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Standing up to the Stigma

HOW WOMEN AT HARVARD NAVIGATE MALE-DOMINATED SPACES, AND WHY THEY CHOOSE TO CREATE THEIR OWN.

BY KATY LIN '26 AND LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

“As women have entered more and more spaces and fields that have been historically male-dominated, you find there aren't many considerations that have been made to accommodate women entering those spaces,” said Dina Kobeissi '24, president of the Harvard Arab's Women Collective. Kobeissi's sentiments represent the all-too-common theme that many Harvard women exemplify: females in male-dominated spaces feeling ostracized, minimized, or left without proper recognition.

STEM concentrations, job occupations, clubs, and activities often present imbalanced gender ratios. Though recent strides to reduce this gender disparity have been made, including reducing wage gaps and increasing diverse representation, the loneliness that women may feel when they do not feel understood or respected may lead to frustration, anger, and oftentimes, wanting to leave. This global phenomenon unfortunately appears frequently on campus.

Sophia Fend '24 did not resign quietly from her Vice President position in the Harvard College Debating Union, or HCDU. In an email sent to the entire organization, Fend announced her departure, explaining how the “deeply rooted sexism, both intentional and not, that characterizes the team environment” has led to “painful and isolating” experiences forcing her resignation.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Fend pinpointed her understanding of the problems associated with such a male-dominated activity—including the development of a congratulatory culture only extended to men, leniency not extended to female leadership, and the eventual departure of women from the team.

“There's a culture that sort of props up the men and gives them a lot more social clout,” she noted, continuing that the lack of respect she experienced did not improve, despite moving up the ranks within the organization. “When women are in leadership positions...there's a much higher bar and expectation for what you should be doing,” she added.

“When you have these kinds of environments that are so male-dominated, it becomes even harder to say no and not be a people-pleaser. Because when you do say ‘no,’ frequently, there's a lot more hostility.” Remarking on her own experience, Fend recalled a health emergency that made her unable to fulfill an assigned task. In return, her concern was responded to without leniency in fulfilling all pre-set duties. “The sheer lack of professionalism that I was met with, from my peers, and lack of respect, in those instances was, in my opinion...pretty outrageous.”

Fend noted that her negative experiences are not at all unique to the HCDU, as seen by the collective experiences of women participating and leading fields without a female presence, but endemic to competitive male-dominated activities on campus. “Debate spaces, but also...all spaces, tend to be so male-dominated, especially at competitive institutions like Harvard. I don't think that [the HCDU] is the only one that has these problems.” Instead, she hopes to broaden the conversation and welcome more free discourse with

her email. “There's a huge amount of importance for young women in actually hearing this when they experience it. There are lessons that can be learned from what was seen on the HCDU, and I'm sure it occurs in other clubs.”

The experiences felt by women in this team, including women senior to Fend who left for similar reasons, and broadly amongst women in male-dominated organizations, often leads to an unfortunate self-fulfilling cycle: women eventually leave, spaces continue to lack female voices, and new women who join are met with the same problems. Fend observed this phenomenon happening within the HCDU. “They lose their women as they age, because people get fed up, and they get pushed out.” Fend noted that she had to stop the female debate mentorship programs when she left her position. She continued, “When women leave, it makes it harder for other women to band together, particularly younger women. And it makes it harder to establish these support systems.”

Maya Dummett '26, a Computer Science concentrator and Director of Community for the Harvard Computer Society, echoed Fend's understanding of women leaving the spaces they are in. While Dummett herself has always had welcoming and comfortable experiences in CS, she recognizes the rarity in her circumstances. “When I came to the College and encountered people whose experiences in CS spaces were plagued with feelings of inadequacy or who faced sexism, racism, or other forms of discrimination, it left me thinking about how many incredible people might be leaving CS on the basis of those experiences.”

Dummett explained that due to computer science's often high barriers to access, it is important to have the proper support and tools necessary to succeed. Yet many at Harvard have faced pushback. “At the College, there are a number of people really studying computer science for the first time... Some have been told that they do not belong, and others have faced the usual difficulty in navigating the mystery that a CS education can be.” This experience is a hardship for all but is an added burden to women, who already face discrimination and doubt.

Reform is difficult. Although male-dominated clubs and fields of studies should undertake measures to ensure that women and gender minorities feel included and respected, female-dominated spaces are equally important in simultaneously building that community that such male-dominated spheres lack.

Kobeissi started the Arab Women's Collective for this reason; to give female Arab students, alumni, and future admits a place where they can feel further accepted and understood. “I started to really see the club's potential impact on an Arab girl's experience at

Harvard in making her feel supported and like she has big sisters here for her. I also realized I didn't know Harvard Arab women who had graduated from Harvard, and I wanted to start building that alumni network for us because it can be so helpful to have connections with women in fields you're interested in who can tell you about their experience and who can empower you to realize you can achieve so much.”

Dummett is involved in groups such as Girls who Code and Kode with Klossy, providing her a space to learn from other female coders and empower and inspire the next generation. “Programs such as Kode With Klossy and Girls Who Code are intentionally creating space for young girls and marginalized genders to cultivate an interest in CS that is protected from many of the barriers that work to exclude them from CS—particularly sexism and other forms of discrimination, that often happen in CS spaces outside of these programs,” Dummett said. She also explained how the groups allowed her to feel comfortable asking questions that could be “perceived as incompetency” by her male peers.

Harvard should continue to uplift these female spaces; to avoid perpetuating the cycle that Fend experienced, and to allow Kobeissi, Dummett, and other women at Harvard to support and be there for each other in fields and spaces where they are in the minority. When asked why these are important, Kobeissi cited shared experiences as a reason to have these forums for women to go to. “A lot of the time you might think you're alone in certain struggles you face, but you find that an entire community of people has experienced the same thing. It's important to feel like you're not alone, and it's also important to be able to mobilize yourselves to counter societal and political injustices you face.”

KATY LIN '26 (KATYLIN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITE FORUM FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.

GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26



It's Okay to be Uncomfortable

PROTECTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT HARVARD.

BY KATE KADYAN '26

On March 6th, Stanford Law School's Federalist Society invited Kyle Duncan to speak on "Covid, Guns, and Twitter." Chaos ensued. Duncan, a conservative judge appointed by Donald Trump, was met with heckles from students during his speech, an interruption that halted his address. Following Duncan's request for an administrator to help de-escalate the situation, SLS Associate Dean of DEI Jean Steinbach took the stage. Instead of briefly calming the crowd, she proceeded to give a 9-minute prepared speech. In this speech, she emphasized that the event made her deeply "uncomfortable," and repeatedly asked, "Is the juice worth the squeeze?" suggesting that the divisive response to Kyle Duncan's presence was justified, and the event should have never occurred at all.

Although student discourse is a necessary part of campus culture, the nature of the Stanford Law students' protests and the response of Steinbach reflects a worrying trend across college campuses: the belief that universities should protect students from ideas that make them uncomfortable.

Harvard is not immune to this phenomenon. In fact, many Harvard professors have founded and joined the Academic Freedom Alliance, an organization founded in 2021, to protect freedom of expression and research among university faculty members. One founding member, Elisabeth Bartholet, a Harvard professor of law, referred me to an article she wrote on April 1st in *The Hill* about the protest.

In her piece, Bartholet contrasted the Stanford incident to the "way many leading

universities in the past prided themselves on exposing students to disturbing ideas." In Bartholet's time at Radcliffe College in the 1960s, both George Wallace, a fanatical segregationist, and Fidel Castro, a Cuban dictator, spoke to crowds of Harvard students. It is difficult to imagine having these speakers come to college campuses today; if Judge Kyle Duncan incited aggressive heckling, visits from figures like Wallace and Castro would have sparked something much worse.

Although these speakers likely held views reprehensible to the student population—some of which may have even been harmful to community members—confrontation with these beliefs and productive discourse are key to both a proper university education, as well as any hope for social progress.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Edward Hall, professor of philosophy at Harvard and founding member of the AFA, pointed out that inviting a speaker to campus is not an "endorsement of their views." Rather, it recognizes that engaging with their ideas "serves the intellectual aims of the course," enabling growth within the community. Firm distinctions from administrators or professors that welcoming guest speakers does not insinuate a concession to their views, but rather an acknowledgement of the value of engaging with their argument, could help encourage free discourse on campus.

These conversations are key, according to Hall, because students *should* have to grapple with "threatening ideas." He argues that graduating without having been made uncomfortable in an academic setting would be a failure on Harvard's part. After all, the mission statement of Harvard's liberal arts education is to expose students to new ideas and to seek out truths—a process which begins with challenging the reasoning behind one's own beliefs.

Placing certain ideas on a pedestal, as essentially unarguable and universal laws, blocks this type of academic inquiry. It creates an ignorance, according to Hall, in which there are "certain possibilities you cannot really bring into focus," of which students are not even aware, due to social pressures or internal biases. To combat this ignorance, it is important to "bracket emotional response" in academic discussions.

At Harvard, this sequestering of ideas often arises in the political realm. Professor Ryan Enos, professor of government at

Harvard and member of the AFA, cites part of the lack of diverse political conversation on campus to the scarcity of conservative faculty. In 2021, *The Crimson* reported that only 3% of the professors who responded to the Faculty Survey identified as conservative. According to Enos, a self-identified political liberal, "Where there is so little diversity of opinion and diversity of politics, it becomes easy to lose sight of the fact that a more general diversity exists." Under the tutelage of a bubble of liberal professors, the very possibility of the validity of conservative ideas is precluded. This blind acceptance is a form of intellectual arrogance—treating certain political ideologies as dogma and losing sight of their real meaning.

Hall pointed to Carole Hooven as an example of the dangers of treating intellectual ideas as intransigent: those who dare to oppose certain academic ideas are attacked on moral and personal, rather than intellectual, grounds. Hooven, a professor of evolutionary biology at Harvard, stated that biological sex is real, and was, subsequently, "unjustly" vilified as transphobic by her colleagues and students. Her course was later discontinued. According to Hall, we should strive to be a "community where criticizing each other's ideas is not only welcomed but actively encouraged, but attacking each other's characters is unacceptable." Hall notes that there is a "sense among faculty of caution even at Harvard," as ideological orthodoxy—dogmatic, uncontested views—seeps into campus culture.

Creating a space that truly fosters diversity of thought is inherently difficult. People have a tendency to defend their own beliefs and receiving contrarian views on sensitive topics can be unpleasant. However, Harvard needs to make it clear that students are *expected* to grapple with ideas which are both academically and emotionally challenging, rather than combat them.

In an era of Twitter echo chambers and polarized political discussion, the role of universities to facilitate unfettered research and discussion is more important than ever. Protecting students from uncomfortable ideas and creating a culture which seeks robust intellectual inquiry are not compatible, and it is Harvard's job to protect the latter.

KATE KADYAN '26 (KATEKADYAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FINDS KYLE DUNCAN'S POLITICS DESPICABLE, BUT DOESN'T THINK SCREAMING AT HIM WILL CHANGE HIS VIEWS.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



Welcome to Harvard

VISITAS THROUGH THE LENS OF AN OLDER SISTER.

BY GRACE VON OISTE '24

For current Harvard students, *Veritas* means truth. For the visiting “pre-frosh,” *Visitas*, on the other hand, might take on a few different meanings. Whether or not visiting students have been committed to Harvard since December and have been eagerly awaiting their turn on campus, or if they are deciding between Stanford or Yale for the next four years, hundreds of Harvard admits flocked to campus this weekend to see what life as a Harvard College student is like.

Visitas is a weekend where admitted students stay with current Harvard students and attend a series of Harvard events, such as an extracurricular fair, academic classes, and “*Visitas* Thinks Big,” to learn about the school before they commit to officially enroll. Although I never got to experience *Visitas*, as it was the height of the pandemic in spring 2020, I had the unique opportunity of hosting my sister, Patricia von Oiste, an incoming first-year to the Class of 2027.

Upon checking in for the weekend, the prospective Harvard students were granted red-lanyards with temporary swipe access, making them easily identifiable around campus. When an incoming first-year steps on campus for *Visitas*, they immediately assume the title of “pre-frosh” around Harvard’s campus. This title, a seemingly old Harvard tradition, invokes a mixed response in Harvard’s incoming first-years. “At first I thought the term pre-frosh was slightly condescending,” Patricia said. “I wasn’t used to it. But now, I kind of like it. I am very happy to be a pre-frosh after this weekend.”

Laetitia Cartiellieri, another incoming first-year from Connecticut, echoed these feelings. “It hurt my feelings a tad at first, but I’ve embraced it now. It seems like everyone loves the pre-frosh.”

For many, the defining feature of the *Visitas* experience is checking in and being assigned to a host room. In the weeks leading up to *Visitas*, current Harvard students are given the option to sign-up to host prospective students in their dorm, either getting randomly assigned to someone or requesting to host specific people. This is what my sister and I did, allowing me to officially refer to her as a pre-frosh the moment she stepped off the train from our home in New York. “I am extremely lucky,” she said. “I felt very comfortable and at home in

Quincy House,” she told me. On the other hand, Michael Shaari, an incoming first-year from New Jersey, was randomly assigned to a room of current students. “I stayed with a first-year in the Yard, which was fun since my host was studying something similar to what I want to study, and I got to meet several current freshmen and prospective students. It was a nice way to get a sneak peak into what our freshman year is going to be like.”

Although spending a night in a dorm might offer a taste of dorm life at Harvard, access to lectures and Annenberg Hall truly encapsulate the quintessential Harvard Undergraduate experience. Though my meals in Annenberg were limited due to COVID-19, my hope was to live vicariously through my sister. The two incoming first-years made sure to eat breakfast in Annenberg. The grand Harry Potter-like room, lined with yard flags and stained glass, will become a routine part for those who choose to enroll in the Class of 2027. “I have never seen a more spectacular room,” my sister said, admiring Annenberg. “I am most excited to sit in Annenberg next year and to try and meet as many people as I can. It is such a large space, but I don’t feel intimidated by it. It seems very warm and welcoming.”

Laetitia especially loved the Veritaffles, a Harvard

classic: “I loved having my first veritaffle. It will be a daily staple for me next year.”

Additionally, many prospective students attended lectures and classes. I brought Patricia with me to Professor Raj Chetty’s Econ 50: Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems. She seemed to be captivated by the grandeur of Sanders Theater and the complex and dynamic operation to host a lecture for more than 200 people. Shaari, on the other hand, attended Computer Science 32, Applied Mathematics, and SCRB50—Building a Human Body: From Gene to Cell to Organism. “Visiting classes on Monday was particularly useful for meeting people because you interacted with pre-frosh students who had similar academic interests. I found them all to be incredibly fascinating and the professors to be very knowledgeable and engaging,” Shaari said.

Seemingly, though, the most captivating part of *Visitas* was the people who attended it. Throughout the weekend, I saw students wearing red lanyards, grinning ear-to-ear, talking to one another, and envisioning their life on campus for the next four years. “While I thought the events were very informative and valuable, my favorite part of *Visitas* was the free time to meet people. I had a lot of fun just moving around the campus with friends who I met and running

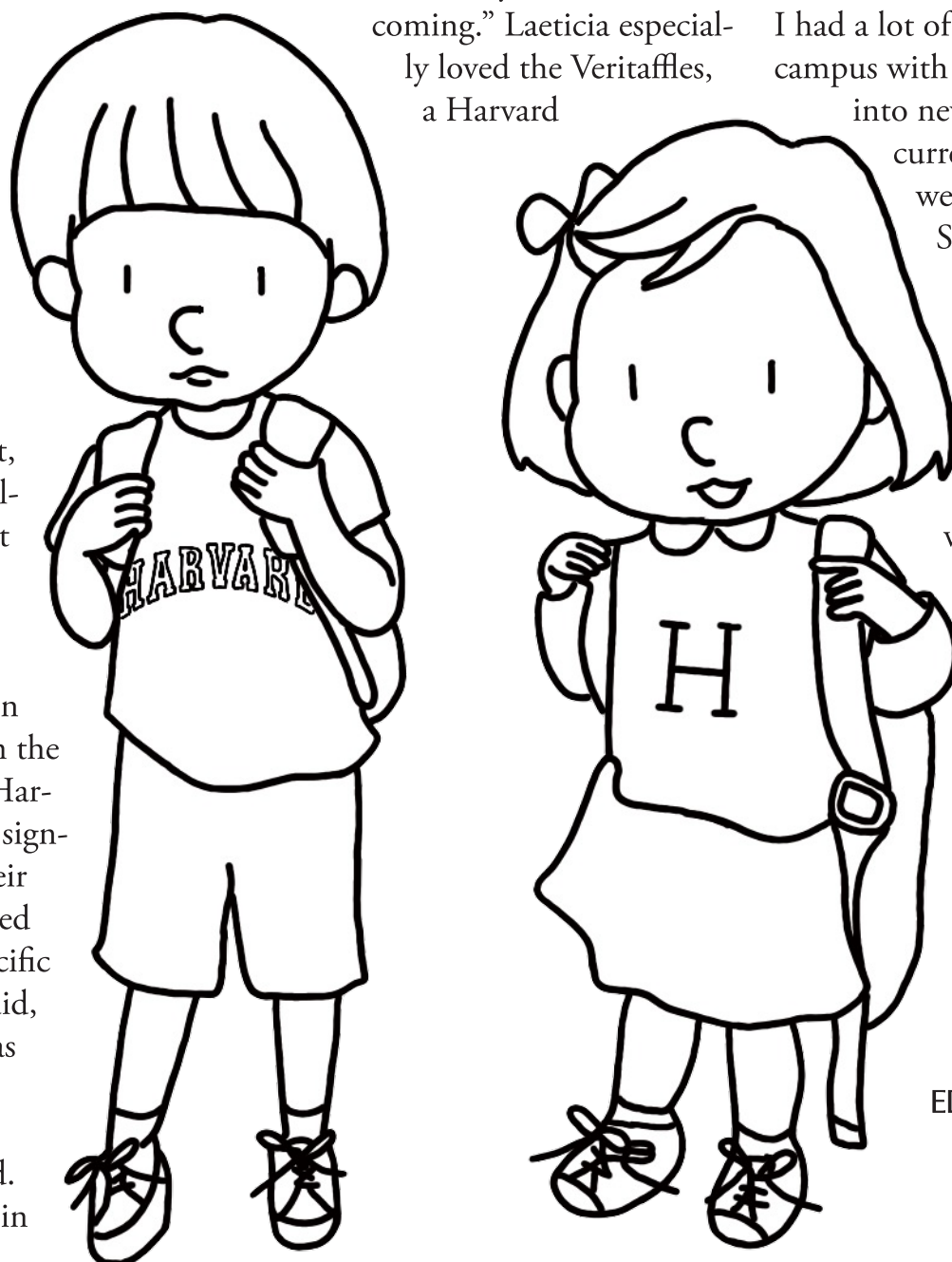
into new people; everybody—both current and prospective students—were very nice and sociable,” said Shaari. Patricia agreed; “I am most looking forward to the fall when I am able to meet more students who were unable to make it here and to meet my roommate. I loved meeting new people this weekend and it made me realize how many new people I will get to meet next year.”

While I do regret not having experienced *Visitas*, I am happy to have watched my sister and her new classmates take part in such a monumental weekend. I, too, am counting down the days until she steps foot on campus.

GRACE VON OISTE '24 (GVO-NOISTE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CANNOT WAIT TO HAVE HER SISTER HERE.

GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26

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The Power of Uncertainty

WHY NOT KNOWING WHAT'S COMING NEXT SHOULD BE CELEBRATED, NOT SHUNNED.

BY CARLI COOPERSTEIN '24

Going to Harvard implies having it all figured out. With peers that serve in Parliament, compete in the Olympics, or have worked in Michelin star restaurants, it seems that everyone else is achieving greatness before graduation. Even seemingly less-extraordinary peers are on the path to success—with hundreds of sophomores lining up investment banking and consulting internships for the summer more than a year in advance, the quest for certainty and security in the first steps of our career is a competitive one.

In an environment propelled by comparison to others, the common question “where will you be this summer” has some students struggling to keep up. Casual chatter quickly becomes an internship arms race, with big-name finance and consulting firms like Goldman Sachs, McKinsey, and BCG landing on the moon first. However, there remains a silent majority on campus, one that should be exalted—the people who do not know what they want to do with their lives yet.

But not knowing what should come next is entirely permissible for college students; in fact, it's what we should be doing. We have much of our adult lives to figure out exactly how we want to spend our time. Yet in the high-pressure environment of Harvard's campus, uncertainty is equated to inadequacy.

To be clear, there's nothing wrong with having everything figured out. If you love investment analyses and sourcing deals then by all means, go for it. I can think of a few important people in my life for whom this is the case, and I am so proud of them for finding and pursuing what they love.

Yet some may feel pressured to get a finance job for the

same reason so many students study econ—it feels like a box to check in the formula for a “good life,” rather than something they genuinely wish to pursue. Studying a practical field, getting an 80-hour/week analyst job, and then working one's way up the corporate ladder is the only certain vision many students have of long-term success. Yet so many successful careers have started in marketing, journalism, design, real estate, film financing, and so much more. The path to success is myriad, and Harvard students' conception of what must come next represents only a narrow view of our potential options.

Perhaps Harvard itself is partially to blame. While Harvard's Mignone Center for Career Success offers a few events each year such as Humanities@Work, Fashion and Beauty Career Pathway Panels, and Museums, Galleries, Libraries, and Auction House Careers, exponentially more resources are provided for more technical and traditional jobs. Employers that visit campus to recruit Harvard students are nearly all finance and tech related. Crimson Careers' “Premier Employer Partners” does not offer a single company from a non-traditional hiring background.

But uncertainty extends beyond the job market. Whether it's not knowing what you're going to concentrate in, not knowing where you're going to live next year, or not knowing what

you want to do after college, living in uncertainty is something that we all experience. So when did we become so bothered by it? At what point did gushing about our fancy office jobs supersede genuine interests and passions?

Seeking comfort in uncertainty came long before the economic and professional boom of the 1990s that has extended to the present day. In 1817, poet John Keats wrote a letter to his son about a concept he coined “negative capability.” Seemingly pessimistic, this phenomenon gives a positive light to the power of uncertainty. He writes that the best artists must grapple with uncertainty, mystery, and doubt; Keats attests that the longer one can go in this phase of not knowing, “the better poet you become.” Finding one's way through life without a fixed outcome on the horizon pushes you to become a better thinker and more authentic curator of your own life. Being a better “poet” of your life means more thoughtfully writing your own story, wherever your decisions may lead you. Taking your time to figure out exactly how you want to shape your life can prove invaluable in aligning your work with your genuine interests. That “negative” space of not knowing what plans will come next allows room for you to grow into your full desires.

When we were kids, or even high school seniors, we dreamed of becoming astronauts and artists. There is still time to have the careers of our dreams and be successful at it as well. I encourage you to go onwards in the uncertainty—the poetry of your life will be richer, truer, and more exciting because of it.

Shoutout to Professor John Hamilton for introducing me to “negative capability” in your fall semester course, COMPLIT 121X: Culture of Convenience. It has shaped my outlook for so much of this year.

CARLI COOPERSTEIN
(VICEPRESIDENT@HARVARDINDEPENDENT.COM) IS THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY
CANDACE
GARDNER '25



Review: *Atalanta*

STYLISH, STUDENT-WRITTEN MUSICAL IMPRESSES AT THE LOEB EXPERIMENTAL THEATER, CELEBRATING A LIFE IN THE NEWS.

BY ANDREW SPIELMANN '25

I sincerely hope that newspapers in 1969 were this stylish and jazzy, although perhaps without the complex interpersonal drama. *Atalanta*, written and directed by Mira-Rose Kingsbury Lee '24 and co-directed by Ellie Powell '25, follows Sarina Lemonde (Grace Allen '23), an editor at the fictional *Atalanta Post* in 1969 New York, as she grapples with her career, identity, and relationships. Packed with complex characters, and well-executed songs, the musical ran at the Loeb Experimental Theater from April 6th to 9th. It provided an entertaining, touching, and relatable story about finding one's place in a confusing world.

Sarina lives in New York City, with her husband Charlie (Matt Given '25). Charlie is fabulous, suave, and gay (but only openly to Sarina and the audience); we soon discover their marriage is a matter of convenience between two best friends. Sarina's mother Miriam Lemonde (Onovughakor Otitigbe-Dangerfield '25) is a wealthy French actress and celebrity, who, in Act One, buys a majority share in the paper and makes her daughter the president. This promotion drives the plot of the show, whereafter Sarina's relationship with her colleagues is soured, and she questions her ability and position in this male-dominated space.

The show opens with jazz, setting the tone for the rest of the show. Brightly colorful suits, against a beautiful, nostalgic, and equally colorful set design, transport us right into 1969. The opening lyrics ask, "Who's who in the news?"—the somewhat unsettling, repetitive tune and the probing lyrics give rise to a sense of toxicity and anticipation which endure throughout the show, and foreshadow the secrets and gossip that will cause problems later on. The opening number takes a minute to pick up, slowly introducing the primary players in the *Post*—Sarina, the publisher

William Harding (Vander Ritchie '26), and his son Jack Harding (Louis Zekowski '23)—but when it does, it is dynamic, and the seven actors become a resounding chorus in the intimate Loeb Ex.

The laughs kick off with "Jack's Love Song," Jack's mid-office-party sexually-charged yearning ballad for Sarina's husband. Zekowski establishes the complex character well, playing up a desire for Charlie that will eventually transform into an unhealthy desperation and torment. This number, along with Miriam Lemonde's "French," entertain well in what is an exposition-heavy part of the show.

An early delight is "Go-Getter," an upbeat duet between Charlie and Sarina. Ostensibly beginning with an argument about Charlie's potential travel to Paris to act under Mrs. Lemonde, the song shifts to a celebration of their symbiotic friendship. Given and Allen expertly curate a wonderful chemistry between the spouses, and showcase what is actually a rather happy, healthy marriage—albeit platonic.

Indeed, Charlie encourages Sarina to lean into the presidential role thrust upon her. Here, the show deepens: she lacks confidence in surpassing the men who surround her, but the wake-up call comes when another editor tells Sarina that no man in the office has the qualifications to run a paper. At the close of Act One, Sarina realizes she needs to own her role in "Someone," a Lin Manuel-Miranda-esque rap-like finale.

While Act One was cheeky and fun, Act Two brings immense character development and unforeseen plot movement which elevates the show. Sarina is threatened when William Harding, the show's primary antagonist, threatens to release photographs of Charlie and Sarina's brother Daniel (Conall McGinn '25) kissing—potentially ruining

both Charlie and Daniel's lives during an era of overt and systemic homophobia.

Vander Ritchie gave a chilling performance in "Company Values," the song which turns the show on its head. The elder Harding concurrently represents patriarchy, corruption, and egotism, but is ultimately only partially absolved when he prioritizes his son's safety over his ambition.

His son, Jack, continues to pine after Charlie ("Daniel (Reprise)"), and sends him obsessive letters, which Sarina considers using as blackmail to counter William. This makes Jack a sympathetic character, and when he opens up to his father in order to rescue Sarina and Charlie, he and his father redeem themselves. The complexity of these pseudo-antagonists never tips into cliché: William remains despicable, yet understandable, and he chooses family just as Sarina chooses hers.

Sarina's character journey occupies the core of the show. In Act Two, Sarina emerges in a baby blue blazer and neat white slacks—looking fabulously professional, yet perhaps stiff and lacking in the down-to-earth vibe she curates early on. Allen embodies a stern, surly boss confidently directing the *Post*. The energy in the "1969" reprise is palpable, demonstrating a livelier newspaper, although we observe hints of Sarina as an Icarian figure. She realizes she cannot continue "Playing God," and in finding a unique way to save the paper from Harding and protect her husband and brother, whilst not giving in to the blackmail, she truly lands as the smart, independent leader she was destined to be.

Sarina's character also avoids cliché. She does not end with a romantic companion, or on top of the world. Instead, she adopts her former editor position, with a newfound confident spirit and flair—excellently reflected in her final costume, a brown leather jacket and flowery pants.

More could have been said about the balance of nepotism with Sarina's portrayal of independent female power. However, some light is shed when the show highlights importance of family and loyalty, as well as the Hardings' representation of an older systemic elitism which Sarina is dismantling. Furthermore, Sarina's ultimate self-demotion absolves her of this criticism.

All in all, *Atalanta* provides an excellent couple hours of entertainment, and a touching story that sticks. It explores the enduring toxicity of the media but romanticizes the everyday and shows what a few indomitable people and some friendship and family can do. Hats off to the five-person team of composers, Mira-Rose Kingsbury Lee '24 (once again), Keagan Yap '25, Ben Dreier '22, Wills Goldsmith '26, and Henry Wu '25 for the eclectic mix of catchy tunes that helped me fall in love with the *Atalanta Post*. Should the show find a future beyond Harvard, it could follow the likes of *Newsies* as another delightful newspaper musical.

ANDREW SPIELMANN '25 (ANDREWSPIELMANN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO MAKE THE *INDEPENDENT* AS COOL AS THE *ATALANTA POST*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEPHANIE BRECQ



Eleganza: Harvard at Its Best

STUDENTS WOW, RISING FROM THE ASHES IN FASHION-DANCE PERFORMANCES AT ELEGANZA MMXXIII: REBIRTH.

BY KATE KADYAN '26 AND AMIYA TIWARI '26

On Saturday, April 22, upwards of 1,500 students flocked to the Bright-Landry Hockey Center for the fashion-dance performance-rave of the year: Eleganza. Upon entering, VIP ticket holders were welcomed with Red Bull—an energizer which spectators would certainly not need after experiencing the vitalizing performance.

Energy united and defined the entire performance. Performers danced, strutted, vogued, and grinded non-stop for two and a half hours. The theme of this year's performance was "Rebirth," and the sizzling, searing, energy of flame was ever present. Executive Producer of Fashion and Publicity Amy Ojeaburu '25 described the Rebirth theme as "being able to take all the fires that are popping up everywhere and channel that into something that's really generative...using it for something really beautiful and meaningful for a lot of people."

Eleganza certainly does so, bringing together the Harvard community in ways unmatched by other productions. Eleganza's Finance Director, Maia Posternack '26, said, "When I mention I'm a part of Eleganza, people's faces light up. It's so special to be part of something like this."

While our community's love for Eleganza might run deep, the commotion surrounding the event runs even deeper. "I've been hearing about Eleganza for my entire first year," attendee Nuriel Vera-DeGraff '26 said. "People on campus kept saying it was one of the best experiences at Harvard. But I honestly didn't get the hype until I stepped into the arena."

In fact, most first-time attendees had no idea what to expect when they purchased their Eleganza tickets—Eleganza is much more than models and dancers on a catwalk. Of course, fashion is a defining element of the show. Eleganza collaborated with brands such as Kiana, Free People, Polly Lava, Youthforia, and more. There were several show-stopping looks: two models strutting down the runway, one's torso covered by a polyester blue tube top, the other with a matching fanny pack; another model in a stunning green tulle dress styled over denim jeans.

Eleganza's "runway," however, was not filled with vacant-eyed models mindlessly putting clothes on display—the performers *wear* the clothes, the clothes did not wear the model. At times, the clothes could not help but be overshadowed by the electric energy and attitude of their performers. No matter how neon, glittery, oversized, or dramatic a piece was, it couldn't compete with the pirouettes, splits, and fierce stares of the performer.

And, in line with previous performances, this year's Eleganza was oozing with sexual undertones. For those who had never attended an Eleganza show, the sultry aspect of the show came as a surprise. "The show was more strip-teasy than I thought it would be," said first-year spectator Izzy Wilson. The sexy dimension of the show was not always compatible with the fashion aims of the show, as the frequent erotically-charged scenes often were defined by the *lack* of clothing. However, Eleganza effectively balanced the sultrier dance scenes with pieces focused on the beauty and aesthetic of the clothing and performer.

The sexy energy of the show was not only fun for the spectators but was also formative for the ARTS | 8 performers. Dancer Dariana Almonte

'26 said, "Being able to be someone who is sexual, promiscuous, and sensual on stage was just so liberating. When I've walked around campus after the show, I walk with a different air. I'm less worried about how people perceive me now. If I can wear a thong and a bra on stage and feel good about that, nobody can tell me anything." To Almonte, Eleganza is "art through motion that people can digest and engage with in a new way."

To facilitate engagement with the show through multiple lenses, Eleganza was broken into three scenes, each centered around a different theme. The first scene, "E Pluribus Unum," critiqued America's motto. The second scene, "Ill Intent," focused on street dance, and the third scene, "The Icon," paid homage to Black women, queer, and trans people, and their contributions to pop culture.

The latter two scenes accomplished their missions in their entirety. "Ill Intent" was filled with memorable Michael Jackson impressions, a Pop Smoke-fueled dance circle, and an epic, voguing-filled performance to Cookiee Kawaii and Dear Silas' "Violin." "The Icon" featured countless body types and gender identities and was not short of bouts of impassioned twerking. Almonte, who was a performer in this scene, said that although every single performer was ecstatic to be on stage, "None of us were smiling. We kept straight faces because we were bad bitches and confident. 'The Icon' really came out in our facial expressions because we were owning our moment. We were unapologetically taking up space. We were doing it, and everyone had to deal with it. That was our iconic attitude."

The first scene, "E Pluribus Unum," however, failed to demonstrate its theme to the extent of its later counterparts. The scene was intended to reclaim America's contradictory motto through fostering a sense of collectivism and uplifting marginalized communities. Translated from Latin to "Out of many, one," the scene's critique of this motto was not obvious upon first viewing and could have been made more explicit for an increased impact on viewers. While the other scenes very much connected back to their central themes, the relation between the fashion and the dances to a criticism of America felt ambiguous.

Yet the few aspects of the show's incohesion were likely unavoidable due to its high levels of diversity. Eleganza was founded in 1994 by members of The Harvard Black Community and Student Theater Group to showcase Harvard's diverse talent—according to Ojeaburu and co-producers Alana Young '24 and Ashley Zhuang '23 in their producers' letter, Eleganza's core tenants are diversity, inclusion, and the radical questioning of social conventions. Eleganza's mission truly shined this year in its highlighting of queer performers: the co-producers hoped to challenge gender convention with their show, ensuring that cisheteronormativity is not perpetuated through Eleganza.

Eleganza was diverse across racial, national, ethnic, gender, and sexuality boundaries, but perhaps even more incredible was the range of the



performances themselves. The show seamlessly transitioned from ballet moves in cottage-core dresses to a powerful, Afrofuturistic dance, to featured student-groups.

The Harvard Black Men's Forum (BMF) wowed the audience with a step performance, a percussive dance with important ties to historically African-American fraternities and sororities. The energy of the crowd was electric during the performance, but nothing compared to the absolute eruption of the audience during BMF's Magic Mike Moment, who lost their white button-downs to put on an erotic, shirtless performance. The contrast between the disciplined rhythm of step and the bold abandon of the strip show was jarring, but in all the right ways.

Omo Naija X The Wahala Boys, Harvard's premier Nigerian Dance Troupe, and Harvard College Bhangra, put on stellar performances that showcased the sheer diversity of arts and movement on Harvard's campus. While these performances differed in style from the rest of the show, the ways in which Nigerian and Indian cultures, among countless others, have influenced American modern dance all came together as a common theme. More than "E Pluribus Unum," we felt that the very presence of these dances demonstrated the beauty of collectivism, intersectionality, and pluralism, when it is showcased at Harvard, as well as within the United States.

According to Posternack, Eleganza typically takes place with proximity to Visitas weekend. This decision is strategically made to ensure incoming students experience the buzz of excitement among the student body after the show. If the leadership of Eleganza aims to expose incoming freshmen to the dazzling effects the show has on our community, perhaps Harvard should follow in their footsteps. Harvard should take a hint from Eleganza: from its energy, its community, and its unabashed emphasis on diversity in every form.

Through channeling 'Ganza, Harvard could become a little more sexy, confident, and empowered. Until then, though, we eagerly await Eleganza 2024.

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PHOTO COURTESY AMIYA TIWARI '26

Going the Distance

A CONVERSATION WITH HARVARD RUNNERS BEFORE AND AFTER MARATHON MONDAY.

BY CAROLINE HAO '25 AND HANNAH DAVIS '25

On April 17th, 2023, nearly 30,000 athletes from more than 100 countries gathered in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, to run the annual Boston Marathon. Started in 1897, the Boston Marathon is the world's oldest annual marathon and one of six World Marathon Majors. The *Independent* spoke to several Harvard students who ran the marathon this spring about their qualification process, training, and race experience.

Runners can either qualify for the marathon by meeting challenging time standards or through the Boston Athletic Association Official Charity Program, which provides various non-profit organizations with invitational entries to the Boston Marathon. Several Harvard students qualified through the latter route.

Jenny Li '23 ran for Team Joslin, a team of athletes who participate in various events to fundraise for the Joslin Diabetes Center. "I knew I wasn't going to qualify for the marathon through the time route, but the meaning of the marathon changes when I'm running for a charity; it reshapes the meaning of running to something other than performance," Li said.

Like Li, Nick Apostolicas '25 ran for Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston, which provides rehabilitation services and medicine to those who have experienced tragic accidents or illnesses. "It has been incredibly fulfilling to hear peoples' stories about regaining strength and mobility, regaining independence, being able to participate in athletic sports again," said Apostolicas.

In addition to several health and rehabilitation focused organizations, the BAA Official Charity Program includes teams ranging from children centers, sports programs, and veteran-focused initiatives.

David Paquette '23 ran for Boston Scores, a soccer and team-based enrichment program for underprivileged urban youth in Boston. "Soccer has been a highly influential part of my own personal development, and as current captain of the Harvard Men's Varsity Soccer team, my passion for cultivating a love for the game and the learning opportunities it brings with the next generation has never been higher," Paquette wrote on his fundraising page.

Federico Rollo '23 took a more unconventional route, running for his alma mater, Boston Latin School. "The way I got a bib was untraditional—Boston Latin doesn't usually receive bibs for the Boston Marathon, but there's a Boston Latin alum involved with The Boston Latin School Association who is also on the board of directors for the Boston Athletic Association. I reached out to him in the fall to see if it would be possible for me to obtain a bib for BLS," said Rollo.

Although varying widely on skill level, preparation, and commitment, training processes typically take months to complete.

"I ran a lot more in middle and high school; I did varsity track and cross country. I got injured my junior year; it was hard to quit since a lot of my identity was centered around being a runner," said Li. "I started running again during COVID and really rebuilt my relationship with running. I decided this year that I wanted to train for the Boston Marathon—it's my senior year and I wanted to try and run it," said Li.

In the months preparing for the event, local

teams can be seen training together to facilitate camaraderie and competitiveness.

"My training started in December, and it was pretty light then. Every weekend starting in January, my team at Spaulding has gone on runs together," Apostolicas stated in the week before the Marathon. "We meet at 9AM on Saturday, leave from a different location, and go on a long run. It started at



10 miles, and last weekend, we did 21 miles. The training program has been really rewarding, and it's a cool opportunity to run with all these people with different motivations."

In the weeks leading up to the race, runners typically employ a taper period that helps to reduce exercise intensity and prepare for race day.

"Now I'm tapering down because the marathon's coming up—I'm still running often but the distance is a lot shorter and the pace is a lot slower," said Rollo.

"The taper season has been good for me and I've been needing the lower mileage," Li added.

On the morning of the race, runners are assigned to waves by qualifying or self-submitted expected times, and meet downtown in groups to board the bus to Hopkinton. "There are massive processions of thousands of people packed together going down. So you don't really get to warm up," Paquette recounted. "There's no way for people to get their clothes back from the start. So everybody buys clothes from Goodwill and stuff and then strips off like their sweatshirts and sweatpants and just throws it on the ground... So it's kind of chaotic at the start, which is some of the fun."

The race's first mile is packed as some runners fall behind while others speed ahead. "It's a pretty hectic space and you're worried about your time and your pacing and you're like 'oh no, I shouldn't have gone this fast,' but [you] just kind of soak in the moment and really realize this is the beginning of it. This is the beginning of one of your dreams and you're about to conquer it," said Apostolicas.

Each runner carries their own goals for the 26.2 miles. "I came in with certain ambitions for time and stuff because you train a lot," said Paquette. "But once it started, I quickly realized in the first couple of miles, it was just going to be



about having fun. It wasn't gonna be about the time. It was going to be about what you remember and the experience and I'm glad that's the mentality."

Once the pack dies down, runners begin to settle into their pace and compensate for time lost in the first mile. Some run in teams while others run alone, relying on the crowd's energy to maintain motivation.

Thousands of local college students and Bostonians pull up to watch the famous race. The Boston College stretch, for example, occurs around mile 21, right after Heartbreak Hill, a steep half-mile uphill at mile 20.

"The crowds really carry you through," said Apostolicas. "Boston College was fantastic. The atmosphere was absolutely electric. Also the Wellesley College scream tunnel—you hear this thing from half a mile away."

The race's final stretch occurs while turning right on Hereford and left on Boylston. "Something overtakes you at that moment. You're just hit with a wave of euphoric emotions, and it's such a surreal moment. You kind of realize your dream is about to come true," Apostolicas explains. "All the hard work and the six months of training and fundraising and all the hours you put into it are about to pay off. And this is what you worked for. I started crying."

Paquette explained his experience crossing the finish line. "I was kind of in a daze. It was crazy that it happened and that it was over," he said. Months of training culminated in a few hours on an overcast April Monday.

Reflecting upon his experience, Apostolicas shared "My body is very sore, but the return to life has been pretty incredible... I encourage everyone, if it is a goal of yours, to attempt it at one point in your life. I think it's one of the most rewarding experiences you could possibly take on. And it's also something that's completely in your control that if you work hard for a consistent amount of time, you could definitely achieve it."

"It was so magical and truly one of the best days of my life," Li echoed. "The energy was indescribable, and it was amazing to see my friends out there with the Boston community cheering all of us on every step of the way," she said.

"The feeling at the end is one I wouldn't trade for anything," said Apostolicas.

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IMAGE CREDIT: BOSTON ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION SPORTS | 9

Indy Sportsbook: Year in Review

LOOKING BACK AT THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY FROM THIS COLUMN'S INAUGURAL SEMESTER.

BY DECLAN BUCKLEY '24, MCGAVOCK COOPER '24, AND ANDREW CHRISTIE '26

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

—Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship in a Republic”

These immortal words have been cited countless times since they were first delivered by an esteemed member of the Class of 1880. Competitors all over the world see it as an embodiment of the trials and tribulations they face in their pursuit of ultimate success. Those of us at *Indy Sportsbook* are no exception. Since our opening column in January we have dedicated ourselves to boldly proclaiming who you should gamble on each week, personal embarrassment be damned. There is no time to account for critics when determining who will win their Premier League game this weekend (take Arsenal -130).

In all seriousness, we know we may not quite be who Roosevelt envisioned. On the contrary, we have highlighted again and again how much of what we say should be taken with a grain of salt. Yet while we may not be “men in the arena” ourselves, we have had a lot of fun gambling on those who are. Therefore, we have decided to open ourselves up to criticism by giving you a recap of our success rate over the course of the semester.

Our very first attempt at making picks occurred just before the perfect event to do so: Super Bowl LVII. In what would be a sign of things to come, our results were decidedly mixed. Though we missed on our prediction of the winner (we're still bitter about that holding call), we saw great success in prop bets thanks to A.J. Brown (+191), Nick Sirriani (+110), and Jackson Mahomes (+165). Andy Reid (+700) sadly had no cheeseburger-related incidents during the broadcast, but one can dream. After making it through *Indy Sportsbook's* debut with our dignity intact, we decided to immediately throw it away by writing about which Champions League team you should gamble on during Valentine's Day. In all fairness, we did pitch this as a way to buy a nicer gift for your significant other. If you did this with our Real Madrid (+195) prediction, this worked out very well. If you went for our other pick of PSG (+160), please pass on our apologies to your significant other.

After a brief break to debate the pros and cons of betting on your favorite team, we turned our attention to women's

sports. We were fairly successful considering the large gender data gap we discussed. West Adelaide won in a nervy 3-2 match, showing we may know more about 2nd division Australian soccer than we let on. We also nailed our UFC picks, as we thought Amanda Ribas (-120) would beat Viviane Araujo and we said upset victor that Alexa Grasso (+450) was an extremely bold pick for the less risk-averse. Our tennis pick did not fare as well, as Danielle Collins (+500) fell to eventual winner Martya Kostyuk in the semifinals of the ATX open.

In perhaps our most heartbreaking moment of the semester, our Iowa March Madness pick came ever so close to cashing. Caitlin Clark led the Hawkeyes (+5000) to the championship game with a historic run of performances before falling just short. If anyone followed our suggestion and put money on them, we hope you cashed out before the final game.

We all know March Madness is a wild time to sports bet, with a large number of games being played everyday and upsets galore contributing to the (in our opinion) best time of the year to sports gamble. This year was especially crazy, with FAU, San Diego, and Miami all making surprising appearances in the Final Four. When previewing this hectic tournament, we correctly picked Furman (+195) to beat Virginia in one of the many first round upsets, and also that Purdue (+1100, 5th favorite) and Baylor (+2500, 7th) would fall early and not live up to their seed. Along with providing individual teams to bet on, there was also a sample bracket in the article. It actually ended up being in the 92nd percentile of all brackets filled out, which is a major success. In the bracket, a couple of good picks like Arkansas to beat Kansas, Creighton and Texas to make the Elite Eight, and UConn to make the final four helped propel this bracket up the rankings.

The next challenge facing *Indy Sportsbook* was to give our take on the Sex Issue. While other authors at the *Independent* wrote about the nuances of sex, societal issues surrounding it, and personal experience, we decided to focus on spring football, women's handball, and cycling. This turned out to be a disastrous venture, as the St. Louis Battlehawks

(+110), Rapid Bucuresti (-120), and our Paris-Roubaix picks all lost. Our sole consolation was the Seattle Sea Dragons (+145), whose 24-21 victory prevented a completely winless article. There is a joke to be made here about this particular issue being our worst, but we are not going to be the ones to make it.

Thankfully, we only had to wait a week to rebound from these losses completely. In our first unthemed article, we somehow managed to hit on every single pick. This included a wrap-up of March Madness, where we chose San Diego State (-134) and UConn (-240) as winners of their Final Four games. We even went on to predict UConn would win the ensuing championship game. We also did not let the failures of the Sex Issue keep us away from cycling and gave an extended preview of the Tour of Flanders. We ultimately landed on Tadej Pogacar (350) as our pick, capping a remarkably successful article we will be lucky to emulate again.

Our final round of predictions set the tone for the summer with previews of the NBA and NHL playoffs. It is too soon to speak definitively about any of these bets, as we previewed title contenders to bet on, not individual matchups, but the majority of the teams we suggested are thriving in the playoffs. The Nuggets and Suns have advanced to the second round, while the Celtics, Hurricanes, and Oilers could join them with one more win. However, the Bucks are currently on the brink of a shocking early exit, as they are currently down 3-1 to the Miami Heat.

Though we will be stepping away from predictions for now, we will be back in full force in the fall. With it comes new sports to bet on, themes to struggle to fit, and opportunities to emulate the “man in the arena.”

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The House Cup: Harvard Intramural Edition

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE INTRAMURAL FIGHT FOR THE STRAUS CUP.

BY MAGGIE BUCKLEY '25

Walking across the river on a windy Thursday night may not seem appealing to many students at Harvard, but it's a ritual that a small number of enthusiastic students look forward to each week. These students are the proud intramural athletes, dedicated to their weekly games and the community that comes with it.

The world of intramural sports at Harvard is driven by the passion and dedication of students who compete for a variety of nontraditional and often student-constructed sports. Whether it's basketball, volleyball, innertube-water polo, or even broomball, these students give it their all, fueled by their love for the game and the camaraderie of their fellow housemates. This article will take a closer look at the thriving intramural sports scene at Harvard, where the Straus Cup competition is just one aspect of a vibrant and exciting world of athletic competition.

Irvin Yi '23 has been actively involved in intramural sports since his first year, using it as an opportunity to make new friends and feel more connected to dorm and house culture at Harvard. First-years start off in the First-Year Intramural Program at Field Day following orientation and spend the year competing for the Yard Trophy. After that, they join their respective houses and get into the real competition—the Straus Cup.

Every time a house plays an intramural game, they receive points—regardless of the outcome. It is common for houses to forfeit due a lack of interest from students to play, so the points incentivize houses to regularly send out teams. However, extra points are awarded for winning games, so houses are encouraged to participate with the goal of winning. The house with the most accumulated points at the end of the year wins the Straus cup.

Sam Woolf '23 reminisces about how she got involved in intramurals during COVID through Zoom activities such as wall sits, push-up competitions, and face cookie races. Despite the remote setting, Woolf still felt that “IMs made Dunster feel like a home. Even though we were all over the world, I still felt like a community was being built.” Once she returned to campus, she eagerly continued participating in IMs in person. Dunster had not made it into the top three houses since the 1960s but came close to winning in the 2022 season, only to be edged out by Kirkland House.

According to Yi, “Some people get really into intramurals and others don't... every house has very different levels of commitment and some take it very seriously.” When asked about who the best house was at intramurals, he didn't hesitate in his answer—Quincy House takes the top spot, according to him (a Penguin himself). However, he is quick to give credit to other houses. “Kirkland and Dunster were the top houses for the Straus Cup last year and are still very competitive about winning the cup,” he said.

While intramural sports should be a fun and light-hearted way for students to bond with their housemates, houses can sometimes take the Straus Cup too seriously. Kirkland House is one example of an intramural team that takes the competition exceedingly seriously. An anonymous Leverett House junior said, “Last year during innertube water polo, Kirkland was overly

competitive, had rude attitudes, was super nit-picky about rules, and would scream when points were scored against them.” Kirkland house did, in fact, go on to win the Straus Cup despite being one of the smallest houses on campus, so their intense approach to IMs can yield victorious results. While their attitude might not foster camaraderie amongst all houses, it's hard to argue with their success.

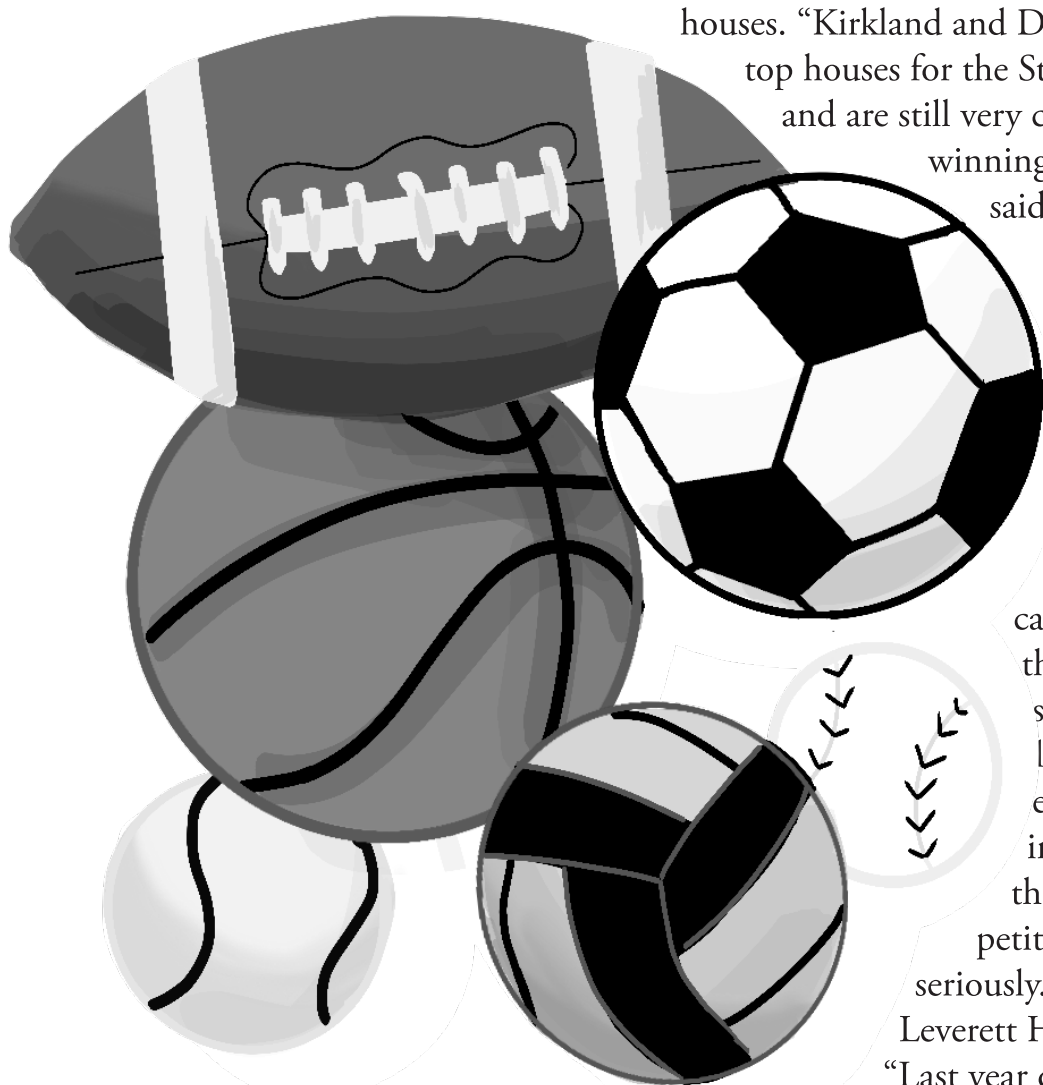
According to Woolf, there has been a shift in culture for this year's intramural games. During the 2021-2022 season, she noticed that the houses were very invested, and the games became unnecessarily competitive. Woolf herself broke her nose during one of the games and referred to someone she knew who tore their ACL while playing soccer. However, for the 2022-2023 season, she has noted that the focus has shifted towards creating a more enjoyable and community-building experience, instead of just winning. As a result, this year has had a more relaxed and fun atmosphere that has facilitated more inter-house bonding for all.

When asked why he does not participate in intramural sports, Ben Littlejohn '25 said the schedule makes it difficult to play. “At 10 pm I'm either doing work or going to bed. Especially living in the Quad, it's hard to make it across the river to participate in most of the events.” While it is true that the late-night schedule and distance from events for many quadlings (and river houses when events are at the QRAC) to participate in intramurals, there is also a positive to having a smaller pool of athletes. With a more intimate group of students involved in the intramural scene, those who do participate regularly are more passionate and dedicated to the games and their house.

In a way, the smaller size of the intramural community fosters camaraderie and shared purpose that can be hard to find in larger, more competitive athletic programs. So, while it may be challenging for some students to make the commitment to intramurals, those who do often find it to be a rewarding and fulfilling experience that they cherish for the rest of their lives.

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GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26



COVER ART + LAYOUT BY PIPER TINGLEAF '24

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