, Flock added new restrictions on how agencies can search within each other's camera networks. Agencies can now pick what types of offenses other agencies are allowed to search for. For example, an agency could allow another department to search its cameras for stolen vehicles or missing persons, while blocking searches related to immigration enforcement.

Another change is that law enforcement users will be required to enter a case code connected to a specific investigation before conducting a search. In July 2025, Flock had made this case code optional, but to ensure security, the company now requires them for all law enforcement agencies. Emergency scans can still be performed, but will be flagged for administrator review.

In addition, Flock announced that it would reduce its recommended default data-retention period from 30 days to seven for new law enforcement customers, while existing customers keep their current retention period. Flock also introduced a new "Evidence Mode," which allows specific information to be preserved when it is connected to an active investigation and is given to the new customers free of charge.

After an Oct. 5 City Council meeting at which members discussed the city's use of ALPR cameras, the city decided to sign a purchase agreement with another company providing ALPR technology called Axon. The agreement involves a one year free trial of Axon's services, during which the city will conduct a side-by-side comparison with Flock cameras to determine which company they prefer.

The council voted four to one in favor of proceeding with the agreement, with the exception of Mayor Adam Loraine.

At the City Council meeting on Oct. 5, a primary concern brought up by many public comments was regarding Axon's contract with the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency. However, both City Council member Lisa Diaz Nash and Casazza have reaffirmed that SMPD has strict regulations regarding this issue and does not share any information with federal immigration authorities or with any law enforcement agencies outside of the state, aligning with Flock's safeguards specific to California. Immigration and reproductive care-related searches are automatically blocked within the state.

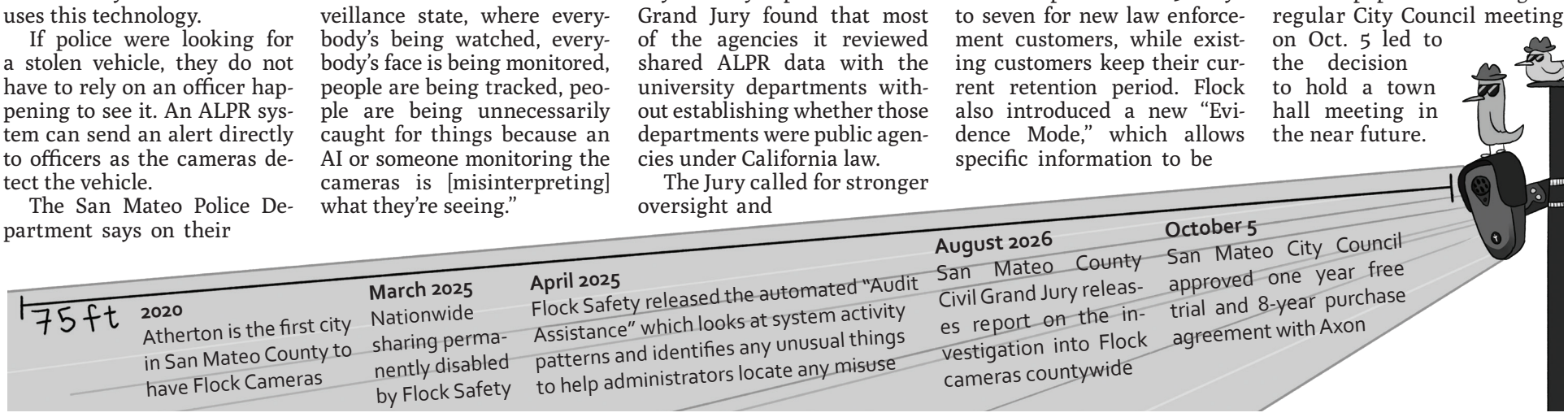
However, Khare believes that there are better methods of finding criminal suspects that would put an end to the privacy debates.

"[Finding] an alternative would be better ... because regulations will always have people [evading them]," Khare said. "People are swerving around the Constitution these days. It's like the Constitution is bendable. You don't know what else is."

Diaz Nash noted that the debates surrounding Flock are complicated, but believes it is possible to address public concerns without having to completely replace the technology.

"[It's] not all white or black, and we definitely want to protect our residents and businesses' safety and privacy," Diaz Nash said. "That's of paramount importance to us, and that's why we insist on the audits and the guardrails ... But we also really value the use of these tools to reduce crime, to find missing people, to find people [involved in] hit and run incidents ... We want both, and we think it's possible to do both."

Concerns voiced by a significant population during the regular City Council meeting on Oct. 5 led to the decision to hold a town hall meeting in the near future.



SOURCES: SAN MATEO DAILY JOURNAL, SAN MATEO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

New staff members join the Aragon community

PHOTOS BY PHOTO EDITOR MADELINE ALLEN REPORTING BY FEATURES WRITER WARREN YAO

GREG GRIFFITHS, SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER



What led you to teach at Aragon?

"I taught at Peninsula High School and Burlingame High School ... I [didn't click] with Burlingame and heard good things about Aragon, so [when] the opportunity came, I [jumped] on it. Burlingame very high intensity with academics and I feel there's a similar culture here, but it's more supportive for [students]."

How did you get into teaching?

"I always liked helping people and started coaching sports in high school when I was 16. I coached volleyball and basketball and ... a bunch of different sports. My parents worked in tech, and seeing people work [in] a cubicle was scary. I'd rather work somewhere where I'm more active."

RUSSELL HORTON, 9TH GRADE PHYSICAL EDUCATION



If you could highlight one aspect of your personality, what would it be?

"I'm a very empathetic person. I can relate to others; I understand what people are going through and how they're feeling, so that helps me as a teacher because I can understand how kids [might] not be having a great day, whether that's stuff at home or at school. My empathy definitely helps in my teaching."

What's your favorite part of PE?

"Being outside with the kids working on athletics. PE is one of the only times where kids aren't using screens. [They're] used in class, when you get home and when you do homework. PE is great because kids are focusing on people around them and moving [their bodies]."

ANGELO GOUMENIDIS, INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT



What part of your teaching persona are you most excited to develop throughout the years?

"[Teaching], because I'm used to a one-on-one environment, and now that I'm in a bigger [community], it's [difficult] to [give] clear instructions with multiple students. I [taught] at ... a one-on-one school where you don't have your typical big classroom."

Are there any parts of your identity that students might connect with?

"Being a part of a family that immigrated to the [U.S.] is a universal experience with a lot of students. [Having] been from an immigrant family [myself], that experience is [something] students can learn from because it can be [difficult]."

YAHIR FONSECA, INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANT



Is there a part of Aragon's culture that stands out to you?

"Aragon's culture is so welcoming. I transferred from Hillsdale after my junior year and graduated here as a senior. I was more welcomed here than at any other school. It was easy to make friends [with] people [being] a lot nicer. [As an IA], I [try] my best to always [give] positive reinforcement [and try] my best to uplift someone."

What should people know about you?

"I'm a nice guy. Period. I'm very smiley, love joking around and [can relate] to anyone's interests. I'm very passionate about all sorts of sports, [and] I'm a big Bay Area sports fan. Sharks, Warriors, Niners, whatever. I'm just a big sports guy."

allcove

allcove San Mateo is a **FREE** youth wellness center for ages 12-25. Youth can hang out and access a range of services that include:

- Peer Support
- Education & Employment
- Family Support
- Physical Health
- Mental Health
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The wasian experience: is it the best of both worlds?

Roy Kong
FEATURES WRITER

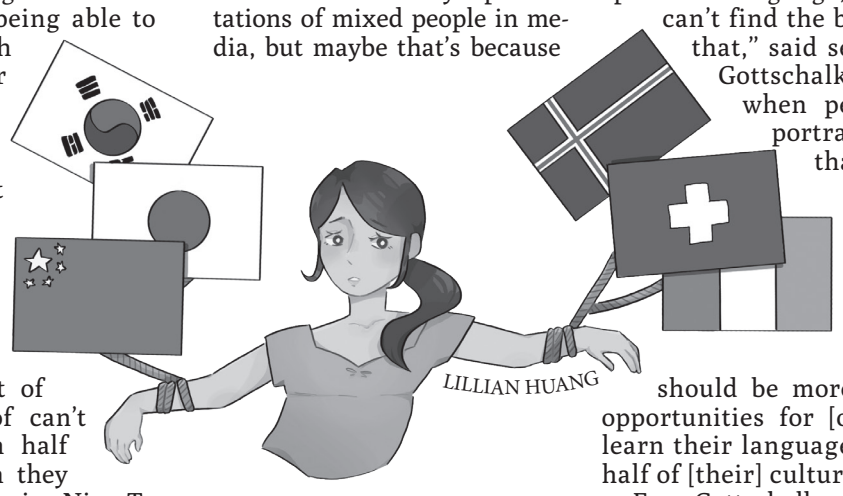
The growing population of Wasians in the United States has been reflected in Gen Z and Gen Alpha media, with their representation coming to life in the Bay Area, including at Aragon.

According to the 2020 Census, 2.7 million people in the U.S. identified as both Asian and White, increasing by 65.8% from the 2010 Census. This increase in the Wasian population has made highly populated areas of Asians more diverse and has created a plethora of mixed cultures and traditions.

Although this new abundance of diversity is refreshing to many, alienation and insensitivity towards biracial people, specifically biracial Asians, have still found their way into the lives of many.

"In the Bay Area, you're treated like a normal person," said junior Johanna Norman. "[Being Wasian is] so common [here] that no one really bats an eye. But outside of the Bay Area or California, I see this problem a lot with older people [where] they're like, 'you're so exotic, you're so interesting.' They treat you like you're a fancy cat breed."

For many biracial Asians, feeling representative of their cultures is a hassle, because being mixed-race also means looking mixed-race. So for many, being able to identify with one of their cultures just through their physical appearance isn't an option.



"I've grown up in a pretty Japanese-American community, but a lot of people kind of can't tell that I am half Japanese when they see me," said junior Nina Taylor. "They act really surprised when they find out how I've been raised and that I do speak some Japanese and celebrate a lot of Japanese culture."

Because of the increasing population of biracial Asians, and specifically Wasians, in the Bay Area, a surplus of different judgments and portrayals has risen. Although Wasians have had a sudden jolt of popularity in the media with figures such as Alyssa Liu, many report that most don't accurately represent biracial Asians.

"I haven't seen any representations of mixed people in media, but maybe that's because I'm not looking hard, or I can't tell if they're mixed," Norman said. "There are few [TV] series with mixed representation, but other than that, I don't feel [very] represented in major media."

Others argue that the representation of Wasians and biracial Asians doesn't portray figures who are in tune with or embracing both of their cultures.

"Sometimes people say they're both [Asian and White], but they can only speak one language, and they can't find the balance in that," said senior Mia Gottschalk. "But when people are portrayed like that in the media, it sounds a bit hopeless. There should be more hopeful opportunities for [others] to learn their language or learn half of [their] culture."

For Gottschalk, being in touch with both sides of her heritage comes easily due to her knowledge of language. However, others struggle to express both cultures that they identify with, such as senior Tyler Rivera.

"Compared to my Mexican friends, I don't know that much Spanish," Rivera said. "And compared to my Asian friends, in terms of their own language, I personally know very little Korean. It's disappointing [for me] because whenever I introduce myself, they ask, 'oh, do you know how to speak Spanish?' [or] 'oh, do you know how to speak Korean?' I'm just like, 'no, I don't speak [either].'"

Rivera has grown up on a different side of many biracial Asians in the Bay Area. Being in the minority of this already small demographic has made his experiences and perspective even more unique from others.

"Outside of myself and maybe one other, I don't know very many Asian and Hispanic people," Rivera said. "With such [a] little amount of people in the community, the representation [is] already smaller, but it is a community that should be brought to light more. All [the] experiences of these multicultural people are very unique, and it's very important to under stand how they fit in."

Unhealthy gender expectations in high school dating

Pavinoor Jaggi
FEATURES WRITER

After seeing students make grand gestures as Homecoming proposals recently, sophomore Waylon Zargar began to wonder how he could create a poster that his girlfriend would enjoy.

"I saw a bunch of people doing these big [Homecoming] proposals at the [football] games," he said. "I was like, 'oh, crap. Does that mean I have to do it at school?'"

As a result, Zargar asked classmates and friends for help with his poster.

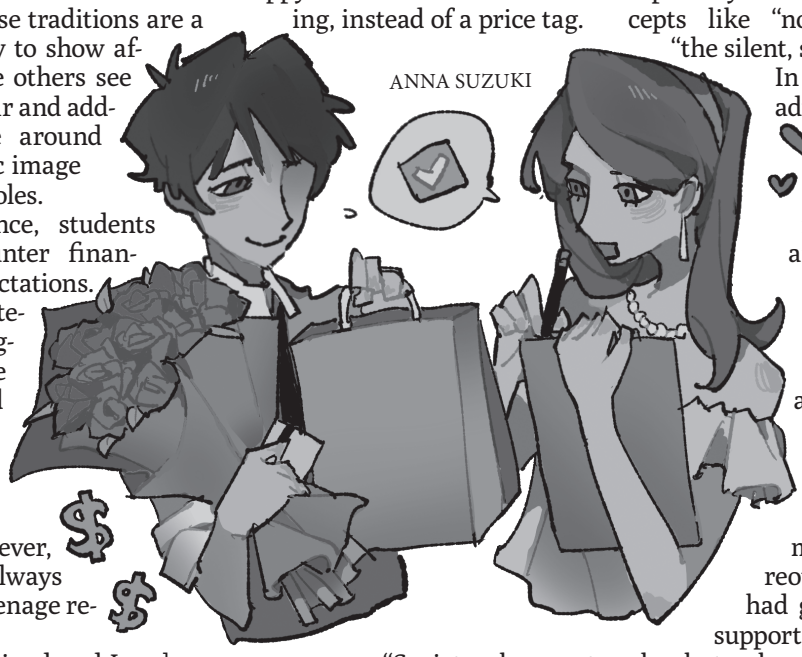
"In my Modern [World] History class, I asked some people, 'hey, what should I do?'" Zargar said. "They gave me some ideas ... and I asked my mom if she could have her students help. Afterwards, we went to my house, and I left the poster in my room. But I thought she'd hate it. So it was very stressful, and I hadn't bought my [Homecoming] ticket yet. I was about two days from them selling out; it was pretty scary."

For many, dating is more than an emotional connection. There are unspoken rules for everything. Some students believe that these traditions are a powerful way to show affection, while others see them as unfair and adding pressure around money, public image and gender roles.

For instance, students might encounter financial expectations. Traditional stereotypes suggest that the boy should pay for dates, buy flowers or plan a major gesture. However, this isn't always possible in teenage relationships.

"[My boyfriend and I are] young," said sophomore Isabel Suakjin, "Neither of us have jobs, so I can't expect him to pay for everything."

When a date becomes a test of who pays, money might become a sign of value. Instead, students said that buying gifts should aim to make someone happy and focus on its meaning, instead of a price tag.



"Society has set the norm that whoever asks them out on the date pays for it and I really don't like that," said sophomore Sophia Holder.

If relationships are less about real connection and more about outside appearance, communication and vulnerability can become a point of pressure, especially with societal concepts like "nonchalant" and "the silent, strong type."

In fact, in a U.S. adult sample from the "Man Box" study, a research initiative that aims to examine the impact of societal norms and pressures on young men and their mindsets, 67% of respondents who aligned with restrictive masculine stereotypes said they had given emotional support to someone else, but only 25% said they felt comfortable crying in front of a friend and 40% said they had talked to a friend about something deeply emotional.

However, some resist this philosophy, prioritizing communication instead. Many students have begun to value transparency and honesty over nonchalant appearances, deviating from what has historically been expected of boys and men.

"Emotions are a big thing for me," Zargar said. "I always try to put feelings first."

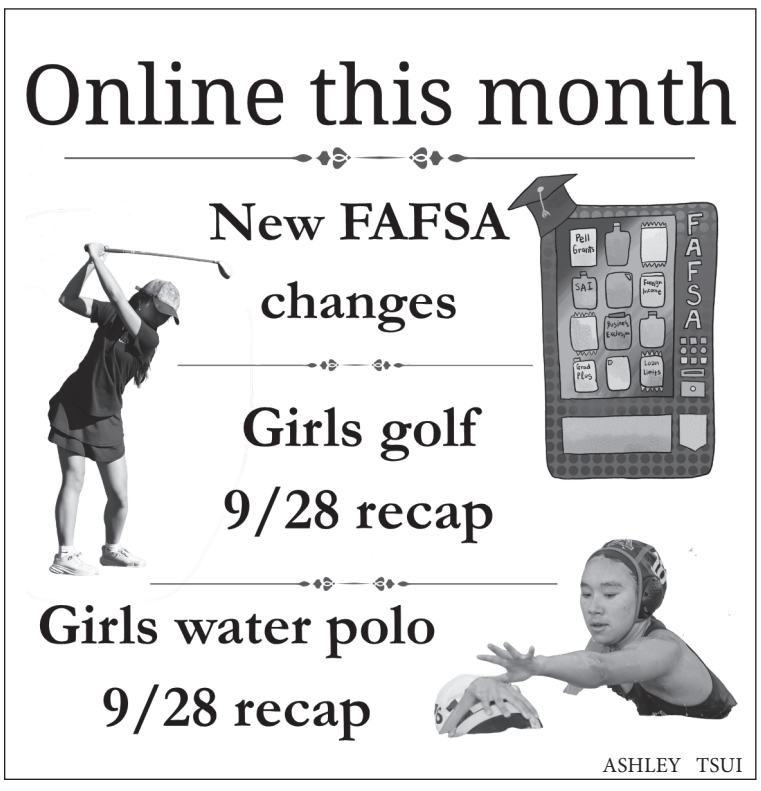
The same pressures can appear just as easily from outside relationships. Romance books and couple influencers often raise standards to a point where love is measured by grand gestures and constant texting. For students who see these idealistic traits as a part of the "perfect package," it might be difficult to see themselves as enough or valuable in a relationship.

"Sometimes people set the bar super high and they'll never find someone because they're looking for someone perfect in all categories," Suakjin said. "But I don't think that anyone is ever perfect and it's more of the person on the inside that's important."

A student may very well want big gestures and extravagant dates, but another may want private moments and thoughtful notes — it depends on the relationship and personal preference.

"You can't go telling someone [that] your partner should be doing you acts of service when their partner [prefers] physical touch," Holder said. "So [love] differs among other people and the way that society frames [love in boxes is] not right."

High school relationships may often navigate restricting societal expectations and peer pressure, but at the end of the day, they pioneer their own path based on what works best for them. Whether that be by splitting the bill or reinforcing communication, students in relationships often prioritize each other's needs over the demands of social norms and traditional roles.





MAXXING

Maxxing, an internet trend in which people take any aspect of their life to an extreme, ascended to popularity in the early 2020s. Now, maxxing has become a viral suffix for optimizing a particular aspect of someone's life, and a variety of people have begun to use the word and even practice their own forms of maxxing.

"I saw it being used all over the place [on Instagram and TikTok]," said senior Jake Wang. "It was really stupid stuff. It was like milk-maxxing where you drink a bunch of milk or raw honey-maxxing, and you eat a bunch of raw honey."

Beyond internet challenges, the term carries a specific meaning when applied to everyday life.

"There has to be an element of willingly spending time doing [what they maxx] because one wouldn't say that they're office-maxxing if they have to go to their [9 a.m. – 5 p.m.] office job five days a week," said sophomore Dylan Shao. "If they're doing it in their own free time, then they definitely could say that they're maxxing."

Due to semantic bleaching — where a word loses its intensity — maxxing has lost its extremities, but the core idea remains.

HEALTHMAXXING

Healthmaxxing is a sect of the maxxing community that focuses on taking physical fitness to extremes. Followers take steps to maximize sleep quality, protein intake, exercise, vitamin consumption or other physical aspects.

"[Healthmaxxing] normally involves promoting eating healthy, and exercising, more stuff like that," said sophomore Kylie Huang. "It definitely promotes better physical health and mental health, and it's overall more positive on people [compared to] looksmaxxing."

However, healthmaxxers' methodology is not always backed by science. For example, while medical professionals almost always view increased sleep as a positive, techniques used by sleepmaxxers — such as taking significantly elevated doses of melatonin and putting tape over the mouth while sleeping — are considered dangerous by health experts and not recommended.

"Fact checking between other sources [helps me pick out good advice]," said senior Anthony Cardona. "There's a lot of research out there that you could corroborate it with. The stuff that doesn't have much research, then it's probably not worth it. For example, there's a lot of science that says, [raw milk] isn't good for you because of all the bacteria."

Professionals also note that exercise, protein, fiber intake and other elements of physical health are healthier in moderation, and that "maxxing" them may create more problems than benefits. Professionals from University of California Los Angeles Health warn that overtraining can lead to potentially deadly conditions. Researchers from Ohio State University say that oversaturating one's diet with certain food groups can lead to health problems, and that hyperfixating on it can lead to eating disorders.

Copy: Allinah Zhan, Claire Dong, Luke Trimble, Cayleigh Wilson
Layout: Allinah Zhan
Graphics: Allinah Zhan

LOOKSMAXXING

Looksmaxxing, the original and most prominent community of maxxers, is the internet's version of glowing up taken to new extremes. Looksmaxxers analyze body characteristics into "hard" features — like bone structure, which is difficult to change — and "soft" features like hair, skin, fitness and style.

With any trend focused on the outward appearance, looksmaxxing may turn moderate insecurity into unhealthy obsession. Online sources often present these subjective beauty standards as a science, encouraging users to rate strangers' faces. A 2025 study of a popular looksmaxxing forum analyzed 8,072 comments and found that users were regularly insulted, ranked and pushed toward extreme appearance changes.

"[Looksmaxxing is] what women have been looking at on social media for like the longest time ever," said senior Allison Hsu. "Now it's the guys, and it's so horrible. Like, who came up with the term strawberry legs? Are you fox pretty, or bunny pretty, or [deer] pretty? It's what women have been going through for the longest time ever, but translated to guys."

Looksmaxxers use a variety of methods to improve their hard and soft features. This includes mewing to straighten the jawline and gua sha to reduce swelling, or more extreme procedures like rhinoplasty or bonesmashing to sharpen the cheekbones and taking off-label anabolic steroids.

"I don't think these [procedures] work," said senior Marshall Lim. "There's no evidence behind [bonesmashing]. There can be positive influences [of looksmaxxing] for self-improvement, like working out. But hitting your face is not gonna help with anything. It's probably just gonna damage your [facial] construction."

> In the US, "4.07% of males (6.6 million people) had experienced an eating disorder at some stage of their lifetime."
> National Eating Disorders Association

Looksmaxxing is synonymous with the polarizing influencer Clavicular, the online name of Braden Peters.

"[Clavicular] posts videos about teaching people how to improve their lives, just being healthier, working out more," Cardona said. "I really take some [of Clavicular's advice] to the heart, but the others that I can't do, I just ignore them. I do the working out stuff, but I don't do bonesmashing. I think he's the best influence possible. I don't think anyone could take his role better."

Clavicular has had significant influence on his fans, a majority of which are young men and adolescents, propagating vocabulary like "frame-mogging" as he livestreams on Kick.

"[Clavicular is] the father of looksmaxxing," Wang said. "He spread it across the younger generation. People take drastic measures to improve themselves, and [Clavicular's] one of those people. It's definitely having a negative influence on the younger generation, because, obviously, he's a grown adult. He can make his own choices. Younger people, when they see him, follow in his footsteps, [which] could harm them."

Some of Clavicular's looksmaxxing tactics seem successful, but he has faced health setbacks from various looksmaxxing attempts. He has stated that he has injected himself with methamphetamine to dull his appetite and testosterone since the age of 14, the latter of which may have resulted in sterility. He seemingly overdosed on drugs in April, though the facts of the situation have not been confirmed.

The "looksmaxxing" movement is also tied heavily to the involuntarily celibate, or incel, community, where the name and other slang originated — for example, being "blackpilled" refers to the belief that physical attractiveness is genetically fixed and largely determines a person's social and romantic value. The group's ideologies rely heavily on sexist principles, coining terms like "foid," shorthand for "female humanoid," to refer to members of the opposite sex. Clavicular himself has faced multiple charges against women, including assault, and is known to have interacted with influencers Andrew Tate and Nick Fuentes, both known for their overt misogyny.

> According to board-certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon Dr. Young Jun, facial restructuring doesn't happen through "repeated impact" like bonesmashing.
> CBS

WHIMSYMAXXING

Whimsymaxxing refers to adding more playfulness, imagination and childlike joy into daily life to fight off burnout common in teens and adults. It serves as a way to push back against the monotony of school and corporate workplaces.

"I've seen my friends naming their personal devices like Lamborghini and then their phone connects to it and [they say] 'my phone on Spotify is connecting to my Lamborghini,'" Hsu said. "That's pretty funny. It's a nice use of free will. [Another] common example is decorating everything. In middle school, I used to make a collage with my notebook [cover] and decorate it a lot."

Whimsymaxxing opens up new routes of self-expression, from style upgrades to creative fashion experiments.

"Honestly, we're kind of in a beige mom epidemic, where everyone's wearing the same basics," Hsu said. "Spruce it up a little. Use some more accessories. Don't just wear a t-shirt and a chain. Try cool accessories and statement pieces, not just stuff that you think fits with everything. I've seen people wear scarves over their pants and I think it's really cool."



As with all subcultures, whimsymaxxing may lead to gatekeeping or an inner circle claiming their superior knowledge on the topic.

"Sometimes, I do see some maliciousness [online] when people start accusing others about not being whimsical the correct way because, apparently, there's a correct way to do this now," Huang said. "[Online], I saw some girls were telling people, 'oh, you guys can't be unicorns, you're not a unicorn,' because they notice that someone's dressed in a way that they see as more popular in society."

PRODUCTIVITY/ STUDYMAXXING

Studymaxxing transforms learning into a gamified and sometimes performative subculture. On platforms like TikTok, academic labor is converted into a distorted system of validation, defined by aesthetic desk setups, stationery hauls, black highlighters on black paper and "Study With Me" timelapses. Followers are encouraged to lock in with viral endurance trends, filming themselves studying outside in the snow or until a block of ice melts to unlock a beverage. Apps such as FlipClock and Ice-Study: Focus Timer similarly turn study time into something visible and measurable.

"Social media makes everything a lot more competitive," Shao said. "You can compare yourself to other people just by picking up the phone. Whereas before that, you would actually have to go somewhere to see people that are smarter than you. The point of learning is not in itself to be competitive. If you're just learning how to compete with others, then what's the point?"

Studymaxxing is just one branch of a broader "productivity-maxxing" movement, found in 5 a.m. morning routines, "day in my life" videos, and LinkedIn posts announcing the next internship or leadership title. For high school students, being productive can mean filling every hour with something impressive, especially when college applications loom.

By incentivizing discipline and tracking hours like high scores, this performance of productivity turns personal habits into public validation. The content is undeniably motivating for some, but it can also glorify all-night work sessions and romanticize sleep deprivation; only 24% of U.S. high school students reported getting at least eight hours of sleep on an average school night in 2025, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

> #studytok and #studywithme have gotten ~23 billion views

"Maxxing steady productivity has negative health impacts," Shao said. "Some people might think that they're inadequate because they're not as locked in as many of the people that they see online. But that is not really an achievable goal because no one with a healthy social life and actual interests wants to study for 12 hours a day."

When keeping balance in mind, a mindset aiming for more productivity may bring improvements to one's life. A planner, to-do list or a consistent sleep schedule can make school and extracurriculars feel less overwhelming. But there is a difference between using routines to make life easier and treating every minute of life as something to optimize.

"The healthiest version of productivity is not waking up earlier, tracking every habit or trying to turn yourself into a machine," said Steve Zhang, junior and president of Productivity Club. "It's a mindset to have that when you're trying to be productive, you're not [simply] trying to finish all your work. You want to be in the mindset that, 'I'm doing this so that I can actually learn this.'"

Celebrities' decisions to become politically vocal

Linus Zhao
FEATURES WRITER

Celebrities are no strangers to controversy. Their every word and action is meticulously studied by superfans and critics. In this light, some celebrities have chosen to speak out in support of a political party, especially during key moments such as the 2024 presidential election. However, others have taken a different path, instead advocating for specific issues they are passionate about while remaining nonpartisan.

Famously, Dolly Parton took this latter stance due to her belief that she was a role model to all and because she did not want to offend other people with her beliefs.

"Everyone loved Dolly Parton," said freshman Charlotte Santiago. "It was nice that she never ... announced herself to a certain party ... it kept her open, in a sense. I think [she did so] just because ... she has such a big influence."

Parton's nonpartisan yet distinctly liberal activism spanned many topics, such as the promotion of LGBTQ+ rights, children's literacy and donations to vaccine research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parton's activism has led to the donation of over 300 million books to children around the world, encouraging them to work towards stronger literacy habits.

Conversely, many other celebrities have openly sided with one party or another. During the 2020 U.S. presidential election, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson openly endorsed the Democratic Party. Johnson later said he regretted the endorsement, changing his tune during the 2024 presidential election and becoming nonpartisan. Johnson reasoned that the shift was due to a desire to avoid angering his fanbase and supporters.

"If the celebrity comes out to say that they're [endorsing] one party, the other party might not agree," said senior Rodrigo Gomez. "They might lose recognition or fans or money."

Online, people have speculated that Johnson's shift was due to a large portion of his fanbase being from wrestling, a sport where people generally lean more Republican.


MAKENNA NGUYEN

However, this shift from open political views to nonpartisanship has not been seen in all celebrities. Amid the 2024 presidential election and her Eras Tour, Taylor Swift posted an endorsement on social media for the Democratic Party. The endorsement itself was not particularly shocking, as she had previously supported many Democrats' ideas, but the open support firmly declared her views to fans once and for all.

"I'm a Democrat, so [it] definitely strengthened my perspective and my opinion on her," Santiago said. "It was almost comforting to know that ... our views aligned ... For some of her super fans, that could have been ... a deciding factor [in the election]."

400,000+ voters visited vote.gov after Taylor Swift's endorsement (CBS)

However, the endorsement alienated Swift's Republican fanbase. NBC reported that after the endorsement, 47% of Republicans said they viewed Swift negatively. Despite this statistic, no research found that Swift's Eras Tour, happening at the same time as the endorsement, was significantly affected.

"[Swift supporting the opposing party] would definitely make me not support her as much, but I would still listen to her music," Santiago said. "[At] the end of the day, she is still very talented."

Rather than changing how people vote, celebrity endorsements instead bring attention to politics itself, making more people overall vote, according to an article from the University of New Mexico citing political science professor Jessica Feezell. Voters generally choose who to vote for based on factors such as socioeconomic status and demographics, rather than celebrity endorsements. This idea contrasts with Swift's 2024 endorsement that led over 400,000 people to make their way to the voter registration website.

Experts say that celebrity endorsements are much more powerful for candidates during primaries instead of during general elections, such as the presidential elections. For example, Oprah Winfrey's 2008 endorsement of Barack Obama ahead of the Democratic presidential primary led to a significant increase in votes for Obama, a Pew Research Center study found.

"At the end of the day, it's the celebrity's choice to say whether they would [endorse] a specific political party," said junior Saan Bertrand. "A lot of them do want to protect their reputation and don't want to ... get backlash."

With the midterm elections next month, celebrities once again face the option to publicly side with a party or stay uninvolved.

Romanticization of country music aesthetics

Neharika Choudhary
FEATURES WRITER

It's finally fall. Autumn leaves drift down as the breeze carries the scent of warm vanilla and cinnamon. A girl wears Ugg boots, bootcut jeans and an overpriced leather jacket, hot coffee in hand. The 2000s aesthetic of small towns, autumn, cafes, friends, romance, sophistication and style dominates social media feeds, making audiences nostalgic for a time they never experienced. The attraction to the country aesthetic seems to follow a similar pattern.

From the South to the Bay Area, country music has traveled a long way to reach the West Coast, bringing core country values, as well as the popularized version of country culture with it — two contrasting appeals of this niche.

"Since country music is more upbeat, it just gives you more confidence, and it lifts up your day," said freshman Kaylynn Sanchez.

Country music is an American genre rooted in Southern folk music and Western cowboy traditions. Its lyrics often evoke rural landscapes, finding richness amid poverty and Southern romance — imagery that can feel distant from life in the Bay Area.

Here, suburban and urban settings offer a different backdrop. The region's emphasis on academic and professional achievement can contrast the slower-paced life some students associate with country music.

For students who feel pressure to succeed in the Bay Area's seemingly inescapable competitive environment, country music may offer an imagined alternative.

"In country songs, the environment is always very rural," said junior Audrey Young. "There's lots of grass and hay. Lots of people live in barns or ranch houses, and there are animals running around. It's very calm and peaceful."


OULU FORD

The appeal may also extend to the relationships portrayed in country songs. For students who see dating as shaped by peer pressure or a desire for status, some country songs about genuine love can offer a contrast; for example, "You Look Like You Love Me" by Ella Langley, or "28" by Zach Bryan.

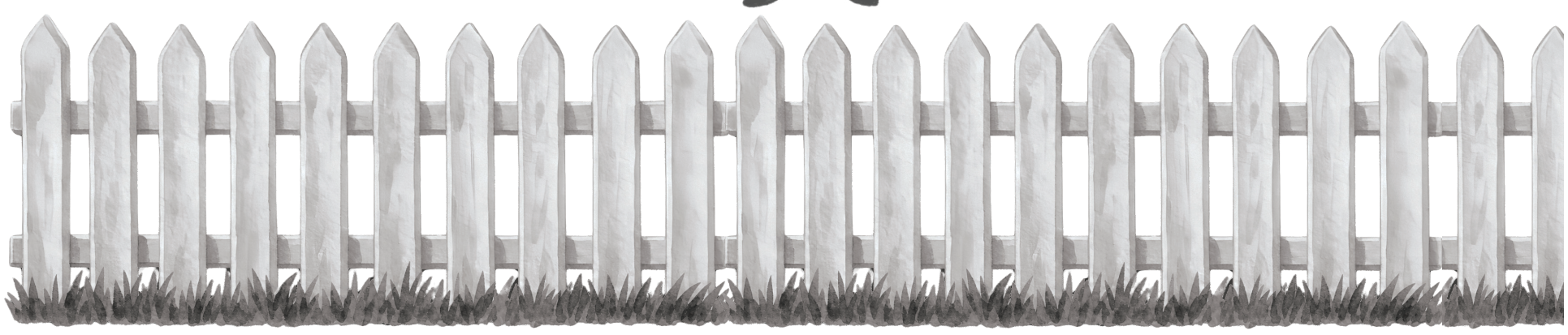
"Some people like the idea of being in a relationship more than they like the person," said sophomore Myra Milar. "It's very common for people to be in a relationship, but most of them end badly."

Country songs about lifelong devotion present a romantic ideal: a partner who remains committed even as the couple grows older.

"Our generation is 100% more different than how it was back then, and electronics have a big impact," Sanchez said. "In the past, people would go up to you, and it would be easier to talk to someone that you like or someone you love. Now, the way things are built in our society is weird."

These perceptions raise another possibility: country music's appeal may come partly from a desire for something students feel is missing from their lives, whether that is commitment, calm or a sense of connection.

For its listeners, country music can offer a glimpse of experiences beyond their everyday surroundings. It becomes more than an escape — it offers an imagined life that may soften the pressures of their own.




COURTESY OF A24 FILMS LLC

“Primetime” is prime entertainment

Anushka Punjabi
FEATURES WRITER

To Catch or Not to Catch? That is the question in Lance Oppenheim’s “Primetime”, a grotesque commentary on the dangers of media sensationalism and the blurry line between exposing and encouraging evil. The movie was released on Sept. 25 and starred Robert Pattinson as NBC anchor Chris Hansen. The movie details the production of “To Catch a Predator,” investigating the show’s creation from start to finish, and more importantly, what happens when the pursuit of justice is transformed into entertainment.

At first, “Primetime” is a straightforward thriller about catching child predators. The show collaborates with local law enforcement and works with heavily scripted “decoys” — members of Hansen’s cast who pose as minors online — to lure predators into houses filled with hidden cameras. Once they arrive, Hansen confronts them with transcripts of their chats with the decoy minor, to which the predators cower in fear, humiliated. Outside waiting are the police, who perform an arrest right away and deliver the predator to justice.

On paper, it is easy to see the appeal: dangerous people are being exposed and ideally, stopped. It fulfills the deep sense of morality humans have of right and wrong.

But the movie quickly makes me question whether exposing someone is still justice when the primary goal of the show is no longer solely to deliver predators to law enforcement, but to target those who will generate the best television reviews. The question is especially relevant when one considers that people being targeted have not necessarily committed a crime. Yes, they’ve had disturbing intentions, but intentions alone are not enough to prosecute someone.

Later, the show turns morally complicated, and these people turn into a television narrative: predator enters house, Hansen confronts, audience watches the predator squirm — “zoom in on his face ... the [predators’] noses flare when I come out” — and everyone goes home feeling that justice has been served.

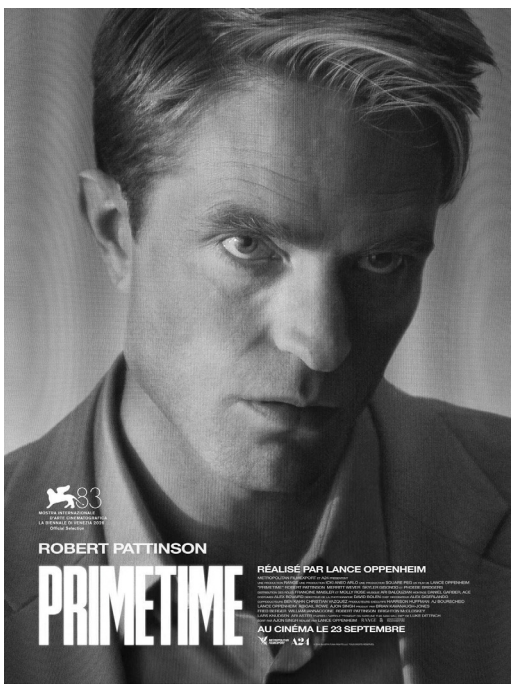
However, more than Hansen and his production team, I found Dan Plum to be the most interesting character. Played by Skyler Gisondo, Plum is a 23-year-old actor who joins production whose dream it is to “make it big.” He is nervous and morally uncertain about impersonating a minor, especially when he encounters the disturbing men the show has lured in.

But, fueled by Hansen’s approval, his discomfort disappears. He cares a lot about impressing Hansen and producer Andie Bender — more than about whether what he is doing is right.

“[What Plum experiences is] like exposure therapy,” said senior Sristi Sharma. “The more you see [violence and corruption], the less ... you feel.”

This transition was the most impactful to me and connects to the movie’s larger idea that evil can spread from person to person. Through Pattinson’s hollow gaze, the show itself becomes corrupted.

“[Sensationalism] ... takes away from how the general public would see [the show] as being shocking ... [similar to how a lot of issues today are taken less seriously] because they’re so intertwined with social media,” said senior Nishaan Singh.



At times, however, I felt that the movie pushed its symbolism too far. The movie would have been stronger if it stuck to a solid theme that it already worked to develop: the ethical consequences of “To Catch a Predator.” I did not need to see every character become a symbol of something larger, a force for good or not.

“You can’t just make something up and then expect [the source material] to [stay as interesting],” Singh said. “[Viewers won’t] realize that’s not true and then still be completely interested.”

The world of “Primetime” is indeed morally contaminated. When threatened with removal from their primetime slot on Tuesday evenings, Andie Bender is convinced that viewers will not be interested in watching a “feel-good” show. “Primetime” suggests that television must include outrage and humiliation, that both Plum and predators are embarrassed. Plum is criticized by friends for his acting capabilities and predators are zoomed in on.

While Hansen himself has criticized the movie, stating that it portrayed him in a one-dimensional light, I take issue with this critique. He may have expected a tribute film, but because the show’s lines are truly blurry, I think the movie’s portrayal of Hansen is deliberately unsettling. I enjoy the ambiguity that the movie deals with: it asks what happens when someone who believes he is doing something good becomes consumed by ratings and power — what someone becomes when they become corrupted and corrupt those around them.

“If [he’s] painted as a bad guy ... people [would] dehumanize him,” Sharma said. “[Hansen] is ambiguous.”

Overall, I would give “Primetime” 4 stars out of 5. I loved the exploration of what evil truly means, and it was interesting to see how the movie, criticizing media sensationalism in “To Catch a Predator” had a clear lens through which they portrayed Hansen.

OUR OUTLOOK:
★★★★☆

Beabadoobee returns

Ethan Fei
FEATURES WRITER

The loud guitar at the start of “Switchblade” shatters any expectation of a quiet acoustic melody. Within seconds, heavy drums kick in, pushing the track toward a dense, aggressive sound. With her new album, “Pylon,” released Sept. 18, 26-year-old Filipino-British singer-songwriter Beabadoobee leaves bedroom pop behind and dives into alternative rock.

“Pylon” marks a major change for an artist known for quiet, cozy tracks like “Glue Song” and “Coffee.” Her earlier music felt gentle and soft, almost as if it described a childhood full of wonder. This album is the opposite: loud, direct and full of energy. Beabadoobee swaps her acoustic guitar for heavier riffs and percussion reminiscent of 1990s rock.

“Her earlier albums were a lot more focused on love,” said junior Ellie Leo. “They were much calmer and quieter.”

This heavier sound changes how her music makes an impact. In the past, her soft voice did most of the emotional work, but on “Pylon,” the instruments do more of the heavy lifting. Songs like “Sun Has Set” use dynamic contrasts effectively. The chorus’ volume makes her vocals sound more desperate and raw. Rather than burying her feelings, the loud instrumentation intensifies the emotion in her lyrics.

“[This album conveys] a little more security in herself and a little more angst, rather than being sad and insecure like the old ones,” Leo said. “It’s more about her exploring her own identity and her own emotional struggles, especially when she’s going on tour and being isolated from other people.”

The central theme of “Pylon” is growing up and finding your own voice. Throughout the album, Beabadoobee pushes against the pressure to remain the cute, whimsical artist she was as a teenager. On “Nothing to Prove,” featuring Hayley Williams, the lyrics explore reclaiming creative control and finding validation within herself. The album tells a story of growing under pressure and public scrutiny, positioning her new rock style as the next step in that process.

Looking at the music theory behind “Pylon,” it is easy to hear how she makes the heavier sound work. On her previous albums, Beabadoobee relied on a thinner texture, often built around her voice and a guitar. On “Pylon,” she switches to a denser texture and a loud-quiet-loud structure. When the chorus hits, multiple layers erupt at once, giving the album an unpredictable, chaotic energy.

The harmony also shifts toward a darker, tenser palette. The guitar parts rely mainly on power chords, which use the root and fifth while leaving out the third. Without the third, these chords create a hollow yet powerful sound that can feel massive and aggressive.

To keep the songs feeling uneasy, Beabadoobee combines power chords with modal mixture, borrowing chords from a minor key within a song written in a major key, creating sudden emotional shifts.

However, the album has a few weak spots. While her new style works, the songs begin to sound similar. They often follow the same pattern: a gentle intro that suddenly shifts into loud, gritty, distorted rock. At times, the heavy guitars overwhelm Beabadoobee’s voice, making her carefully chosen lyrics difficult to hear.

“The other songs that are [softer] are better,” Leo said. “The parts that are softer tend to have better lyrics”.

Despite these weaknesses, “Pylon” is a strong step forward. It captures the anxiety and chaos of becoming an adult and shows that Beabadoobee is done hiding behind a calm acoustic guitar. The album allows her to find her voice and build her own rock identity, earning 4.5 out of 5 stars.

OUR OUTLOOK:
★★★★½



COURTESY OF DIRTY HIT RECORD LABEL

Dueling opinions: mandatory military service



Nathaniel Wilson
FEATURES WRITER

"I want you," says Uncle Sam. But maybe you don't have a choice.

"Mandatory military service impedes my freedom!" You're right. But there's more to it than that.

There are real scenarios where mandating military service, in reasonable quantity, is not only a good idea but necessary.

First, one must look at the question of what service, mandatory or not, offers to a nation to determine if there is a scenario where mandatory service makes sense.

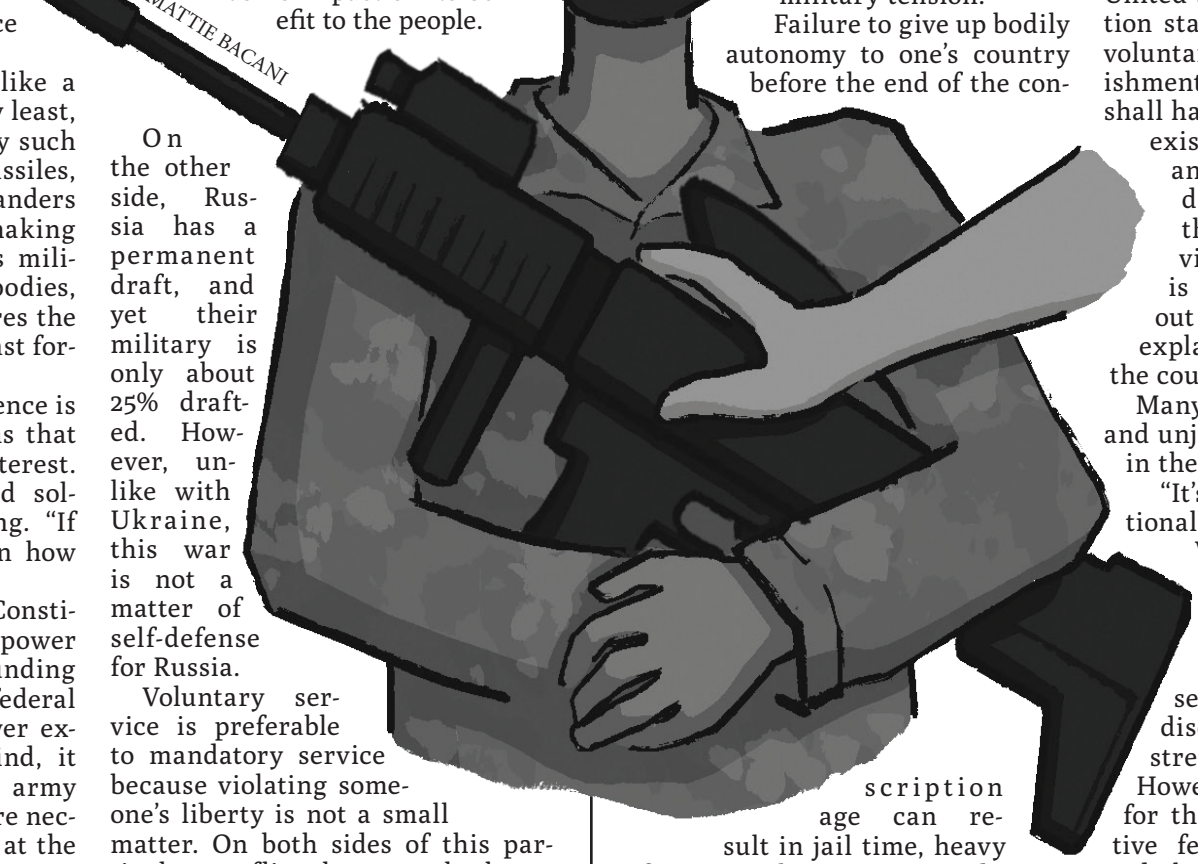
An army definitely feels like a military necessity. At the very least, if the U.S. is using technology such as autonomous drones and missiles, they probably need commanders and high-level personnel making decisions. Assuming there is military necessity for breathing bodies, sovereignty practically requires the ability to defend oneself against foreign invaders.

Otherwise, a nation's existence is a bet on the mercy of nations that can be assumed to have self-interest.

"To fight a war you need soldiers," said senior Jake Wang. "If you ... have no soldiers, then how powerful are you really?"

It's also engrained in the Constitution that Congress has the power to maintain an army. The founding fathers believed that the federal government needed this power explicitly. With all that in mind, it seems fair to believe that an army (in particular warm bodies) are necessary for a country to have, at the very least in wartime, but more generally at the discretion of Congress.

Additionally, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, philosophers who inspired many of the U.S.' founding principles, argued that one cannot have liberty without security first. These philosophers are taught at Aragon, appreciated in academia. The logical extension of this is that security must be prioritized. Note that temporary suspension of liberty is a slippery slope — for instance, with Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Still, in some scenarios such as imperative national defense, it is reasonable that if Congress can in no other capacity raise an army that they deem appropriate, then it suspends some liberties for the ultimate protection of the nation.



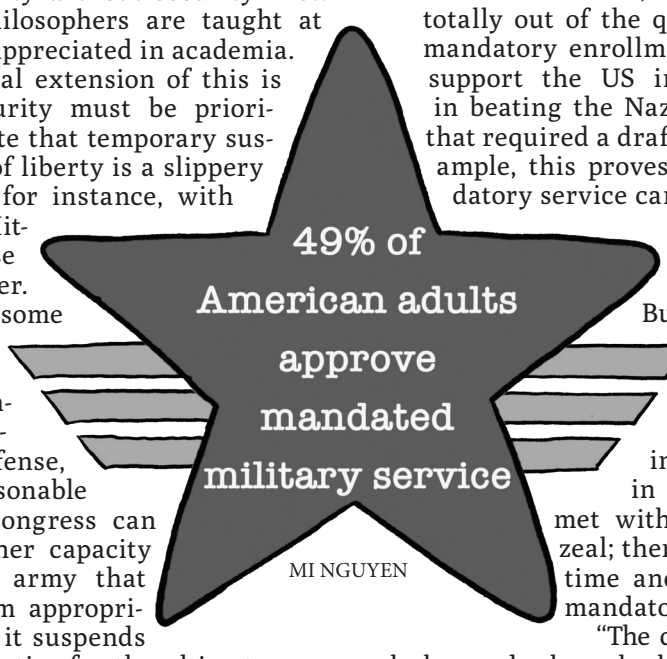
"If we are assuming enlistment is low, and the U.S. needs ... soldiers, then yes, the draft is necessary," said senior Nick Nasib.

One example is the Ukraine-Russia war. Ukraine is an interesting example for a few different reasons. They are currently fighting for their sovereignty. Mandatory service makes up about 75% of their army. On one hand, it seems reasonable that in such desperate times, an army of this composition is necessary. On the other hand, it requires that you believe the people of Ukraine are better off winning the war. If they are not, it seems like the needless risk of hundreds of thousands of lives for a war that is not supported enough to invoke voluntary service. Of course, a government will use whatever power necessary to preserve itself, so the fact that the Ukrainian government made the choice has no impact on its benefit to the people.

On the other side, Russia has a permanent draft, and yet their military is only about 25% drafted. However, unlike with Ukraine, this war is not a matter of self-defense for Russia.

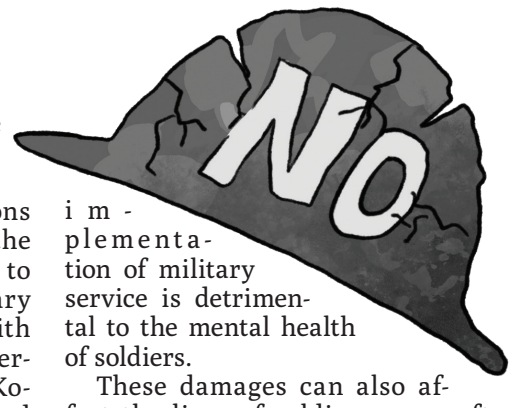
Voluntary service is preferable to mandatory service because violating someone's liberty is not a small matter. On both sides of this particular conflict, however, both are used. The difference is that one is a fight for its very sovereignty, and the other is an invasion of another nation. The question is different for both sides.

In the case of the US, wars are not totally out of the question for mandatory enrollment. People support the US involvement in beating the Nazis, and yet that required a draft. As an example, this proves that mandatory service can be a good thing beyond pure necessity. But with due limitation, as it's hard to imagine a war in Iran being met with the same zeal; there is a right time and place for mandatory service.



"The draft should only be used when absolutely necessary," Wang said.

Ultimately, mandatory service is a necessary power of a just government in times of crisis. The sovereignty of a nation depends on its ability to defend itself and mobilize its people. In other scenarios, there is a substantial case to be made, but no blanket statement is applicable.



Rohan Gupta
FEATURES WRITER

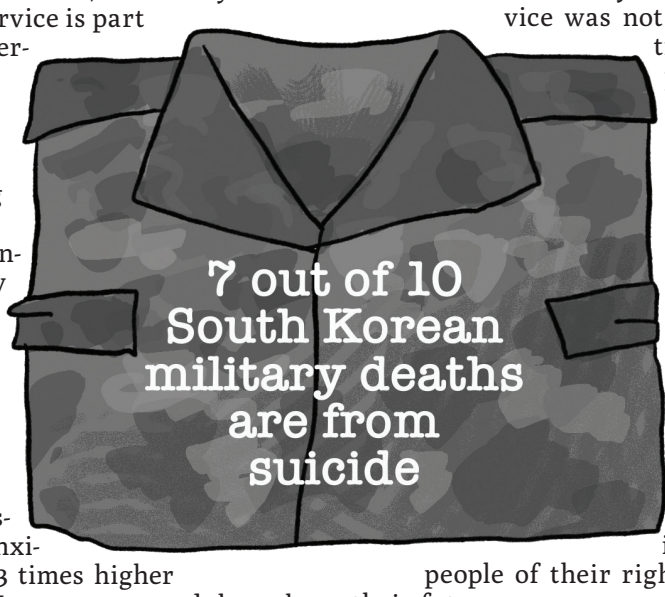
Fight — and maybe die. Refuse to fight and get thrown in prison and labeled as a traitor.

These are the exact expectations placed upon the average citizen if the United States of America were to impose mandatory military service. In countries with mandatory military service like South Korea, Israel and Brazil, mandatory military service ranges from one year to up to two years and eight months. These countries are forced to implement mandatory military service because of low numbers of recruits or anticipated military tension.

Failure to give up bodily autonomy to one's country before the end of the conscription age can result in jail time, heavy fines, travel restrictions and social consequences.

The repercussions of mandatory military service are vast, as many people return with traumas that are not only limited to physical but also mental, which often affect a person's day-to-day life.

In South Korea, a country where military service is part of every person's life, mental health decline is a growing problem.



A National Library of Medicine study found that mental disorders such as depression and anxiety were 1.3 times higher in South Korean young adult males who served in the military, than men of the same age with no military experience. Moreover, suicide ideation is 1.5 times more frequent in men serving in the military than men who are not in service.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among South Korean soldiers, responsible for over 70% of all deaths. The implementation of military service is detrimental to the mental health of soldiers.

These damages can also affect the lives of soldiers, even after completing their mandated service.

"There's definitely a decrease in mental health," said sophomore Dennis Zhan. "People also act differently, because you grow strict habits from [the] military."

In terms of the United States of America, making military service mandatory would take several years and resources, which could be better spent making a more important change in people's lives. As section one of the 13th Amendment of the United States of America's Constitution states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." This clearly asserts that mandatory military service is unconstitutional, as it is involuntary servitude without a punishment for a crime, as explained by the highest law of the country.

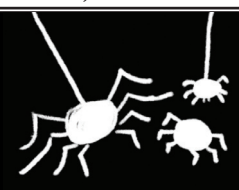
Many agree that it is unlawful and unjust to force someone to serve in the military.

"It's immoral and unconstitutional," said sophomore Thomas Wongsmith. "Personally, I think it's just wrong to force people into something that could alter their life."

Supporters of mandatory service argue that it builds discipline, unites citizens and strengthens national defense. However, forcing people to serve for their country can cause negative feelings towards its citizens and the country itself from within. Some also note that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1918, in the case Arver v. United States, that a military draft does not violate the 13th Amendment's ban on involuntary servitude.

However, just because a practice is legal does not mean it is morally justifiable. If mandatory military service was not about controlling the population, but rather, about discipline and unity, it could be built through voluntary programs or expanded military incentives, without depriving young people of their right to decide their futures.

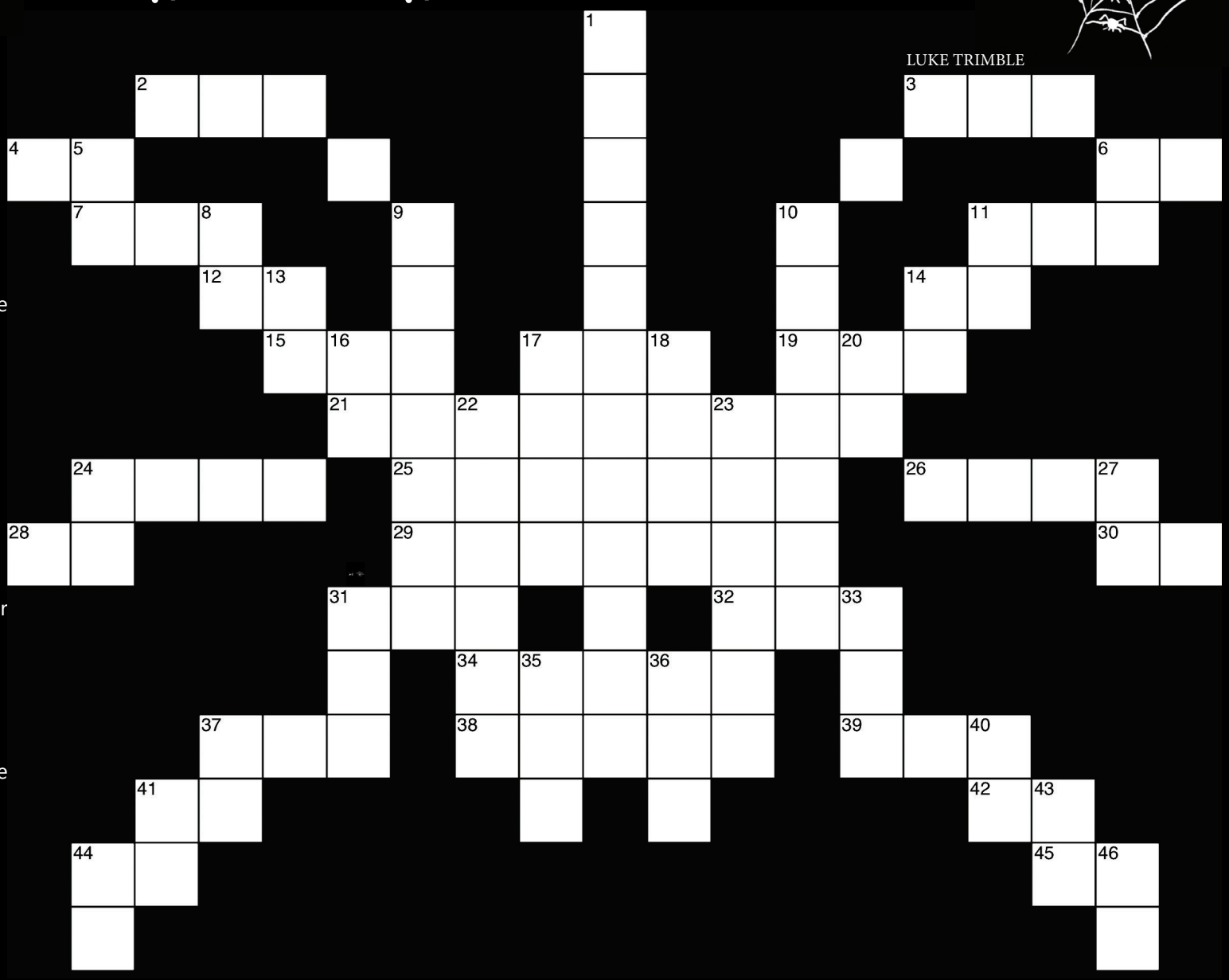
Mandatory military service is an insult to the English language. Forcing an individual to give up their bodily autonomy is not a service, but indentured servitude to the government. Framing it as an act of 'service' causes people to not scrutinize their governments for putting their citizens in harm's way.



Itsy Bitsy Crossword



LUKE TRIMBLE

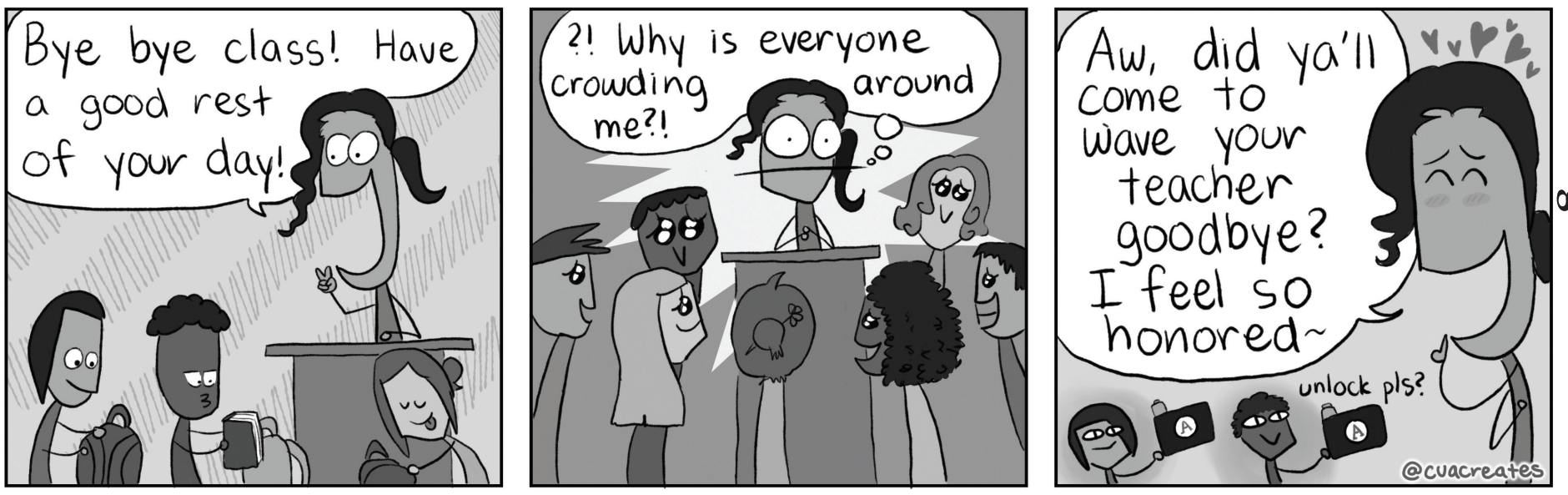


ACROSS
2. Said by someone who just heard 11A
3. Star Wilson of 26A
4. Legal eagle
6. Person who played music at Hoco
7. How zombies might gather
11. Scary sound
12. Mature genre of books
14. Where you text multiple friends (abbr.)
15. Ne'er-do-well
17. Amino acid asparagine (abbr.)
19. To sing without words
21. I am ____!
24. Sound a werewolf makes
25. Archaic word for lifeless
26. Valkyries' semifinals opponent
28. One who has fought for the U.S.
29. Tiny plant part
30. You might buy this in the "Oregon Trail" video game
31. "All Too Well" album
32. Most-nominated female artist of the 2018 Grammys
34. Virus named for an African river
37. "Love Don't Cost a Thing" singer (nickname)
38. What you'd call your male Spanish teacher
39. Where 31A artist held her wedding (abbr.)
41 Harder freshman or sophomore class at Aragon (abbr.)
42 Conjunction for alternatives
44 Globally accepted measurement system used for science
45 Who 35D is to 37A

DOWN
1. Irrational fear, or a Stevie Wonder song
5. After midnight but before noon
6. Make happen
8. Near
9. Monster who could use some braces
10. Former Starbucks CEO Howard
11. Before the year 0
13. One out of a six-pack muscle group
14. One who makes a sports team's decisions
16. Country in which we live (abbr.)
17. Afternoon, in Australia
18. One of two MLB leagues, to which the Giants belong (abbr.)
20. Country in which we live
22. Opposites of cathodes
23. 21A would not have been a fan
24. Greeting
27. Therefore
31. 2016 Olympics host city
33. Find a target
35. 37A's former husband Affleck
36. Text reaction to something funny
37. "Just saying" (abbr.)
40. What green means
41. It might take over the world
43. Prefix for "done again"
44. Type of memory chip card
46 5th period noble gas (abbr.)

Solutions:
bit.ly/OctCrossword26

Unlocking time



Snacks for all!



MI NGUYEN

Athletic Hall of Fame honors six more

REPORTING BY SPORTS WRITER ALEX CHOY

On Saturday, Sept. 26, Aragon held its 18th annual Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony at Center Court, commemorating six individuals for their distinguished athletic careers at Aragon. The event featured speeches from the inductees on their time at Aragon, as well as plaques noting their accomplishments in the Peninsula Athletic League and California Interscholastic Federation Central Coast Section, among other honors.


ALEX CHOY

JEREMY LEIBS

CLASS OF 2002

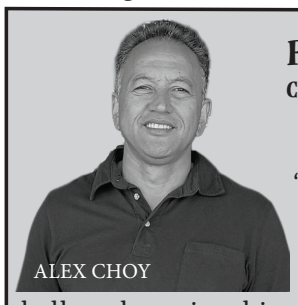
Jeremy Leibs is the most accomplished hurdler in Aragon history. During his four years, he set school records for the 65-meter, 110-meter and 300-meter hurdles, capturing PAL and CCS 110-meter hurdle titles as a senior.

Leibs' obsession with meticulous improvement fueled his rigorous dedication to the sport.

"I've always been drawn to [activities] where you can [keep] ... measuring [your] progress," Leibs said.

He later became an Academic All-American and two-time Caltech Athlete of the Year, paving the way for future student-athletes.

"I loved [hurdles]," Leibs said. "But I didn't want to sacrifice academics. I didn't want to [quit] robotics, and so I feel like I showed that you can balance those [things]."


ALEX CHOY

REX HARRISON MANU

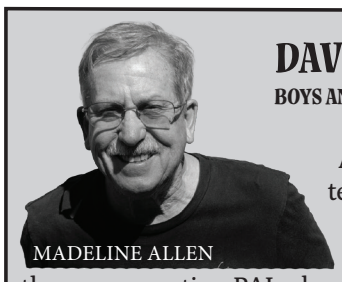
CLASS OF 1986

A member of the famed "Manu Crew," Rex Manu played a crucial role in Aragon's undefeated 1985-86 PAL basketball championship season, being named first-team all-league, all-county and all-CCS.

Manu credits Aragon's encouraging atmosphere for sparking his success.

"At Aragon, there's a lot of support for the coaches and ... players," Manu said. "It creates an awesome environment for athletes to excel in. When you get older ... you become very thankful for what a school like Aragon offers to students."

After graduating in 1986, Manu starred at Skyline College and Pepperdine University before playing professionally in Taiwan, collecting multiple championships and honors.


MADELINE ALLEN

DAVE OWDOM

BOYS AND GIRLS TENNIS COACH

As the most successful tennis coach in Aragon history, Dave Owdom led boys tennis to three consecutive PAL championships and 17 CCS qualifications, and coached three individual CCS girls tennis champions.

Recognized as a CCS Honor Coach in 2020, Owdom focuses on developing life skills and sportsmanship in the athletes he coaches.

"For 'AHS', he says 'Always High Standards,'" said co-coach Jon Felder. "We [strive to] play the game the way the game is meant to be played."

Owdom hopes that his legacy lives on through his players rather than his achievements.

"If they remember me and say, 'I had a good experience, it was fun [and] I've gotten better,' that's how I want to be remembered," Owdom said.


COURTESY OF KEVIN MCAULIFFE

KAT MCAULIFFE

CLASS OF 2011

An electrifying midfielder, Kat McAuliffe was the focal point of the girls soccer 2009-10 CCS Co-Championship team, recording 17 goals and 17 assists and becoming the PAL Most Valuable Player.

Over the course of her Aragon career, she became the girls soccer program's all-time top scorer, earning multiple all-league honors and top-scorer awards along the way.

Having lived just across the street from Aragon for much of her life, McAuliffe always felt a deep sense of pride and connection with the school.

"To have been part of the team and represent what this school [means] to me," McAuliffe said. "I wouldn't trade it for the world."

After Aragon, McAuliffe played D1 soccer with the Santa Clara Broncos.


ALEX CHOY

KIER LACROSSE

CLASS OF 1983

A decorated three-sport athlete at Aragon, Kier LaCrosse made his biggest mark on soccer, guiding the team to three PAL titles and two CCS semifinals, and earning multiple all-state and all-CCS honors.

"We had many games [together]," said Daniel Rosaia, a close friend of LaCrosse. "He was a goal-scoring machine, always striving for perfection."

LaCrosse's drive for success followed him off the field. As an aspiring guitarist, he played for multiple notable college bands, earning an audition with the Grammy-winning band Red Hot Chili Peppers.

"Aragon shaped how I was working with people," LaCrosse said. "[It] helped me well beyond soccer, especially [in] my music career."


ALEX CHOY

WILLIAM ELEAZER

CLASS OF 2009

Breaking Aragon's quarter-century individual wrestling CCS title drought, William Eleazer cemented his status as a great.

That year, he won a PAL Championship and two invitational championships, leading to him being named San Mateo Daily Journal and PAL Wrestler of the Year.

He is perhaps best remembered for his thrilling comeback in the 189-pound CCS final. Down 3-4 in the dying seconds and pinned down, Eleazer turned the tables and flipped his opponent, securing an unforgettable championship. The following morning, East Bay Times declared that he had "redefined what it means to never give up."

Eleazer is known for his achievements, but those close to him remember his dedication and how he embodied the spirit of wrestling.

Opinion: pro athletes should not be allowed in college sports

Adya Tewari
SPORTS WRITER

In college sports, there has always been a clear divide between college athletes and professionals. This season of college football, however, that line has become blurry.

Louisiana State University, with new coach Lane Kiffin, has found itself at the center of the debate. Lane Kiffin previously coached at Ole Miss, but left mid-season for LSU's head coaching job.

During the offseason, Kiffin and LSU pursued former Ole Miss players Dae'Quan Wright and Zxavian Harris, both of whom had gone undrafted and signed with NFL teams for the summer. Wright signed with the Philadelphia Eagles and later spent time with the Cleveland Browns after being waived. Harris signed with the New Orleans Saints, and was also waived. Both players then pursued a return to college football at LSU, with their former coach.

Some agree with the concept of playing one more year in college for the sake of performance optimization.

"College athletes should be allowed to play a fifth year," said senior Clemson softball commit Taylor Workman. "It gives the athletes the ability to make the most of their college careers and play at a point where they are at their most physically strong and mature."

However, even though extenuating circumstances can pose reasonable justification, graduated athletes should not typically be playing at a college level.

"College athletes should not be allowed to play after graduation, because the NCAA starts tracking eligibility the moment you enroll," said senior Oye Oyegbami. "However, there should be exceptions like medical redshirts."

If an athlete suffers a season-ending injury, they are allowed to "redshirt" if their injury meets the specific standards for their sport. This allows them to make up lost eligibility in order to ensure four years of eligibility throughout a five year window, often granting them an additional year.

Trinidad Chambliss, Ole Miss' quarterback, is an example of why exceptions can be reasonable. He sought an additional season after missing his 2022 season at Division II Ferris State because of medical issues. His case ultimately went to court after the NCAA denied his medical waiver, and he was granted another year with Ole Miss.

Athletes who miss out on seasons often do pursue a fifth year, and are usually allowed to play if they meet the criteria. The reason the LSU


MI NGUYEN

case is getting so much more attention is because it creates a situation where players who had already entered the professional system can return to college if their career has not taken off.

"The moment you sign a professional contract, you should be considered a pro," Oyegbami said. "You're no longer a college athlete."

Workman, along with many others, agrees.

"College sports are like professional sports now with the way that the athletes are treated," Workman said. "However, there needs to remain a distinction between the two."

Wright and Harris sought a temporary injunction in Louisiana state courts, which put the NCAA's rule barring professional athletes from playing in college on hold. This is what would have allowed them to play for LSU for an additional season.

"Ultimately, once a player has declared for the pros, that needs to be the end of their college eligibility," Workman said. "Otherwise it just exploits the system that was first meant to be a means to get an education."

The controversy became large enough that the Southeastern Conference considered terminating LSU's membership. They also threatened to impose fines that would have cost the school more than half of its football budget. LSU eventually opted to fill its two remaining roster spots with other players, not Harris or Wright.

The situation was even acknowledged by Kiffin himself during LSU's season opener against Clemson. After a blowout first half, Kiffin joked, "Imagine if we had pro players."

The SEC opted to let LSU remain in the conference, and LSU suffered no sanctions or fines after backing down from its case.

While Workman supports fifth-year eligibility, she acknowledges that it creates problems.

"It takes opportunities away from younger players," Workman said. "Colleges are taking smaller high school recruiting classes because there is more experience and talent available either from the portal or a fifth year."

The NCAA's eligibility rules are very clearly evolving, with people using loopholes to their advantage.

"The rules need to be made universal, to leave the least wiggle room for people to take advantage of college sports," Workman said. "Specific outlier situations can be evaluated individually by the NCAA, but the rules don't need to be variable to account for those one-offs."

While athletes deserve flexibility surrounding circumstances outside of their control, there should still be a separation between college sports and professional level sports to avoid unfair exploitation.

International Dance League finishes season

Sabina Gulati
SPORTS WRITER

On Sept. 20, dance team GRV captured the World Championship trophy of the inaugural International Dance League, the world's first professional league for dance. The Southern California-based team clinched the title with a score of 94.00, just 0.43 points ahead of the runner-up dance crew, Brotherhood.

The IDL is a series of 5 dance competitions ending with a championship round to finish off the season. This season, 6 pro teams, 1MILLION, Brotherhood, GRV, Jam Republic, Quick Style and Royal Family were invited to compete in New York, Vancouver, Sydney, Seoul and Los Angeles. Each series is made up of 2 rounds. The first is composed of three one-on-one matches, with the matchups decided based on their ranking points earned in previous matches, deciding which three teams continue on to the second round. Points are earned each series through placement as well as a public vote.

Heading into the final at the Shrine Expo Hall in Los Angeles, the favorite was undeniably Brotherhood, who went undefeated across all five series since the season began in May. On the other hand, GRV had a rocky regular season run, suffering three first-round exits. However, they managed to find their rhythm in time for the final.

"I wanted Brotherhood to win," said sophomore dance team member Avah Tolentino. "[But] GRV deserved it. They were super in sync, and they gave it their all."

The structure of the IDL allows any qualifying team to put together an outstanding performance and capture the championship, with no regard for their regular season results. This format left Brotherhood, as the regular season champion, without any significant advantage during the post-season.

"[GRV] statistically deserved it, but Brotherhood's championship set was very heartfelt ... so that's why people are even more upset about [the outcome]," said senior dance team member Jaxon Aquino. "They had brought back a really old set from like 10 years ago, and I thought it was cool."

The dance crews participating in the IDL spend months preparing their choreography sets, having anywhere between 2 to 4 weeks to choreograph, practice and clean their routines. IDL operates under an "open-style choreography" format, but because of the background of the competing teams, routines are often a mix of hip-hop, commercial and urban street/club dance styles. As a whole, each team must give its all in order to compete at the highest level.

"They all offer something unique in how they approach their dances," said dance teacher Marisa Castillo. "All of them have to be at that level of technique and commitment ... working towards the same goal, giving that 100 plus percent effort to be where they're at."



MI NGUYEN

Still, after months of dedicated preparation, there is always a chance that something goes wrong. In these cases, crews must be able to act quickly and adapt.

"Brotherhood had an issue during the [Sydney Series], when their music wasn't getting cleared," said senior dance team captain Megan Hugo. "They had to scratch their entire [choreography] for one song and make a new one two weeks before the competition."

The IDL has connected dance communities around the globe, with the Sports Business Journal confirming that the league surpassed one billion views worldwide.

"The [league] brings a lot of people together because when they're all watching IDL, it becomes something relatable," said sophomore dance team member Kylie Wong. "Such good choreography inspires dancers to be more motivated [and] train to get to that level so that they can also achieve [their] dreams."

The IDL and its competing dance crews have also influenced the Aragon dance team's style, simultaneously expanding its membership.

"Brotherhood, GRV, we've definitely taken inspiration from their choreography," Hugo said. "[We] hope that in the future [there] will be more diversity in the team, and that can start with people becoming more familiar with IDL ... The team is open to everybody."

As the first dance league of its kind, IDL opens many more possibilities for the next generation of dancers, especially those chasing a career in the industry.

"A lot of people just want to go into a job that's like engineering or nursing because that's all they're comfortable with," Tolentino said. "But having a dance [league] like IDL influences young dancers and shows them that [they] can do so much more. They can go into acting, dancing, singing, whatever [they] aspire to be."

With all of the IDL dance crews originating from different parts of the world, people are getting the chance to see their own ethnicities represented on the big stage.

"In [Los Angeles], Brotherhood did tinikling ... and I thought that was really cool," Aquino said. "[Since] I'm Filipino, I felt really connected to that set."

Overall, the first season of the IDL has made an impact on dance communities around the world, though improvements can always be made as they prepare for the next season in 2027.

"[The IDL] is still a little bit flawed because it's new," Aquino said. "But I think it has a really bright future ahead of itself. There's definitely exciting things coming up."


AARON LEE
Senior Dana Schanker and junior Chloe Wan play defense.

Flag football loses to Carlmont

Deven Shahani
SPORTS WRITER

On Sept. 28, the Aragon flag football team (4-7) faced Carlmont High School Scots (9-3) in their sixth league game of the season. Carlmont defeated Aragon 14-6, extending its winning streak to seven games while the Dons dropped their third straight game.

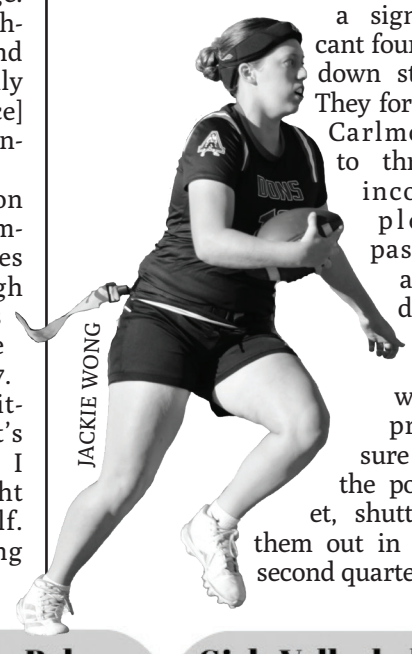
Before the game, the Dons had faith in their ability to win if they worked successfully as a team.

"To secure the win, we just need to bring the energy, get hyped and support each other," said senior running back and safety Tessa Matthews. "That's the best thing you can do, help your teammates play their best."

This is the first matchup between these two teams this season. Last year, Aragon played the Scots once, with Aragon securing the win, 20-13.

The game started slowly, with the Dons receiving the ball first and being forced to punt after failing to gain any first downs. With some short passes and screen plays, Carlmont was able to march into the red zone. After some short run plays, the Scots went for it on fourth down and scored through a quarterback run play. They also earned the extra point with a short pass to the left side of the field. The score remained 7-0 through the end of the first quarter, and neither team made a successful offensive drive.

In the second quarter, the Dons continued struggling, throwing an interception on their third drive in the half. Although the offense still had trouble, the Dons' defense tightened up with a significant fourth-down stop. They forced Carlmont to throw incomplete passes and deal with pressure in the pocket, shutting them out in the second quarter.


JACKIE WONG

"The biggest thing is getting stops on defense, possessing the ball on offense and sustaining drives," said head coach Malcom Davis. "We're moving the ball, but the unfortunate thing is that we're not finishing when we get to the red zone."

The second half started with a fast drive from Carlmont that led to a passing touchdown. The Dons' offense continued to struggle with another interception. These substantial plays in the third quarter pushed the momentum towards Carlmont, who continued to drive down the field and extended the lead 14-0.

The Dons' offense came alive in the fourth quarter as their defense strengthened, and senior wide receiver and corner Amelia Ortiz made a crucial catch to spark the offense.

"[Junior quarterback Samantha Pieper] threw a great ball right to me," Ortiz said. "It was a joint effort, catching the great pass, and then I just got around the defender."

The Dons offense kept their momentum with some quick passes and runs leading them to the red zone. Pieper finished the drive off with a run to put the offense on the scoreboard.

However, Carlmont regained possession, and the Dons were unable to get the ball back with enough time to complete the comeback. Despite the late surge from the Dons, Carlmont was able to win the matchup.

"I'm proud of the way we competed," said junior wide receiver and safety Eva Felix. "Everyone played hard and stayed together throughout the game. We know there are things we can improve on, but we can use this loss as motivation going forward."

With the loss, the Dons look to improve their game and especially their offense in upcoming games.

"Those last two quarters, the biggest thing was getting stops on defense, possessing the ball on offense and sustaining drives," Davis said. "Our defense is in a pretty good spot, but we just have to find a way to continue to finish drives by putting the ball in the end zone."

The flag football team's next match will be an away game on Oct. 19 against Burlingame High School.

Recent Varsity Scores

Football v. Capuchino
10/9
L 30-14

Girls Water Polo v. Sequoia
10/12
W 19-3

Boys Water Polo v. Sequoia
10/12
L 23-8

Girls Volleyball v. Burlingame
10/13
W 3-2

Boys Cross Country @ PAL 2
5th place

Tennis beats San Mateo 7-0



JACKIE WONG

Emmy Teufel
SPORTS WRITER

Though the sun was burning and the courts were radiating heat, the Dons' girls varsity tennis team kept its cool to completely sweep San Mateo (4-5) 7-0. Since Aragon is currently undefeated, the majority of the players were confident in taking home the win before the game.

"We're going to do pretty good," said junior Ella Teng. "We have a stronger team this year [and] we have a strong chance of even sweeping."

Co-head coach David Owdom attributed the team's excellence to the strong relationships between players.

"[The team] has a lot of talent, [and] they have good team bonding," Owdom said. "Spending time together [and] supporting each other [is] more important than anything else."

In the No. 1 singles match, sophomore Mia Lo led the way at the top of the lineup, using powerful spin and precise short-shot placement to keep her opponent moving. Her ability to control the ball and place shots strategically helped her create opportunities and put pressure on her opponent throughout the match.

"When you're down, just try your best to have fun and smile, and when you're doing your best, just keep doing what you're doing," Lo said. "I would just keep telling myself to keep going, just keep trying to play my best."

Lo ultimately came out on top, with an ending score of 6-1, 6-0.

Seniors Shanay Biouk and Jessalyn Williams brought strong serving and steady play to the court in the No. 1 doubles match, taking advantage of opportunities, including missed serves from San Mateo to earn important points. While they started down, they were able to push through and finish, matching the heat beating down on them with the intensity of their swings and eventually winning in straight sets.

"When we were down 2-1, we didn't start very well," Biouk said. "So winning the deuce point at 2-1 [in the] first set was great for a turning point [in] the match."

In the No. 3 singles match, junior Ella Teng put forward a solid performance against San Mateo sophomore Isabella Moudry, winning 6-0, 6-0. With court awareness and hard shots, she stayed competitive, while her serving earned several points.

Lastly, in the No. 4 singles match, freshman Emma Teng continued the Dons' streak, winning both sets 6-0.

"You just really never know what the opponent's gonna do, and you always just want to respect the opponent," said co-head coach Jon Felder. "You want to respect their game, you want to respect their level, and try to play your game at a high level too so you can compete well."

Aragon is fighting to keep their momentum alive and bring home the Peninsula Athletic League championship, something the team has never done before.

"[They're] doing very well," Owdom said. "I hope they can win the [PAL] championship because I don't think Aragon [girls tennis has] ever done that."

Looking forward, the Dons will face the defending PAL Champion Carlmont High School Scots on Oct. 20.

Football Falls 28-21 in Homecoming Game



AIDAN KASTEN

Albert Feng
SPORTS WRITER

Coming off a blowout win against Piedmont High School in their last game, the Aragon Dons football team (3-1) hosted the Los Altos High School Eagles (2-1) for their homecoming game on Sept. 25. Although the team lost 28-21, head coach Ash Parham noted the team's energy coming into the game.

"[We were] definitely excited about the win [against Piedmont]," Parham said. "It was probably our best, most complete performance as a team so far this year. Just kind of building on that and finishing the first half of the season."

The team started their night strong by driving down near the 30 yard line, powered by a 46 yard catch from junior wide receiver Gabe Wilcox. Aragon's offense couldn't put points on the board though, and senior quarterback Isaiah Johnson threw an interception on a tipped pass, and Los Altos took the ball all the way back for a touchdown.

Johnson and the team bounced back as they drove down the field fueled by a big reception from sophomore wide receiver Ben Henderson. This time the Dons were able to run it in as sophomore running back Mikey Alvarado-Corzo ran it in for Aragon's first touchdown of the game.

"Just because I made those few mistakes, it doesn't determine who I am and what I need to do," Johnson said. "So sometimes I just sit down, think, come back, focus and just overall get better at what I do, take it play-by-play and always just stay calm and collected."

After the game, Henderson highlighted how the team helped him play well and make big receptions.

"I had a few good plays," Henderson said. "It starts on the [offensive] line, they've got to hold up, especially on pass plays. Everyone just has to do their job, and if they do, then we'll be more successful."

After the touchdown, the Dons went for a two point conversion to try to take the lead, but Alvarado-Corzo was stopped and the Dons couldn't deliver. After this, Los Altos drove down the field quickly to score their second touchdown of the day. On the Dons' next drive, a bad snap caused a turnover on 4th down.

"We moved the ball well, and then we had a turnover that led to a touchdown for the other team and our energy was anxious for the rest of the game," Parham said. Aragon struggled on the next two drives as Los Altos's quarterback made a good play for a touchdown pass on fourth-and-11, while the Dons couldn't convert on 4th down themselves. Even so, a 12 yard sack from senior safety Isaac Martinez helped the Dons get the ball back.

"Defense is really what gets me going, but after a sack we're all hyped," Martinez said. "I think it's a chemistry type thing, and we all rely on each other."

During the last drive of the half, the Dons and Johnson battled to get into field goal range, but they couldn't as time expired with Aragon near the 40 yard line and the first half finished with the Dons down 21-6.

The Dons started the second half strong by forcing a punt, but they made mistakes, as Johnson threw his second interception of the night.

The Dons battled back in the second half with touchdowns from Wilcox and senior and wide receiver Everest Lavery, but it wasn't enough as the Dons failed to recover an onside kick and lost the game 28-21.

After the loss, Parham highlighted some positives in the team's play.

"We outgained our opponent by about 350 yards," Parham said. "We did well offensively and pretty well defensively."

Johnson also highlighted some things he believes the team needs to do better.

"Staying together as one andcommunicating [better]," Johnson said. "We [need to] stay focused and not get too cocky, not get too over confident that we could beat them. We need to stop overlooking teams a lot."

The Dons next game will be against Milpitas High School in a league matchup on Oct. 16.