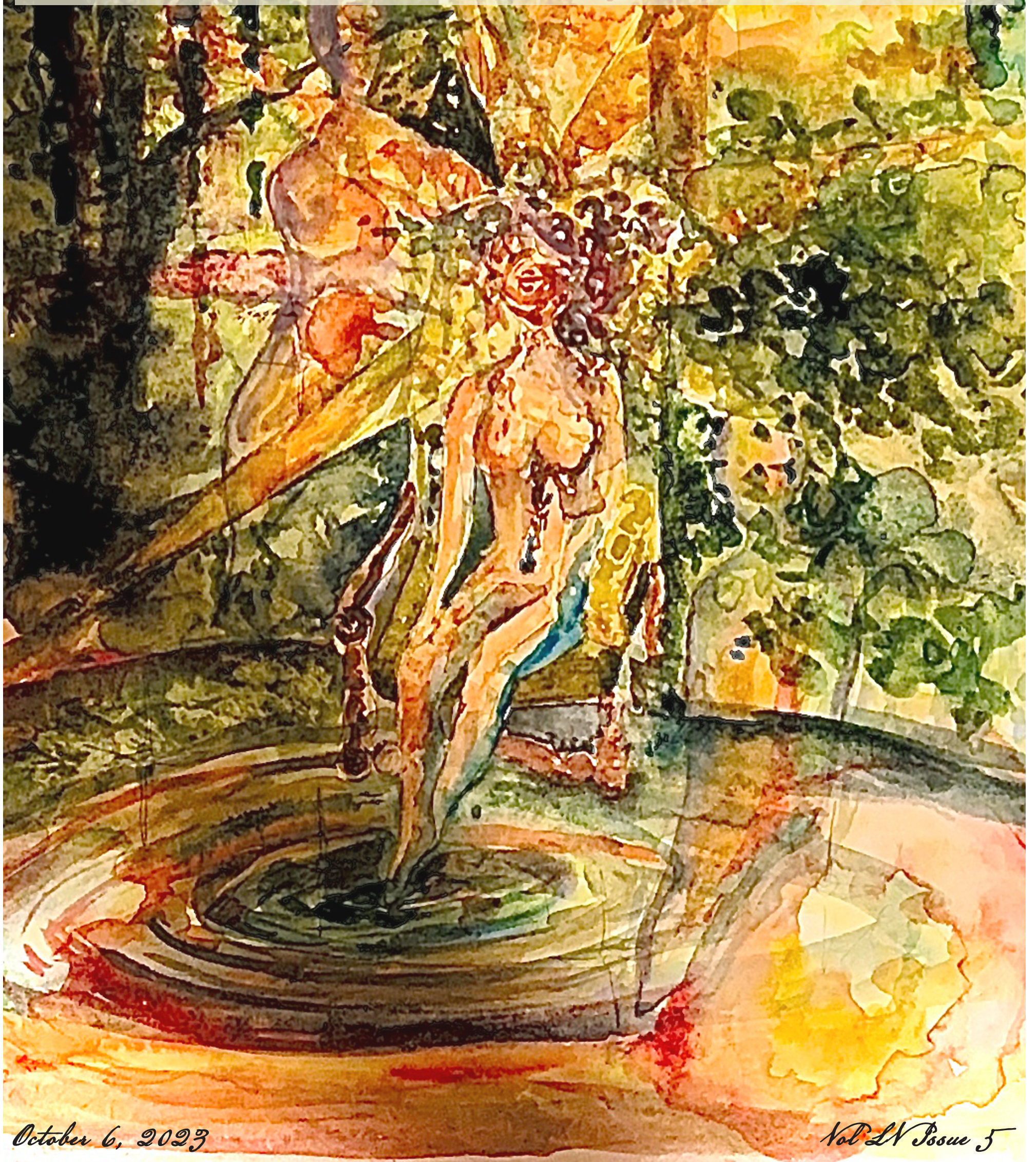


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# MASTHEAD

October 6, 2023

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# THE HEART OF HARVARD

*From dining hall cooks to mailroom employees, the success of Harvard relies on its staff.*

BY SOPHIE DAUER '27 AND NINA BERKMAN '27

Each day, Harvard students rely on the school's vast support resources to help them navigate campus life. Without the employees behind programs like Securitas, Harvard Yard Operations, and Harvard University Information Technology, this school, quite literally, would not operate. Harvard University Dining Services keeps us fed, the Harvard University Police Department protects our safety, and the Facility Maintenance Operations ensures that we have working lights and outlets. Amidst the endless problem sets and papers, it is easy for Harvard students to forget to appreciate the individuals who do so much for them. After speaking with a few of these employees, we learned about the work and perspective of staff so crucial to Harvard life.

**Wallace de Oliveira—Custodian at Smith Campus Center**



Originally from Brazil, Wallace De Oliveira has worked as a custodian at the Smith Campus Center for just under a year. De Oliveira's job at Smith entails picking up trash, mopping and drying the floors, wiping down the windows, and cleaning the bathrooms. "Everything has to be spotless," he said. Prior to working at Harvard, de Oliveira attended medical school for seven years in Bolivia. He plans to go back to Brazil to pursue medicine eventually.

In response to being asked about whether he thinks custodial staff are appreciated by Harvard students, de Oliveira replied "I believe, as I was a student before, sometimes we don't give much appreciation for people that do that."

"If somebody goes by and says 'thank you,' it makes your day better. It makes you feel, you know, appreciated. It's small gestures. 'Thank you,' a smile, you know, we're not asking for much," de Oliveira added. He commented on the effects of his work, stating, "Any person on the team has his function. Can you imagine if I stopped doing this for a week? How much trash would be outside?" He views the relationship between students and custodial staff to be symbiotic: "You as the students are important for us because without you guys, we don't have work. And, we're important for you because we maintain the building."

**Andrew Silva—Main Yard Electrician for the Facility Maintenance Operations**



Andrew Silva is from Billerica, Massachusetts and has worked for Harvard's Facility Maintenance Operators (FMO) for six months. "I'm a main yard electrician, so we'll fix lights, plugs, do some little projects, and various other things." The FMO, along with the Engineering & Utilities Department, is responsible for maintaining Harvard's energy supply and performing engineering and technical services. Commenting on his experience working at Harvard, Silva stated "Being here six months, I feel pretty appreciated."

**Ana Rodriguez—Quincy House Dining Hall Staff Member**



Ana Rodriguez has worked at the University for 36 years. Initially from El Salvador, she currently works in the Quincy House Dining Hall. "I swipe IDs. I make sure that everybody has their own IDs and swipes in. I clean tables, I cut dessert, and I fill the napkins," Rodriguez said. A vital part of student life, Harvard University Dining Services (HUDS) is the body responsible for Harvard's numerous dining halls and cafes and serves a lofty 22,000 meals a day during the academic year. "I love HUDS [and its] great benefits. What's not to love?"

**Karen Johnson—Annenberg Dining Hall Staff Member**



HUDS Employee Karen Johnson started working at Harvard 11 years ago after hearing positive reviews. "I serve students, prepare and set up everything for breakfast, lunch and dinner," Johnson said. She enjoys working for HUDS due to the favorable hours and the opportunity to be part of students' lives.

**Robert James—Annenberg Dining Hall Staff Member**



Annenberg employee Robert James began working for Harvard nineteen years ago, after moving from Maine. "It is a pretty good job: pay scale, benefits, and so forth," James said, explaining why he came to work for Harvard. He works in general services, meaning that he covers a wide range of duties to ensure Annenberg runs smoothly.

James has found a strong sense of community at HUDS. "The guy at the checkout desk is my best friend," he stated. He considers the opportunity to work with his incredible colleagues as one of the main reasons why he has been here for so long. Since HUDS plays such a significant role in all students'

lives, James suggests that students should show their appreciation for its employees. "Get to know the person at the front desk, the people who put the food out, and thank the cooks."

**Sal Uccelol—Annenberg Dining Hall Staff Member**



Originally from Sicily, Sal Uccelol has worked at Harvard for 18 years, but has been at Annenberg for two. Last year, Uccelol was a checker, swiping IDs for students entering the dining hall. He now floats around and "helps everybody out." Before his new position, he served as a cook for almost 13 years. According to him, feeding so many people is both a hard and rewarding task. Describing his work at HUDS, Uccelol stated, "[I am] trying to make sure that you guys have enough food and feel comfortable, that's my job."

**Javonni Malcolm—Employee at the Harvard Yard Mail Center**



From Atlanta, Javonni Malcolm works at the Harvard Yard Mail Center, where first-year students pick up their packages. "Basically, I just help students locate their package, and if they don't know their mailbox number, I also give it to them. [Also], I just scan all packages for students," Malcolm explained.

He added "I love Harvard. It's such a great community. Everybody's nice. You know, there's a nice building, and everybody just has great vibes. Go Harvard!"

...

As seamless as Harvard's centers, programs, and resources appear, there are many moving parts that keep campus functioning. As students who rely on these facilities every day, it is important that we acknowledge and appreciate the hard work of the people who are behind them. As noted by Smith Center Custodian de Oliveira, "Little things make all the difference."

**SOPHIE DAUER '27 (SOPHIEDAUER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FREQUENTLY LOCKS HERSELF OUT OF HER DORM.**

**NINA BERKMAN '27 (NINABERKMAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) NEEDED HELP SWIPING IN AT BERG AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEMESTER.**





# FROM CRISIS TO COMMUNITY

*When natural disaster strikes, Harvard students mobilize for Libya and Morocco despite silence.*

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 AND TAYBAH CRORIE '25

"This is a tragedy, but it is not the end of the story," Wasan Rafat '27 exclaimed to a crowd that gathered around the steps of Memorial Church to mourn the over 10,000 recent victims of Morocco's recent 6.8 magnitude earthquake and Libya's devastating floods.

The vigil on Tuesday, September 26th, was a joint effort between the Society of Arab Students and the Harvard Islamic Society. It honored the Moroccans who fell victim to the earthquake, killing nearly 3,000 civilians and severely damaging the Atlas Mountains and surrounding regions. Libya also faced catastrophic flooding due to Storm Daniel, killing and displacing thousands of people and wreaking havoc on the country.

Rafat, a Libyan first-year, solemnly reflected on the flood's impact, touching listeners with her vulnerability. "Thousands have lost their lives, including in my family, and it has left me feeling heartbroken and helpless. It's hard not to let the guilt overwhelm me as I stand here today in Harvard Yard, as my extended family is suffering."

While Moroccan student Rym El Mahil '24 fortunately did not have family directly impacted by the earthquake, she echoed the gravity of Rafat's words. "I also obviously feel for the people of Libya, because to me, they're my brothers and sisters. It's still just a sentiment that you feel of dread and sadness," she said.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Jana Amin '25, president of

the Society of Arab Students, shared that in light of the tragedies impacting Morocco and Libya, she has found it challenging to feel excitement for President Claudine Gay's "joyous inauguration." "I think I've been reminded, especially walking through the yard this week ... that there has been so much effort and time and energy poured into President Gay's inauguration, which was wonderful ... I kind of wonder, with so many people gathered, is there a way to also shed light on some of these crises that are affecting other community members?" she asked. "It makes it much harder to celebrate a historical moment on campus when there's so much struggle happening around the world."

Immediately following the tragedies, multiple events were coordinated to raise funds and awareness. Following the Moroccan earthquake, the Society of Arab Students shared a fundraising initiative, in which they would be collecting donations through Venmo or Zelle to be donated to El Baraka Angels Association and the Association Amis du CHU Mohammed VI, "two grassroots organizations providing disaster relief on the ground," read the circulated flyer.

Mahil noted a lack of faculty support for the fundraising. "As far as I know, I have not really seen anything from the faculty level talking about the earthquakes and the floods ... Students tried reaching out and asking professors to put up flyers in their slides, and they said they said that they

didn't want to get 'political,' even though it's a natural disaster," Mahil explained. "It's very telling, I think, of just Harvard's involvement. Sometimes when it comes to natural disasters in countries that are Muslim majority countries ... our issues are sort of just swept under the rug a lot of the time."

Amin emphasized the lack of university-wide support is concerning, given that this a universal social and climate-related issue. "I have been so disheartened by how little I have heard about Morocco and especially Libya over these past weeks ... This isn't just about Libya or Morocco. This is about the pollution of our earth that has led to a rising tide globally. This is about the under-representation of Libyans and Moroccans of the College and across the University ... This is about our collective capacity to care," she stated at the vigil.

Rafat, in an interview with the *Independent*, proposed solutions to the institution's apathy. "I think that [Harvard] should probably have more school-wide fundraisers. I don't think [fundraising] necessarily needs to be something that falls on the Arab Society or HIS because that places an undue burden, I believe, on those groups." She emphasized how the tragedies in Morocco and Libya are symptoms of a larger problem affecting us all. "Not only is this something that affects North Africa, but [the flood and earthquake] really does illuminate the really devastating effects of climate change," she said.



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The Harvard Society of Arab Students is organizing a fundraiser to support El Baraka Angels Association and the Association Amis du CHU Mohammed VI, two grassroots organizations providing disaster relief on the ground.

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Mahil questioned whether this lack of support has to do with the small Moroccan population at Harvard, expressing her belief in being one of few Moroccan students on campus.

Similarly, Rafat expressed that she is one of the only Libyan students at Harvard. “I don’t really talk about how I’m feeling in terms of the floods in a school context, simply because I don’t really know who to talk to about that ... I don’t really feel camaraderie, just given the fact that I don’t really know many other Libyan students.”

Moreover, Mahil mentioned how the cultural differences between North African and Middle Eastern culture has caused her to feel isolated in group spaces. “I’ve kind of felt excluded from at least Arab spaces. North African culture doesn’t fit into the Middle Eastern majority that exists on Harvard’s campus ... It’s this new wave of recognition that I feel like we’re getting, and so that’s kind of just interesting trying to navigate since we are different, fundamentally.”

However, students have found support within the University’s Muslim Chaplaincy. Chaplain Abdur-Rashid and Chaplain Samia Omar explained to the *Independent* how they have coordinated multiple efforts to check on and address

student needs. “We advised our student community on ways to support affected students through specific religious and spiritual practices, which included outlining specific prayers to be performed for those affected directly and indirectly,” they said. “We also made it very clear that the Muslim Chaplains are a campus resource for any student affected by the crisis, and we urged affected students to reach out to us directly if necessary.”

An email sent from the Chaplains to the Harvard Islamic community on September 12th read, “When we witness such events occurring, we have a moral and spiritual responsibility to pray for all those who have lost their lives, loved ones, and/or property. It is our duty as fellow believers to pray for the victims, their families, and for those who may still be trapped under rubble or trapped because of water.”

The Arab and Muslim student community also does its best to be there for one another through these struggles. “People instantly just jumped into just talking about, ‘What can we do? How can we raise money? How can we get that money to people?’” said Mahil.

In response, immediate progress was made in providing assistance to one another and raising funds. “I have been so inspired watching our community support each other through this crisis,” said Amin at the vigil, “We have raised almost \$6,000 for earthquake relief in Morocco, and [we have] just launched our fundraiser for Libya this past weekend. Please consider donating to @SASHarvard to support.”

To continue garnering support, The Signet, Ghungroo, and the Society of Arab Students held an arts showcase, “Sur Sagar,” on September 23, with proceeds going to earthquake relief in Morocco. “This event was basically in an effort [to bring] everyone together and talk about things that we actually care about, which

is helping people in any way that we can,” said Hana Rehman ’25, co-director of Ghungroo and co-organizer of Sur Sagar.

The event had an impressive turnout, exposing many students to an issue that the wider University has seemingly neglected. “[The earthquake] is an urgent and pressing issue towards which not a lot of attention is being given. [Sur Sagar] is an event that will bring a lot of attention to the crisis, and hopefully will generate a little bit of help,” said Rehman.

Rafat encouraged students to help communities in need, even if they are not their own, by spreading awareness and giving back. “The key takeaway I have from this is that I have an extremely privileged position and that we all do as well. We have the potential to help raise awareness regarding this issue, and the first step is to acknowledge the suffering that is currently going on, which since you’re here, seems to be complete,” she stated at the vigil.

“The next step, and the most important one, is to take action, to help. Donate if you can ... help fund emergency kits, food relief aid, and temporary shelters for families who have lost their lives and their livelihoods. If you cannot donate, then spread the word. Every action is meaningful, and anything you can do matters.”

**LAYLA (HAARAOU) ’26 (LAYLACHAARAOU@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A MOROCCAN-MUSLIM STUDENT ON CAMPUS WHO FEELS DEEP SADNESS FOR HER COMMUNITY AND IS GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT SHE HAS RECEIVED THUS FAR. TAYBAH (CRORIE) ’25 (TAYBAHCRORIE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A MUSLIM STUDENT ANGRY ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE WHO ASKS YOU TO DONATE GENEROUSLY AND GIVE YOUR NORTH AFRICAN FRIENDS LOVE AND A LISTENING EAR.**

**IMAGES TAKEN BY TAYBAH (CRORIE) ’25 FLIERS COURTESY OF THE SOCIETY OF ARAB STUDENTS NEWS | 5**





# REBUILDING THE IVORY TOWER

*The inauguration of President Gay moves Harvard toward a new age of diverse thought and inclusivity.*

BY LUCAS COHEN-D'ARBELOFF '27 AND KAIA PATTERSON '27

A sea of plastic ponchos and soaked umbrellas swarmed Tercentenary Theatre on Friday, September 29th, as students, faculty, and alumni huddled under the downpour for the inauguration of President Claudine Gay. Attendees braved numerous bag and ID checks and waded through a muddy Harvard Yard all to hear the words of their university's new leader. Barring some Sidechat rumors about a potential appearance by former President Barack Obama, Gay took center stage.

Since replacing former Harvard President Lawrence Bacow and stepping up to the position on July 1st, Gay is both the first person of color and second woman to lead the University. In her inauguration address, she urged the Harvard community to lead with courage and to incorporate diverse perspectives and interests into academic work.

"Harvard has always been a place to ask 'Why?' It animates our research and teaching," she said. "'Why?' is the question of scientific breakthroughs, archival discoveries, fresh artistic forms, new remedies for physical and social ills. 'Why?' rights wrongs, overturns conventional wisdom, and opens the blue sky of human pursuit and possibility."

The inauguration festivities began the night of Thursday, September 28th with an invite-only "Arts Prelude" in Sanders Theatre featuring student performance groups such as the Asian American Dance Troupe, Expressions Dance Company, and the Harvard Ballet Com-

pany. The following morning, the University hosted an Academic Symposium in the Science Center and John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum, composed of six panels on topics including "Challenging Inequality in the US: New Ideas and Approaches," "Revitalizing Democracy," and "Looking Ahead: The Future of the Academy."

Several experts on the inequality panel noted Gay's commitment to studying the topic throughout her academic career. Previously a Harvard professor of Government and African-American Studies, Gay next became the Dean of Social Science at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) in 2015 and Dean of FAS in 2018. She is also the founding chair of the FAS Inequality in America Initiative which launched in 2017.

In the panel "Looking Ahead: The Future of the Academy," panelists reaffirmed the importance of inclusivity and varied perspectives within the Harvard community. "When I imagine the University of the future, I hope it is one where moral formation will be at the heart of higher education, with more inclusivity, more access to more people who have never been part of this conversation," explained Matthew Potts, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church.

Considering Gay's hopes to maintain the exchange of these diverse perspectives, the panelists acknowledged the challenges Gay will inevitably face in response to the June Supreme

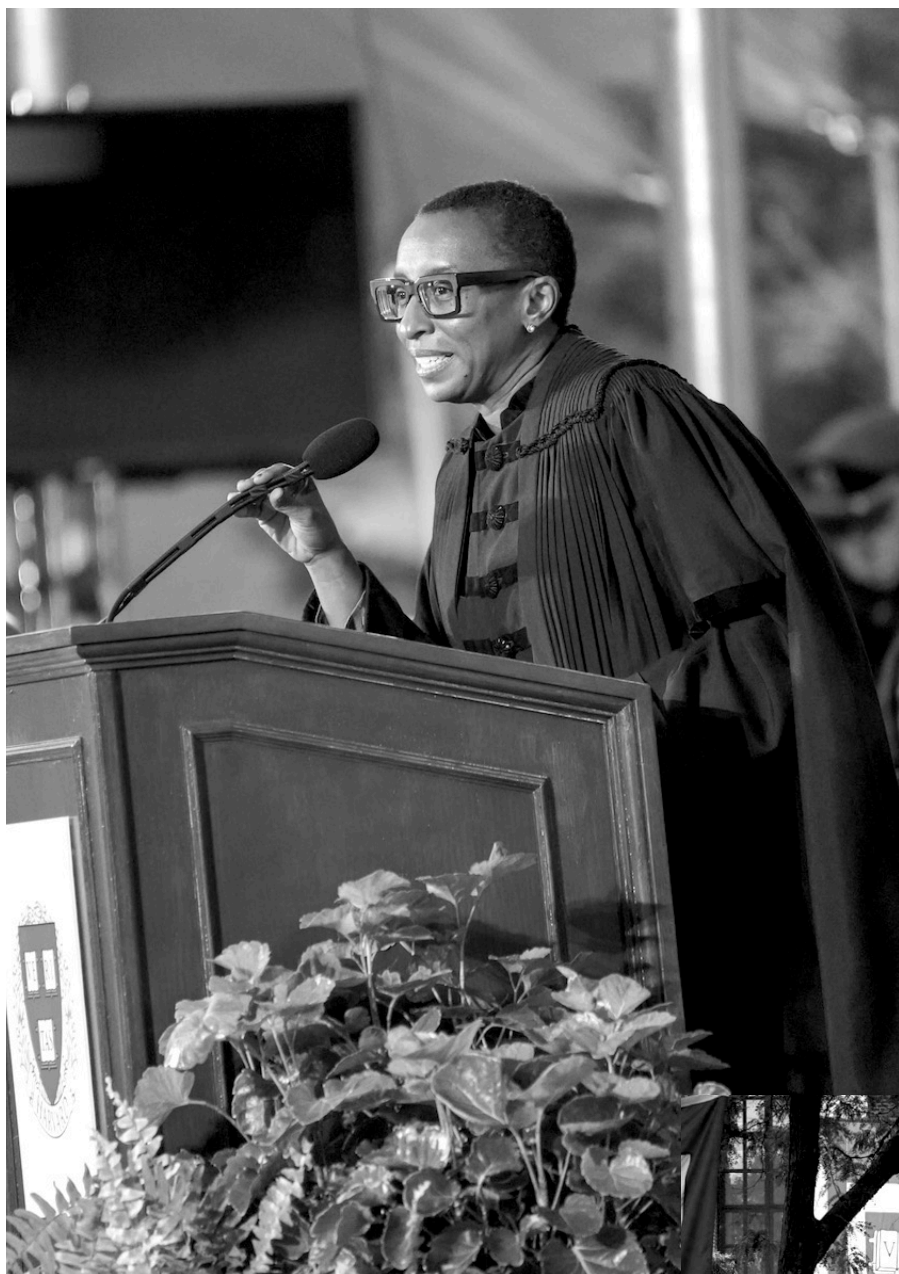
Court rejection of affirmative action in higher education. "The academy faces profound legal setbacks to access, including most recently in the Supreme Court decision to end affirmative action," said Durba Mitra, Richard B. Wolf Associate Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality. "In our present, we have had to reckon with the seeming paradox of the unfulfilled promise of higher education, and the reality of the academy's profound and painful inequality."

"Obviously, this is the most challenging issue that presents President Gay," Louis Menand, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Professor of English, added, referencing the Supreme Court ruling against affirmative action. Yet Gay did not fail to acknowledge the elephant in the room. "[Harvard has] a responsibility to create opportunity by identifying talent and promise wherever it resides, and bringing that talent to Harvard," she said. "We are still on a journey that began in earnest with President Conant to draw from a deeper pool of talent and provide our institution with the excellence it deserves and our diverse society with the leaders it needs and expects."

The ceremony began with a procession by the Harvard Band, followed by an opening anthem performed by renowned Cuban saxophonist Yosvany Terry. A series of greetings, addresses, and presentations composed the majority of Gay's inauguration, punctuated by music and dance interludes by the Harvard Opportunes and Madelyn Ho '08.







tunity to develop their talents and contribute their gifts,” she said.

Rodriguez, noting how Gay’s parents attended the City University of New York, offered a similar sentiment. “President Gay is a proponent of increased diversity in our campuses, as she has expressed her commitment to building an even more inclusive Harvard community,” he said.

Gay went on to address her background as a first-generation American in contrast to the experiences of those enslaved by the University at its founding. “My story is not their story. I am a daughter of Haitian immigrants to this country,” she said. “But our stories—and the stories of the many trailblazers between us—are linked by this insti-

tution’s long history of exclusion, and the long journey of resistance and resilience to overcome it.”

As Gay closed out her speech, she further emphasized the importance of diverse thought in an ever-polarizing world. “And so must we hold fast to our purpose in a dangerous and skeptical world,” she said. “Far from defending an ivory tower, we strive for a staircase open to all. An upward path with no board torn up. Not only for our students, but for the billions of people who will never set foot in Harvard Yard, yet whose lives may advance a step because of what we do.”

Following the inauguration ceremony, many Harvard students noted feeling proud of their new president and the diversity she brings to University leadership. “Claudine Gay’s inauguration means a lot to me because she’s the first Black woman president of the University,” Samantha Giles ’27 said. “Her presidency brings more representation in Harvard’s leadership, which I really appreciate.”

Ending the ceremony, Harvard Undergraduate Bhangra, a team performing a traditional Punjabi dance form, took the stage,

Speakers, including Senior Fellow of the Harvard Corporation Penny Pritzker ’81, Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey ’92, Chancellor of the City University of New York Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, and fourth-year at Harvard Medical School Natalie Sadlak, addressed attendees with great appreciation for Gay’s embodiment of a new and reformed institution. “President Gay represents a new vision for Harvard’s future,” declared Sadlak. “She herself embodies a blending of Harvard’s future and its past, and makes sure the legacy of the university and the promise of new perspectives.”

Healey praised Gay as an expert on diversity and inequality whose ascendancy will serve as a source of inspiration far beyond the University. “[Gay is] a leader whose own life tells us a story, a story of hope for young people whose communities have been marginalized, and a story for all of us about how much better our world can be if every person has the oppor-



enveloping the Harvard community with vibrant color and music while signaling attendees to depart Tercentenary Theatre for festivities in the Old Yard. Undeterred by the rain, the community continued to celebrate, viewing Gay’s inauguration not only as a historical moment but also as a step toward a brighter future for the University.

**LUCAS COHEN-D’ARBELOFF ’27 (LCOHENDARBELOFF@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND KAIA PATTERSON ’27 (KPATTERSON@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WISH THE SIDECHAT OBAMA RUMORS WERE TRUE.**

**IMAGES TAKEN BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER ’27**



# PARTY HARD, OR HARDLY A PARTY?

*International students shine some light—or throw some shade—on the Harvard party scene.*

The expectation: *Pitch Perfect*, *American Pie*, *Superbad*. Frat bros standing over kegs. Packed dorm parties. Loud American music. The reality: “kinda awkward,” “not enough dancing,” “why are people so stinky,” and “no more Pepas, please!”

Despite being warned by friends and family or social media that Cambridge party life wasn’t all that, and that Harvard workloads might not be the most conducive to a good time, most international students were underwhelmed upon arrival and surprised by just how different from back home it proved to be. Italian international Gemma Dean ’27 said about the Harvard party scene, “Even though I had low-ish expectations, it was still lower.”

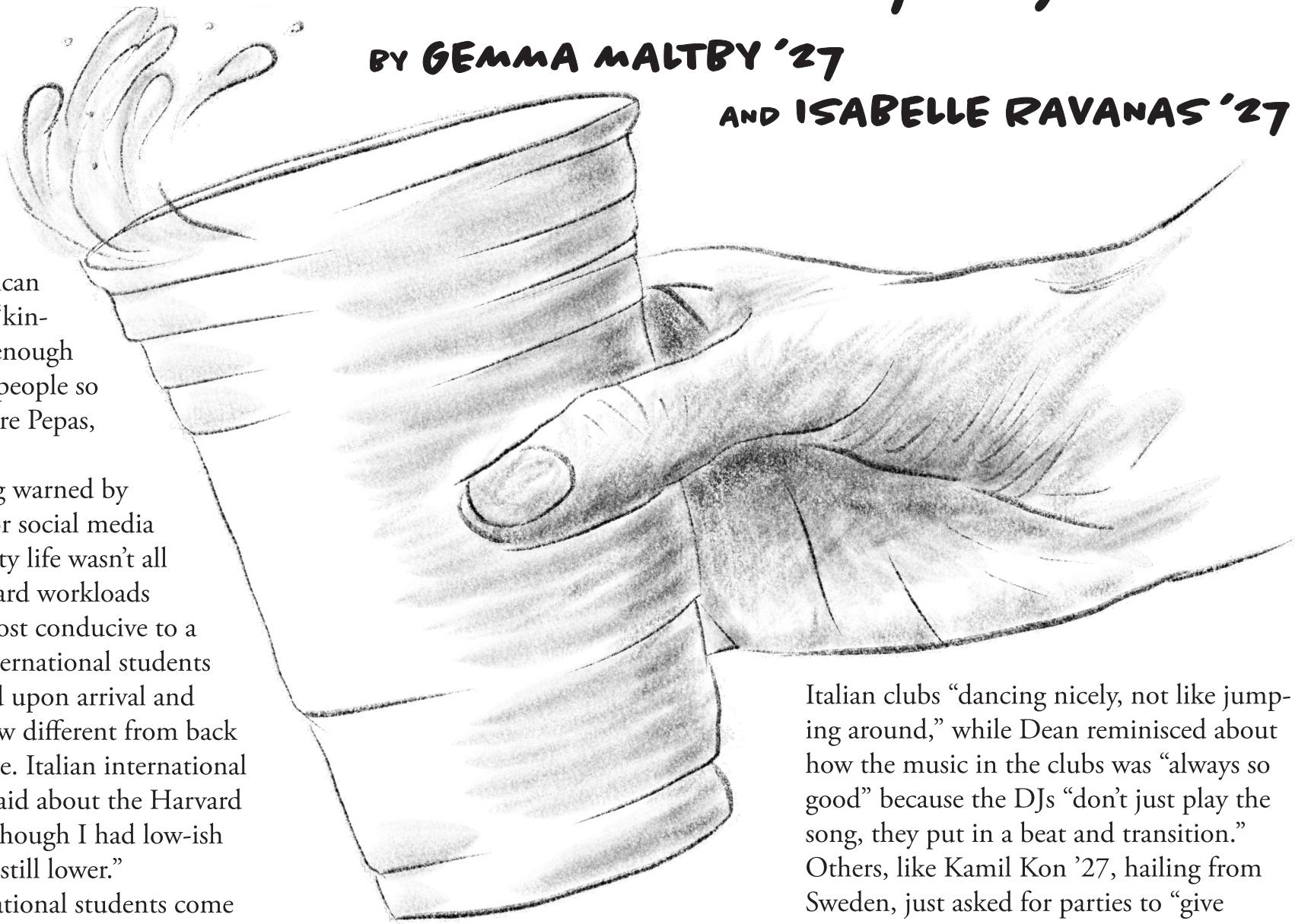
Many international students come from countries where the legal drinking age is 18, so coming to the U.S. has made them feel like children again. Teodor Malchev ’27, a Bulgarian international student, said, for the first time since he was 14, he “felt like a little boy that needed to hide from authorities.” Erik Dalaker ’27 described the change from being able to buy wine at the store in Norway to “getting moral lessons from my proctor about the dangers of alcohol” as a big shift.

These frustrations are amplified by the fact that the lower legal drinking ages abroad often lead to an even younger unofficial drinking age. In Italy, for example, the “drinking culture starts very young,” according to Gaia Negrini ’27, who explained that parents often play a role in “guid[ing] their kids through getting to know alcohol.” According to fellow Italian Matteo Cagliari ’27, starting younger means that “you get all the bad experiences out of the way, and you get to the point where you’re more educated.” Hailing from Hong Kong, Darcy Lin ’27 added, “It’s weird to come from a place where everyone knows their limits and have known them for a while to a space where people are beginning to experiment.”

In fact, most internationals were caught off guard by how new drinking was to some. Alexandre Philippe-Waysand ’27 said that compared to back

BY GEMMA MALTBY ’27

AND ISABELLE RAVANAS ’27



home in France, he wasn’t expecting “to see people drinking for the first time, not knowing their limits, and often therefore drinking a little too much.” That leads to parties like the one Malchev recently attended, which “ended because someone was just vomiting.” Malchev said, “That did happen to me when I was in Bulgaria, but just, like, when I was in 9th grade.”

Despite their apparent newfound fascination with alcohol, Americans do not seem as interested in the parties themselves. According to Malchev, people seem more concerned by questions like “how can I get to this party” and “how can I get to the next one” than staying for the “real experience” of the party. Whereas the internationals report partying from around midnight or 1 am to 4 am or 5 am, they noticed that Americans seemed to head home at around 1:30 am (at the latest). Timi Esan ’27, from the U.K., asked the relevant question, “Why are people so lazy here?”

Not that the experience at the parties is all that great. Some internationals, like Esan, enjoy the American music and say that “people actually dance and sing” at parties here—as opposed to in the U.K., where, he says, “people are generally more conservative” and “don’t want to show how they’re feeling.” Other international students, like Negrini, missed seeing people at

Italian clubs “dancing nicely, not like jumping around,” while Dean reminisced about how the music in the clubs was “always so good” because the DJs “don’t just play the song, they put in a beat and transition.” Others, like Kamil Kon ’27, hailing from Sweden, just asked for parties to “give [them] some Abba remixes.”

It’s not all negativity from the internationals, though. Cagliari ’27 admitted that he had “underestimated” Harvard and appreciated the fact that, “if you want to go out, you can.” Many internationals agreed that being in dorms instead of nightclubs cultivates a culture where partying is more about socializing and networking than anything else. Indeed, Hunter Haynes ’27, a New Zealander, explained that “there’s less social exclusion here if you’re not wanting to drink compared to back home.”

In any case, the party scene is not exactly what attracted most internationals to Harvard in the first place, so, for now, they are more than happy to enjoy the many other things the school has to offer. Nevertheless, many are cautiously optimistic about their future partying prospects. “I think it will all get better as we get older,” said Nicaraguan Alejandra Conrado ’27, “I think there’s still hope.” Hopefully, she won’t be disappointed.

GEMMA MALTBY ’27 (GMALTBY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND ISABELLE RAVANAS ’27 (ISABELLERAVANAS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MISSED AN INTERNATIONAL PARTY TO WRITE THIS ARTICLE.

GRAPHIC BY CANDACE GARDNER ’25



# GETTING IN: NOT THE HARDEST PART

Harvard students may not get frat flu, but imposter syndrome spreads like a virus.

BY EMMIE PALFREY '27 AND AVA REM '27

Why did I get into Harvard? It's the question that plagues every admitted high school senior and new Harvard first-year. Everyone remembers that fateful Ivy Day: every nerve in your body awake, hands shaking as you typed in your portal password, involuntarily screaming at the sight of confetti. But soon, the initial shock wears off, and you're left to wonder: *why me?*

We long believed that getting into a school like Harvard would make all our worries disappear, but it really only transforms them. Harvard undergraduates continue to experience unprecedented stress in the competitive landscape of academics and extracurricular clubs, in addition to the continuous need to prove one's worthiness for this school.

This impossibly high-achieving landscape can quickly leave new students feeling isolated, alone, and unworthy, a term psychologists have named *imposter syndrome*. Though it is not a clinical diagnosis, most professionals agree that it is a very real phenomenon that often prompts anxiety and stress, described by the American Psychological Association as a form of "intellectual self-doubt." At Harvard, this feels like not belonging, not deserving acceptance, or not measuring up to peers.

"I think initially when you get in and you first really experience the people that have also gotten in with you, you do feel a little bit of that imposter syndrome," said an anonymous undergraduate. "Like, 'what special thing did I

necessarily do to get in?' Because there are so many amazingly talented people here."

In general, Ivy League students can be more susceptible to high levels of stress. *College Magazine* named Harvard the most stressful college in the country, and *Surviving Ivy* claims Ivy League students can be up to three times more likely to experience anxiety and stress than the average college student. On a national level, all colleges are experiencing a mental health crisis, with over 73% of surveyed undergraduates having experienced a mental health crisis during their four years. Knowing that Harvard students are more likely than students from less competitive schools to experience behavioral health issues and that imposter syndrome is a common cause of anxiety, we began to wonder: *could this self-doubt be contributing to Harvard's high-stress norm?*

Our peers say yes. "I put a lot of stress on myself, like, mostly unnecessary stress," said one female first-year, "to like, kind of justify to myself that I deserve to be here." For new undergraduates, imposter syndrome can be a breeding ground for low self-esteem and, consequently, self-imposed stress.

Perhaps the institution contributes to these sentiments. The expectations, for some, just seem to climb higher and higher, as Harvard attracts high-profile individuals to campus events such as the recent inauguration of the University's new president, Claudine Gay. While students celebrated this joyous and monumental event, they also felt the pressure of sharing a space with household names. "I definitely feel imposter syndrome on this campus because Angela Bassett is

here right now," said Elyse Gonsalves '27, after hearing rumors of the actress's appearance on campus. Harvard's plethora of famous graduates and guests can make students feel like they have to live up to the Angela Bassetts of the world, despite still being young adults.

And it doesn't stop here—these stressors worm their way into students' extracurriculars, too. As most undergraduate students have come to realize from sharing meals with strangers in Annenberg and striking up conversations with classmates in lectures, everyone here at Harvard uniquely pursued their passions in high school. Many of our peers were the founders of their own non-profit organizations, acted as student body presidents, or traveled the world for community

service projects, all while juggling the responsibilities of being a teenager. It's clear that in the few weeks we have spent on campus, this ever-present desire to have a packed Google Calendar and commit to as many extracurricular activities as possible is the ever-present norm.

Considering the multiple academic and extracurricular fairs organized by the College and required meetings with Peer Advising Fellows (PAFs) or academic advisors, undergraduate students are expected to have a rudimentary understanding of the resources and club communities available for them to join. However, as many of our peers have stated, what is less well known upon arrival is how stressful applying, or "comping," for these clubs would be. "Finding out that, oh, you have to comp for these clubs and, like, put in a bunch of time before you were even in it was kinda daunting and I didn't expect it," said another female first-year.

Despite a selective comp or application process, undergraduate students are united by the desire to be part of a community here on campus—a home away from home to meet like-minded individuals and pursue meaningful passions. However, when that competitive club on campus doesn't offer you a second round interview, students become discouraged from putting themselves out there again in the future. "[I put in] a lot of time, a lot of effort," one female first-year noted. "[Rejection] is really, really disappointing."

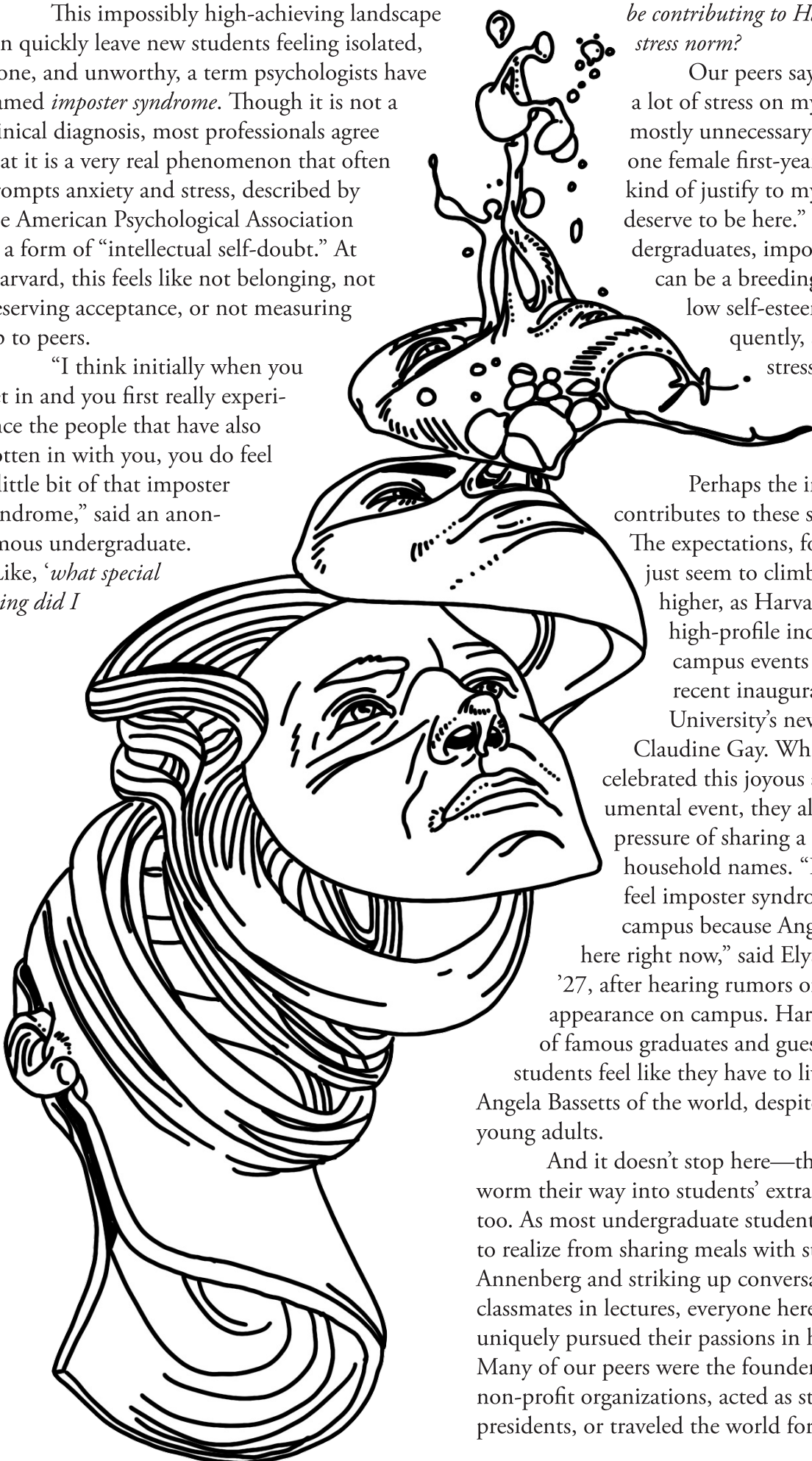
Fortunately, some students have conquered their imposter syndrome and are able to simply enjoy their time here. Wyatt Croog '27 explained, "You belong here for a reason, whatever that reason may be." Nigel Savage '27, relays to us his mom's favorite phrase: "No one else is better than you, but you're better than no one else." It's hard to imagine one student telling another that they don't belong, or don't deserve their acceptance. So why are we so needlessly harsh on ourselves?

The answer is, of course, that Harvard students are rigorous, and expect from themselves only greatness. It's what makes us academically successful. It's what drives us. But being so self-critical only makes the competitive environment more toxic. It is, therefore, our collective responsibility to expect less perfection and more compassion, from ourselves and from others.

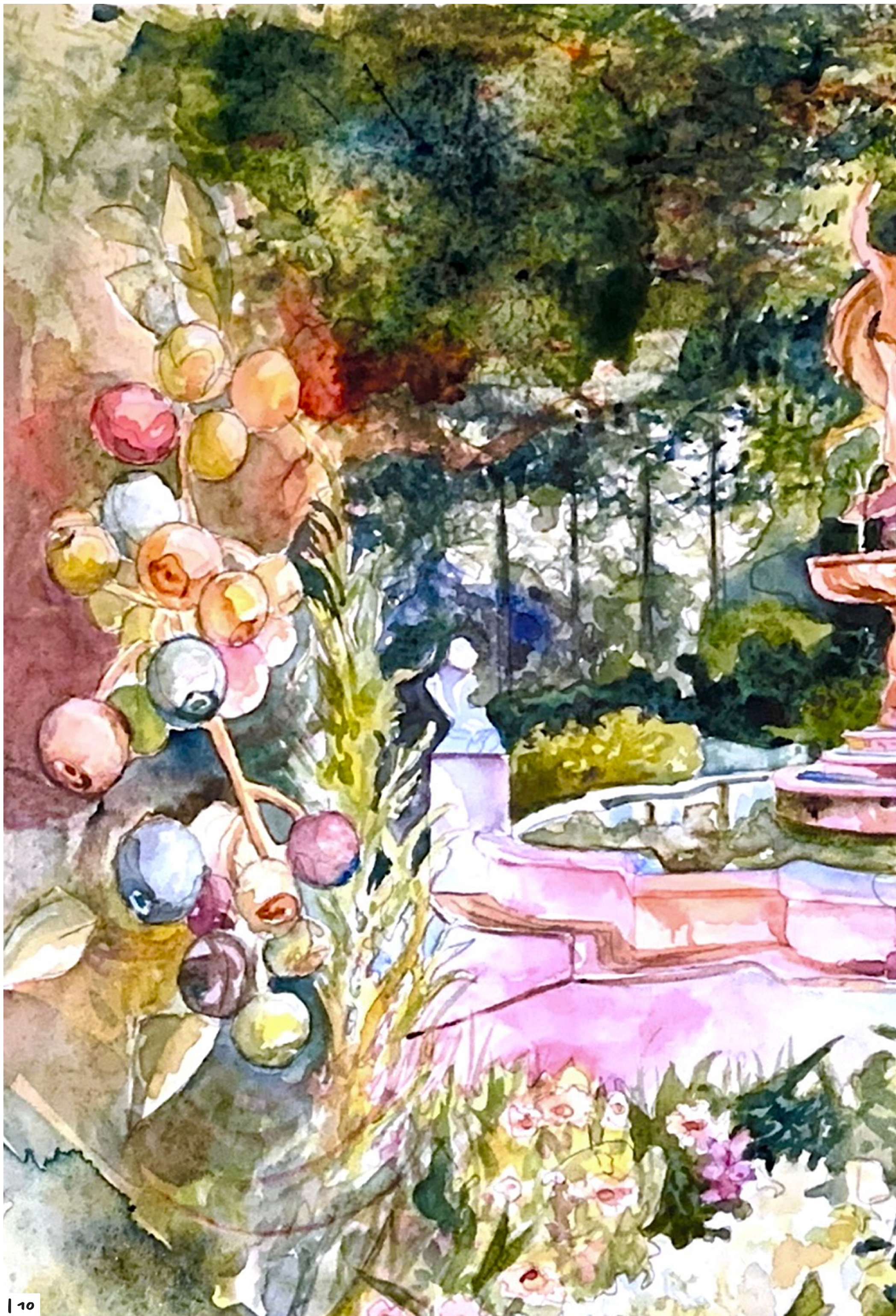
We encourage you to enjoy the process, as we will attempt to do for the next four years: to learn from our mistakes, support each other through the failures, and show courage and kindness (especially to ourselves) at every step.

**EMMIE PALFREY '27 (EPALFREY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS SAD NOT TO SEE ANGELA BASSETT IN THE YARD ON FRIDAY. AVA REM '27 (AVAREM@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FELT IMPOSTER SYNDROME AS SHE INTERVIEWED AWESOME UNDERGRADUATES FOR THIS ARTICLE.**

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26













# I AM MORE THAN MY SOB STORY

Students should not be pressured to exploit their pain in college applications.

BY RANIA JONES '27

I am haunted by a lineage of four words: You are your trauma.

My mom died a week into my senior year of high school. As I approached and navigated the chaos of the college admissions process, my whole world was fractured. Between drafts and drafts of varying personal statements, everyone around me seemed to know that the gaping grief-sized hole in my life was what colleges were looking for. I was expected to capitalize on this.

The concept of students centering their college essays on their personal trauma has been dubbed “trauma dumping.” Viral social media stories have popularized this essay-writing approach, where trauma essays are portrayed as the “make-or-break” factor in college applications.

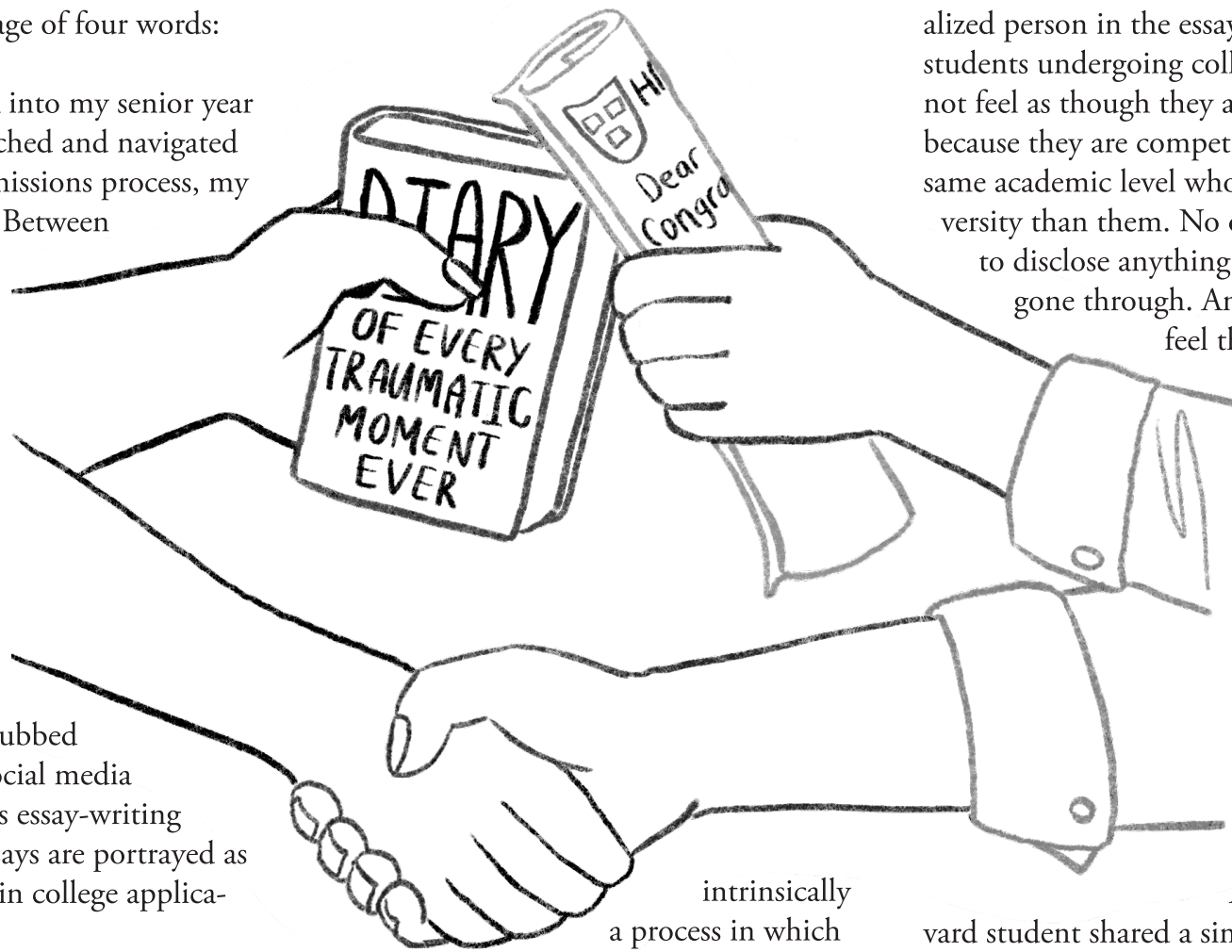
When students compare themselves to the other applicants, they rank themselves against their peers in a form of trauma Olympics. Turning one’s pain into a self-sales pitch should never be the way to win over an admissions officer. The personal essay *could* be meaningful for students if they actually felt that any topic was available to them—as I reflect on my own college application process, however, I’m left wondering, is capitalizing on and benefiting from personal trauma unethical? Or is it a “glass-half-full” way of looking at things?

Founder and CEO of the Krupnick Approach and current college consultant Dr. Joseph Krupnick '00 said, “The fundamental goal for getting into top schools is to differentiate yourself, to distinguish yourself, and to create your own hook ... People who have traumatic experiences or who have an uncharacteristic life, or other experiences, that are also unusual, feel pressure to write about those things, because they are very personal and unusual.”

The majority of college applications consist of test scores, GPAs, and class rankings—all factors that shrink our beings into data points. It’s no surprise that essays are often viewed as the only thing on a student’s application over which they feel they have control.

According to the College Board, colleges want “a unique perspective, strong writing, and an authentic voice,” from students in their application essay. Harvard Business Review says the Common App essay is “your chance to show schools who you are, what makes you tick, and why you stand out from the crowd.”

The college application process is “intrinsically an intrusive process,” according to Krupnick. “And it’s



intrinsically a process in which you’re telling people things that they have no right to know about. It’s kind of how the system seems to work now,” he explained.

The college essay should be a space for exploration and reflection where students can present what they care about and what makes them who they are. Yet, when students feel required to write about their adversity to stand out, the college essay allows for minimal amounts of meaningful self-reflection. This phenomenon narrows what applicants think is worth writing about, and more problematically, what makes them worth receiving the education they dream of.

When a Harvard junior who wished to remain anonymous was asked if they felt a pressure to write about their eating disorder, they said, “I felt like I was able to write about it, from not a place of it being a sad story, but of actually about something pretty incredible that I was able to overcome.” They continued to explain that our society normalizes trauma in a problematic way, detailing that “people to try to compete with others” about their trauma.

Similarly, Abigail Mack '25 went viral on TikTok after posting about her “Letter-S” essay about the loss of a parent. Stories like Mack’s contribute to the belief that in order to be a competitive college applicant, not only must students have endured trauma—they also must put it on display to be analyzed by admissions officers.

The Supreme Court’s decision to overturn race-based affirmative action puts an even harsher burden on applicants’ essays. Colleges no longer can consider the systems of inequity that may affect students of color, but individuals can include their experience as a margin-

alized person in the essay. Hopefully, future students undergoing college admissions will not feel as though they are at a disadvantage because they are competing with kids on the same academic level who have faced more adversity than them. No one should feel forced to disclose anything that they may have gone through. And students who do not

feel they have experienced much adversity or hardship should be grateful, not bitter, and write about any of the other things that make them who they are.

Exploiting painful and traumatic moments in your life to “sell yourself” to a college will never work in your favor.

An anonymous Harvard student shared a similar sentiment—“I think that like one of the things that my college counselor was like really trying to drive home was like ‘you can’t write a sob story, because they’re just going to read it and feel bad for you. Like there has to be, like a so-what, like what did it do to you, like why?’” she said.

Never in the process of writing my college essays did I ask myself if writing about my mother’s death would give me admission clout. I knew what I went through was terrible and to overcome those challenges was remarkable, but a little bit of me will always wonder if Harvard thought my trauma was all I had to offer. Is who I am outside of my trauma still enough for Harvard, or were they just looking for a slap on the back for saving me from my circumstances?

Trauma-induced people should lean on the conflicts of their life only in authentic ways. I wrote about the most intimate moments of my life only because I know that I am not defined by my grief. Instead, it has helped shape who I am. I would encourage those who feel like their stories were written in tragedy to rethink writing about their trauma. You don’t want to become an applicant that colleges pity, nor will people value more if they can only sympathize with you. The admissions officer will not be just focusing on what happened, but will take into consideration what’s happening next, or what’s happening now.

\*Quotes have been adjusted to account for filler words and grammatical correctness.

**RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS SHAMELESSLY PUBLISHED HER TRAUMATIC COLLEGE ESSAYS FOR PUBLIC READING.**

**GRAPHIC BY OLIVIA PARK '27**



# HARVARD'S POISONED HEART

## Inside Harvard Square's multi-decade architectural identity crisis.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND JONAH KARAFIOL '26

During our time serving as archivists for the *Independent*, we have had the opportunity to read and reflect on many past pieces. The Indy continues to serve as a place where counterculture opinions are not only accepted, but encouraged. While there are no longer half-page advertisements, entire sections of jokes, or numerous local news stories, the spirit of Indy articles have been largely preserved. Some of our favorite articles from the 2000s issues are segments by “Masked Marvel” in which Masked Marvel provides input on Harvard Athletics and gives predictions for important upcoming games, similar to our current Gambling Column.

For the “Unearthed” issue, we dug up two stories from 2000 focusing on Cambridge’s evolving commercial landscape. We wanted to find something that tackled one of the central issues of Harvard right now: the dying local environment. The articles highlighted how large chains have driven small local businesses out of Harvard Square, altering the architectural and cultural landscape of our campus.

Contributing writer Charles Sullivan described the changing atmosphere in his 2000 article titled “The Heart of the Matter.” “Thirty years ago, West Cambridge families came to Brattle Square to shop at an A&P supermarket, a Woolworth’s 5 and 10, three department stores, and numerous small retailers and services,” he wrote. But the Cambridge that Sullivan describes—one where families shop for their everyday needs—is disappearing rapidly. Instead, we have banks, chain restaurants, and fast fashion.

In the same 2000 issue, Beth Holt describes a “mall-envy [that] has apparently taken over Mass Ave in the form of Au Bon Pain, Baskin-Robbins, PacSun, and Abercrombie.” Harvard Square has continued this trend of ousting local businesses in favor of big chains such as Anthropologie, Starbucks, and IHOP. While storefront turnover

is inevitable, financial interest can easily undermine the Square’s identity, as authentic storefronts are being replaced with generic, run-of-the-mill shops.

Even Harvard’s dorms contribute to the Square’s artificial atmosphere. Take Winthrop, for instance: its modern white exterior feels out of place amongst the other red-brick river houses. Its stairwells, hallways, and dining hall belong in a hotel rather

every other street. The unorthodox winding streets are riddled with bike lanes that have turned Brattle Street from the “King’s Highway” to something out of *Ready Player One*. When you walk through the Square today, you just as easily could be in any other major city.

Harvard Square is having an architectural identity crisis; with every additional chain, it inches one step closer to looking like a strip mall. The quality of the stores is of little concern. Rather, the problem is that the world’s only Curious George store was torn down to house the 21st Starbucks within a 2.5-mile radius. Harvard and its students should protect the antique atmosphere of the Square that is a product of its rich history.

It’s easy to think that as students, we are helpless spectators to the changes occurring in front of our eyes. As patrons of the Square, however, our collective dollars play a large role in Harvard Square’s ecosystem. By being selective with where we spend our money, we have the power to defend Cambridge’s iconic look and culture. While ordering Starbucks and Shake Shack can be slightly more convenient and less expensive, the extra effort goes a long way in preserving Harvard Square’s authenticity.

As illustrated in our article titled “Don’t Go Here, Go Here...”, Harvard Square is home to many hidden

gems. Students should not let the big glass panes, shiny neon signs, and sleek modern designs prevent them from exploring every nook and cranny that Harvard has to offer. Instead, walk the streets of the Square, spend time outside, and engage with the lesser-known corners.

LUKE WAGNER (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND JONAH KARAFIOL (JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITE FORUM FOR THE INDEPENDENT.

IMAGES COURTESY OF JAMES VASEFF  
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than in a Harvard house. While many of the dorms are in dire need of renovations, they do not have to come at the cost of Harvard’s style. When Claverly Hall was renovated, Harvard managed to keep elements of its past such as the mahogany wood stairs and cozy offices.

It’s not just Harvard dorms that are losing their personality. Harvard Square looks nothing like it did even ten years ago. The unique crimson-colored brick sidewalks once flowed through the heart of the Square, but today, green construction fences clog every corner and scaffolding blockades





## First Month Relationships: Risky or Risqué?

BY HAN NGUYEN '27

Each year, first-years swarm campus with curiosity, excitement, and nervousness. We go about orientation week and meet an overwhelming number of new people. Despite the sea of unfamiliarity, many of us find ourselves gravitating towards one person—someone who draws us in immediately, someone who we feel like we could talk to forever.

Do we pursue the relationship further and see where it can take us? Seeking first month attractions may bloom into something greater, but more often than not, they present challenges.

Noah Plattner '27 found himself confronted with this dilemma when he was asked out on the second day of college. "It was maybe a bit too early, honestly, to go into a relationship," Plattner said. "The verdict is not out yet. Maybe it's gonna be enriching. So far, I like it. It's nice to have someone to talk to. It's nice to have someone to go to the river with. I feel optimistic."

However, things do not always work out this well. Victor Bowker '27 faced a similar situation, with different results. "I had a run-in with someone and I was unclear on the dynamic of what was desired." Bowker describes how this event reminded him that in a place like Harvard, in the throes of social pressure, it can be difficult to quickly dive into a worthwhile relationship. Harvard's fast-paced environment can be physically and emotionally taxing; with hours allocated to p-sets, sports, and extracurriculars, there is little time left for these initial attractions.

The first month of college feels like the first episodes of a new life. There are still hundreds of people we have not met. Exclusivity and commitment to one person can hinder new relationships and divert attention from the essential pursuits of academics and finding one's passions. "I want to explore other avenues," said

Bowker. "It is important to make friends and establish new connections, but at the same time, this is a big moment of growth for all of us. It has to be like an individual moment of growth, because we can't become dependent on people."

Moreover, the inevitable ups and downs of young relationships can introduce unnecessary stress and drama into an already challenging phase of life. Rather than being a source of stability and support, these relationships can exacerbate the emotional rollercoaster that is often synonymous with the first year of college.

On the other hand, first-year relationships, and in this case, first-month relationships can bring a host of wonderful outcomes. During a challenging transition into college life, these early connections can be catalysts for personal growth and self-discovery. First-year relationships, instead of being a distraction, may become a classroom for life's most essential lessons. "A relationship is essentially like a fifth course you're taking, so you're learning a lot," said Plattner. Despite the additional work, it can be a rewarding challenge that doesn't need approval from the dean.

First-year students gave their own suggestions on how to maintain a secure and stable relationship. Elizabeth Norris '27 said, "It's really important to form authentic and trustworthy connections before getting into a relationship." Modern-day connectivity is more concerned with surface-level attractions than genuine connections. When it comes to other people, it is easy to prioritize image over substance—focusing on one's facade over getting to know the real person. Feelings of loneliness constantly arise despite familiarity with thousands of people.

The first months of college are all about first impressions. Because of this, it can be difficult to form authentic connections until students settle in and feel comfortable. Nigel Savage '27 encourages

us to "look for someone who would be your friend if they were not your significant other." Beyond the romantic attraction, a strong foundation of friendship provides a robust framework for a lasting and fulfilling relationship. When your partner is also your friend, your shared interests, values, and understanding of each others' personalities create a sense of comfort and trust that forms the bedrock of a healthy partnership.

Along with trust, "communication is huge. As long as you are on the same page about everything or are at least open to communicating with the other person, then do what you want" advised Cameron Reckard '27. Transparency plays a vital role in building the strong foundation of intimacy. For a relationship to work out, effective communication becomes the key to resolving issues constructively, fostering compromise, and preventing resentment from festering.

Ultimately, time holds the answer. So many of us go into college eager to see our social lives blossom, but hurrying into relationships is risky. Imagine the people you will meet in future classes and clubs, and know that relationships are not set in stone—they are polished with time.

You have the next four years to find your people; this is just the beginning. However, it's up to you. With benefits like emotional support, companionship, and some late night walks to the river, who's to say pulling the trigger is wrong? Whether you decide to commit now or hold off, there is not one ideal way to go about college. Some may find themselves connecting immediately with someone special, while others may choose to fly solo. Love at first sight or slow-burn: the choice is yours.

HAN NGUYEN '27 (HANNGUYEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WENT INTO COLLEGE WITH A BOYFRIEND.

GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26



# EMPOWERING & ACCESSIBLE: THE CLIMATE FRESK WORKSHOP

*The discussion surrounding the causes and consequences of man-made climate change has made its way to Harvard's campus.*

BY ANA-MARA LEPPINK '27

Considering the dull, repetitive way in which the threats of climate change are often presented in academic settings, it should be no surprise that many students are tired and disillusioned by the climate change crisis. Professors and textbooks often portray climate change as either unfathomably large or highly complex, and this can drain our motivation to address it, effectively leaving us paralyzed. It can be easy to think, as I have sometimes done, that it is already far too late for us to escape climate change's most daunting effects. However, there might be a way of educating people about this disheartening yet incredibly urgent topic without engendering that numbing feeling of despair as a byproduct—and it seems almost too easy.

Too many social media-driven climate mitigation strategies focus on individual rather than collective action; surely everyone has been reminded countless times of the need to turn off unnecessary lights, reduce the length of showers, and recycle our waste. While such measures are certainly important, their impact is simply not large enough, considering the magnitude of the crisis. Other times our calls for action tend to gravitate towards two central bodies who harbor the power to enforce solutions that can help halt or reverse the planet's warming: politicians and scientists. We lose sight of the fact that if a solution is going to be effective, it requires everyone's (including our civilians') participation.

Mauro Morabito, the head Teaching Fellow of GenEd 1094: "Confronting Climate Change: A Foundation in Science, Technology and Policy," facilitated a Climate Fresk workshop on September 26th and 29th in Mather House with the intention of addressing this all-too-common issue of students feeling out of touch with climate change. The movement aims to equip participants with knowledge of the fundamental science underlying climate change, a feeling of empowerment, and a desire to take action against it. Since the organization's founding in 2015, over one million participants in 130 countries have enrolled in Climate Fresk workshops, hoping to enhance their understanding of climate change's causes and consequences and subsequently discuss potential mitigation strategies.

Fifteen participants, including myself, were divided between two tables equipped with



colored markers and post-it notes reminiscent of kindergarten art activities. The workshop comprised three stages: a construction of a "fresco" to display climate change's timeline (hence the organization's name), a verbal reflection, and a session to brainstorm tangible solutions. The assembly of the fresco allowed participants to break climate change into a more digestible topic, by illustrating its causes and consequences.

My group's fresco resembled a spider diagram, with interlocking colorful arrows connecting many factors of climate change together.

Seeing the causes of climate change in front of us broke down this complex issue into more digestible pieces of information. People were able to clarify otherwise cryptic scientific concepts such as ocean acidification and radiative forcing to unfamiliar ears. Our different academic backgrounds were an asset: I was able to use knowledge from Life Sciences 1a to explain how carbonic acid dissociation

leads to a drop in the ocean's pH, while a participant working in the medical industry outlined the correlation between organismic habitat loss and human health.

By the time the climate frescos were completed and admired, a true sense of community had permeated the room. It was clear to me that the group of strangers that had nervously entered a couple of hours ago had managed to find commonality in their shared concern for the planet.

During the second stage of Climate Fresk, we sat in a circle

and had the chance to discuss our emotional reactions to the previous activity. People shared their fears regarding the future of the Earth, personal stories of migration due to precarious climate situations, and doubts about wanting to have children forced to bear the burden of our choices.

The third and final stage of Climate Fresk consisted of an open discussion about potential solutions we could adopt to reach the goal of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from the 2015 Paris Agreement: restricting the global temperature rise to two degrees Celsius. The workshop's

facilitator, Morabito, explained that one way to achieve this would be to reduce everyone's carbon emissions to 2 gigatonnes a year. Currently, Americans emit 16 gigatonnes of carbon a year on average.

In speculating possible methods to approach this goal, we discussed solutions like clean energy production, reduced meat consumption, and engineering endeavors like manually filling the atmosphere with cooling aerosols. "[I wanted to] reinforce my knowledge about climate change in a setting other than the classroom," said Oliver Song '27. Like many of the other participants, he was "very satisfied" with what he got out of the experience. "[The] opportunity to communicate with others with the workshop's content contributed very positively [to my experience]," Song said.

Climate Fresk portrayed the dimensions of climate change in a way that I had never experienced. By visually mapping out its catalysts as well as understanding the immediate consequences, I gained an understanding of the looming challenge in a way that actually seemed possible. If there is ever an opportunity for you to complete Climate Fresk, take it—it is an experience you will not regret.

**ANA-MARA LEPPINK '27 (ALEPPINK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) INDULGED IN TOO MANY OF THE VEGAN COOKIES THAT WERE SERVED AT THE WORKSHOP.**

IMAGES TAKEN BY JENNY JIA '27





# THE SAG-AFTRA STRIKE

## Student Actors and Filmmakers Hit Hard.

BY KYA BROOKS '25

■ For a lot of people, this is their full-time job.

This is their career. And to have it leaked that one of the studio executives said, 'We're going to make them strike until they start losing their housing,'...I think it's just absolutely mind-blowing," said sophomore actress Kathleen Benson '26.

Benson stars as the lead actress in *Teenage Vampire 3*, shot by prominent filmmaker Robert Rodriguez. While the movie was positioned to debut this fall, a turbulent summer of discontent that rocked Hollywood changed these plans.

Since July 14th, for the first time in 63 years, the Screen Actors Guild and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) and Writers Guild of America (WGA) have been on strike together to advocate for better pay and working conditions. Former SAG president Ronald Reagan, in an attempt to demand fair compensation, led the last double strike in 1960. When major media companies broke off ongoing labor negotiations this summer, writers and actors united against the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP).

"[The double strike] hasn't happened in decades," said sophomore Saara Chaudry '26, four-time Canadian Screen Award winner and ACTRA Award winner. "So to navigate it now is something we're all adjusting to, and I think it's just a group effort. You know, we lean on each other for support and make do with what we can right now."

Kathleen Benson was interning at Heyday Films in Los Angeles this past summer, hoping to attend auditions on the side. "There was one point when I was working there and there were only like five things in the entire city being shot. Five new projects, which is unheard of. Normally, there's hundreds going on all the time."

Instead, Benson took to the picket line in solidarity with fellow creatives. Organizers used fun themes such as Disney princesses or *Bridgerton* characters to boost morale each day. "For people who are striking every single day for months on end, that's super monotonous and really tiring work, especially in the middle of the summer," Benson explained. "So having themes, having music—all of that stuff really helped to keep the energy going."

She continued, "It almost felt like a block party ... But I think that if we're going to be in this miserable position of getting shit pay, and the studios just absolutely being overrun with greed...I think the spirit I felt being there was like, 'This is a very shitty situation, but we're going to make the best of it' ... Because ultimately, we know that [the studios] need us. We are the heart of this industry."

Now, Benson is uncertain about the timeline for her film release. Because *Teenage Vampire 3* is an independent film, promotion is still allowed. She explained that, in addition to a theatrical premiere in a chain of Alamo Drafthouses across South Texas, the film will be sold to distributors such as Hulu and Peacock. Yet once these companies own her film, because they are members of AMPTP, promotions will violate strike guidelines. Benson hopes the release date will be pushed back until the strike ends.

"Especially for indie movies like mine that have independent financing, we want to be able to promote it. Especially if it's releasing [video-on-demand], [promotions are] the way that we get people to watch it," she explained. "A lot



KATHLEEN BENSON '26

of these decisions aren't up to me, but it would be very sad to not be able to promote it."

"It's about what's fair and what's equal," Chaudry echoed. "For years, performers have been struggling to put food on the table for their families. And when employers have been making billions of revenue off of the work and the labor of SAG-AFTRA members, it's hard to wrap your head around the fact that they haven't been able to share in that success," she noted.

Chaudry is best recognized for her starring roles in *The Breadwinner* (2018), executive produced by Angelina Jolie, and *The Muppets Mayhem* (2023). The latter premiered during the WGA strike. The actors completed their press tour, but when SAG-AFTRA began striking as well, it barred them from conducting further interviews.

"I definitely have to think twice about what I'm posting on social media. If I'm thinking about posting a summer photo dump, I'm making sure, 'Oh, let me make sure I'm not posting any pictures from the show or where I air,' if there's anything that could be seen as promotion. Just to make sure I'm 100% standing in solidarity with other SAG-AFTRA members and with SAG-AFTRA in general," she said.

Chaudry is a member of ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) as well as SAG-AFTRA. As a dual cardholder, she has advocated for greater awareness about the strike among fellow Canadians. "It's definitely a balance for sure, but it's because I do belong to both ACTRA and SAG-AFTRA. It's interesting to see how conversations being held on this side of the border are different in comparison to what's going on down south," Chaudry said, in regard to the lack of protests occurring in Canada.





As a first-year student, her acting and promotion was often a full-time job, demanding frequent flights to New York and Los Angeles. Yet her current year looks much different. “As a student, it’s almost a blessing in disguise, because I have some time to really focus on my academics right now... I think I’m lucky to be one of the SAG-AFTRA members that has a backup right now or has something else that they can be putting their energy into, whereas a lot of other people are struggling,” she noted.

Anthony Houhoulis, who is currently obtaining his master’s degree in museology and art forgery prevention, is an independent filmmaker who writes and directs short films. He made his theatrical directorial debut with the short film *128 Years* (2019), which premiered at the Downtown Independent Cinema in Los Angeles. After a limited theatrical release, the film became available for worldwide streaming on Amazon Prime Video.

Although Houhoulis’s independent projects are exempt from the strike, union and non-union actors still constantly fear public backlash. He filmed the first season of his television series this summer using non-union actors. “It’s affecting everyone. The SAG [actors] obviously it’s affecting, but even the non-union actors,” he explained, referencing the actors in his film. “Even though they technically get a pass, they don’t want to engage in ‘scabby’ behavior and then not be able to get in [to the SAG-AFTRA union] once the strike is over,” he said.

Houhoulis cannot take his television series to festivals in search of a buyer. Major streamer studios who might buy independent projects all belong to AMPTP, making distribution and promotion impossible. “You can make your movie as an indie. Good luck getting it seen anywhere because [you’re not allowed] to put it on [streaming services]. Because effectively, what good is the strike if you’re just going to go around it?”

Houhoulis names piracy as the original sin that created the streaming economy, which pays creatives very little in residuals and is another factor that led to the strike. “The



**ANTHONY HOUHOULIS**

general public, they want the movies for free, and they also want the creatives to be paid a fair sum. If you’re not paying a fair price for the movie, it isn’t enough money to pay the creators. Everyone can blame the studio until they’re blue in the face. If we don’t have a viable business model, we don’t have a way to pay creators. This comes down to what’s the best way to coax people away from piracy. Is it streaming? Is it just shoving commercials down their throat hoping enough watch it?”

Sophomore Wesley Wang ’26, another filmmaker, experienced a career breakthrough during the strike. He wrote and directed the short film *Nothing, Except Everything* (2023), produced by Scott Aharoni and starring renowned actors David Mazouz (*Gotham*) and Lily Chee (*Daredevil*). His film premiered and won a Grand Jury Prize at the Oscar-qualifying

Indy Shorts International Film Festival.

Strike guidelines did not prohibit Mazouz and Chee from attending the film festival or posting on social media about the film, yet they still declined to do either. Wang explained, “Their agents were like, ‘[the strike is] still more of a social thing at this point rather than legal.’ [The actors] want to show that they’re supporting the strike.”

The success of *Nothing, Except Everything* gained attention from publications such as *Variety* and *MovieMaker*. This newfound credibility allowed Wang to write and direct his upcoming horror short film *you are seen.*, which follows influencers on a Hamptons trip who are terrorized by a stalker. While it is an independent film, he used non-union actors to be safe.

On September 29th, *Nothing, Except Everything* premiered on YouTube. Mazouz and Chee promoted the release on social media, noting that the film is not a struck project and stating their support for the strike. Regarding the strike, Wang reflected, “It’s tough. For a lot of people I know personally. It’s just unfortunate. I don’t know what to say.”

While the strike has heavily impacted student filmmakers and actors, they remain committed to their craft. There is a feeling of optimism that persists, reminding everyone that the 2023 SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikes have the potential to rewrite Hollywood history. Despite difficulties, actors and writers are confident that history will side with labor.

*Author’s Note: As of September 26th, the WGA strike has since ended.*

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**WESLEY WANG ’26**



# A SLICE OF BREAD, A DILL PICKLE, AND A GRAPE.

How the TikTok trend “Girl Dinner” is both feminist and anti-feminist.

BY ELLIE TUNNELL '27 AND LAUREN BARAKETT '27

We're tired, we're hungry, and we want food. To respond to these classic urges, female social media creators artistically craft their combination of leftover chicken, carrots, and bread and posting it on TikTok under #girl dinner.

The Girl Dinner trend, in showcasing nontraditional and arguably incoherent dinners, has unveiled a fine line between promoting disordered eating and embracing alternative modes of femininity.

Though not its original intention, “Girl Dinner” has freed women from the responsibility of being designated dinner-makers. Whether it's marketing peanut butter and chicken wings or Mac and Cheese and dino nuggets, the trend has normalized eating intuitively to one's desire.

TikTok influencer Olivia Maher coined the phrase “Girl Dinner”—her original video posted in May of 2023 went viral with upwards of 1.5 million views. After Maher's video was posted, other creators showed off their take on the trend causing the hashtag to begin to revolve around women posting on TikTok showing off their uncoordinated meals and celebrating the joy of snacking.

The trend has also shed light on an ongoing battle between young girls and their food: it can easily glamorize eating unbalanced, non-nutritious meals, which can be detrimental to an individual's physical health and relationship with what they eat.

Moreover, creators who are using the hashtag to uplift women by showing their lazy dinners, showing that femininity doesn't require one to be constantly put together, are invalidated by others who are using the trend with more superficial motives.

With 5.9 million followers on TikTok, influencer Alix Earle showed off her popcorn dinner drizzled with marinara sauce. Negative comments flooded the video; one commenter, @adotdrillz, said, “This is sad I feel bad for you I hope you get sum food,” and another, @lex1luvyou, stated, “How in my anorexic life did I NEVER THINK TO SAUCE POP.”

Even though Earle—in posting a video of popcorn for dinner—may consider her content to be simply relatable, similar videos can easily encourage disordered eating. This is harmful in a world where eating disorders affect 9% of the population, and 75% of those impacted by Anorexia Nervosa identify as female.

Sophomore Matt Travaglini '25, a lifestyle YouTube creator,

says, “If someone had eating issues, per se, they would do the trend in a way to validate their unhealthy eating trends for themselves.” Young, malleable minds scroll through their TikTok feeds daily, consuming thousands of videos tailored to their exact algorithms. In an attempt to emulate influencers such as Earle's lives, impressionable viewers may subconsciously seek to replicate her unorthodox dinner regimen.

Clara Rhoysan '27, the founder of Dear Me, a non-profit centered around body positivity, says, “I don't love when people,

entire trend does not contribute to disordered eating and body image issues. On the other side, TikToker Isa Kristen posted a video of her Girl Dinner, which consisted of chicken legs, peanut butter on crackers, and a protein smoothie. She remarked that her take on Girl Dinner consisted of protein, fat, and carbs, comprising a full, healthy meal. Olivia Zhang '27, who has 57,000 followers on TikTok, said, “I personally think [Girl Dinner] is just a fun trend. I feel like it's a great way to be natural and authentic about how our meals sometimes look, especially as students.”\*

In encouraging women to take agency over their meals, the hashtag has also diverged into a positive, feminist trend, allowing women to embrace authenticity in their eating habits. Nothing is more gratifying to a busy girl than indulging in a pile of low-effort, chaotic, and fulfilling snacks at the end of a long day, and knowing thousands of other girls are out there doing the same thing.

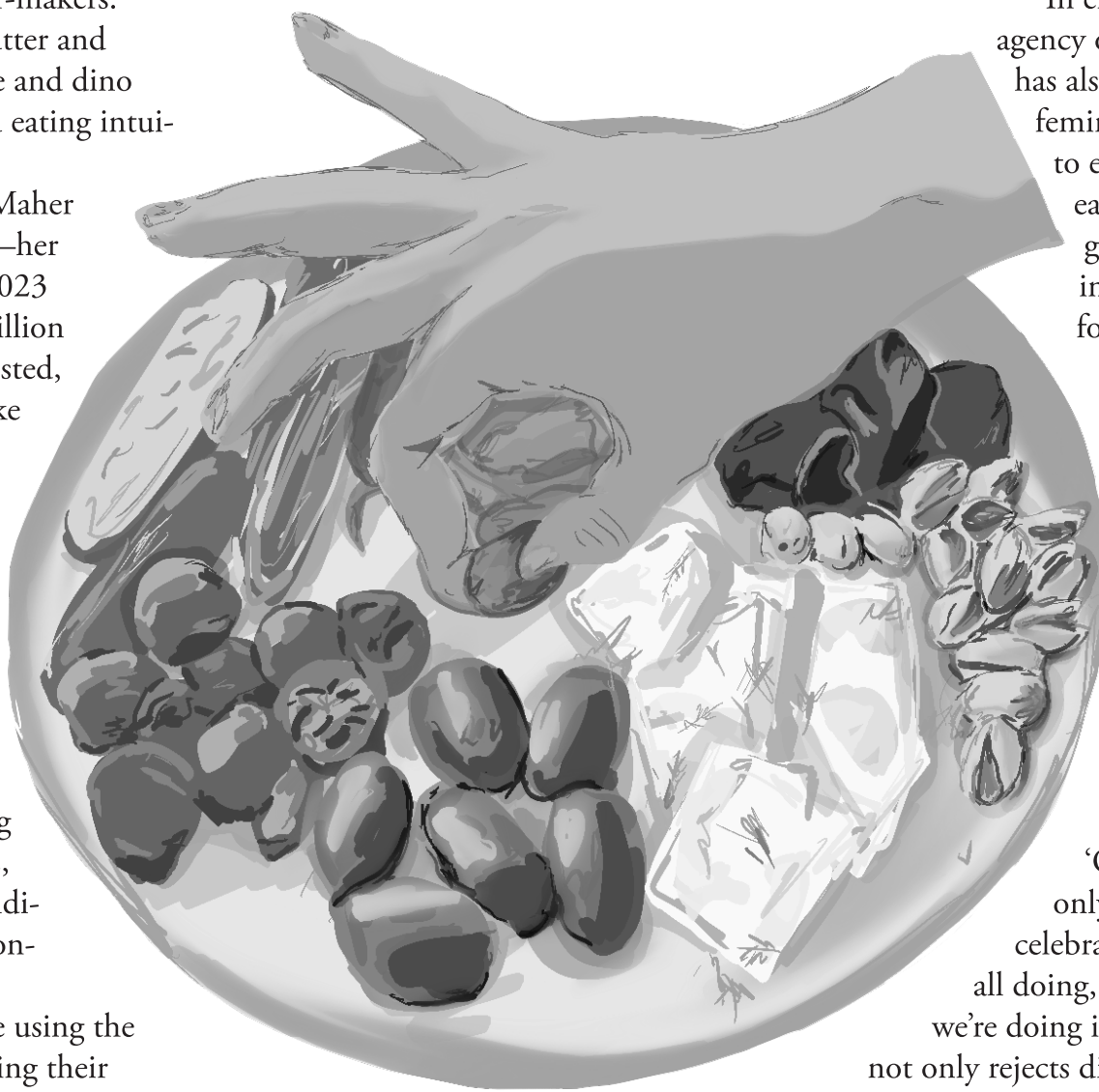
In an interview with The New York Times, Alana Lavery, a London-based content creator, proved her allegiance to the trend, saying, “There was this feeling of, ‘Oh my God, I'm not the only one ... I love anything that celebrates something women are all doing, but we don't all know that we're doing it.’” In her eyes, Girl Dinner not only rejects diet culture and the rigid expectations of how one should eat but also fulfills women with peace and enjoyment in their food.

In addition to Girl Dinners, the term “girl” is now being used to describe daily affairs such as “girl money, girl bathroom, or girl math.” The adjective communicates a whole range of contexts that typically only female-identifying people can understand. In taking pride in a wide range of female experiences, the term has forged a new identity for women, one that allows them to embrace and reinvent femininity.

*\*Quotes have been adjusted to account for filler words and grammatical correctness.*

**LAUREN BARAKETT '27 (LAURENBARAKETT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND ELLIE TUNNELL '27 (ELLIE\_TUNNELL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ATE A GIRL DINNER WHILE WRITING THIS ARTICLE.**

**GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26**



especially fitness influencers who have it as their entire job to look a certain way, are promoting the lifestyles and eating styles that they have, because young girls don't need that.”

While TikTok users generally lack scientific evidence behind their judgmental comments, nutritionists also wonder if this trend is doing more harm than good and, more critically, if Girl Dinner is another case of problematic diet culture plaguing our feeds.

Registered dietitian Mackenzie Burgess commented on the slippery slope of the trend, providing in a July 2023 Health article that “Promoting [these meals] as Girl Dinner gives the impression that women need to have smaller portions or a special kind of meal compared to men.” To Travaglini, a viral plate of ice or carrots “definitely promot[es] unhealthy eating habits.”

However, the nutritional content of every Girl Dinner is not created equal, and the



# NO CLUES

BY REBECCA ACKERMAN '25

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

## ACROSS

- 1 Drew on a case?
- 6 "Swan Lake" maiden
- 7 Prompt again
- 8 Identifies, as an undercover cop
- 9 "Revenge is \_\_\_\_ best served cold"

## DOWN

- 1 Marilyn Monroe's real first name
- 2 Beat \_\_\_\_ horse
- 3 Rapper Minaj
- 4 What are you looking at?
- 5 "Good gracious!"



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