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CONTENTS

3 SHELF REFLECTIONS BY JONAH KARAFIOL '26

4 SIMPLICITY IN OUR STUDIES BY SACHI LAUMAS '26 AND GAURI SOOD '26

5 How to BUILD A MINIMALIST CLASS SCHEDULE BY KAYLA REIFEL '26

6 HOW TO BEAT BURNOUT BY CLARA CORCORAN '25

7 "LIZZIE MCGUIRE, YOU'RE AN OUTFIT REPEATER" BY KATE OLIVER '26

8 CENTERFOLD BY SERA MCDONALD '24

10 POINT: GOOD FOR THE SOUL BY EMMIE PALFREY '27

11 COUNTERPOINT: MORE IS MORE IS MORE BY RANIA JONES '27

12 I'M (NOT SO) OCD BY EMMIE PALFREY '27

13 WHEN STUDENT LIFE IS UNDER CONTROL AND UTTER CHAOS BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26

14 INTERGALACTIC ENTANGLEMENT BY KYA BROOKS '25

15 CROSSWORD BY REBECCA ACKERMAN '25

Shelf Reflections

LESSONS LEARNED FROM A LIFE IN A LIBRARY.

BY JONAH KARAFIOL '26

I grew up in a library. The first floor is the reference section: dozens of encyclopedias, the complete Harvard Classics, and the 20 volumes comprising the Oxford English Dictionary line the walls of my living room; two bookcases with titles ranging from *Consider the Fork* to *The Oxford Companion to Food* are housed by the dining room; and cookbooks chock-full of heavily annotated recipes are strewn across the kitchen. The second floor is fiction: eight more poorly alphabetized bookshelves chronicling the evolution of literature from Homer to Hemingway stand in the playroom, and the study holds the memories of my father's time as a law student and math teacher. My siblings' and parents' bedrooms each house an additional hundred-odd books, a mix of sentimental stories from our childhood and works we hope to read but probably never will.

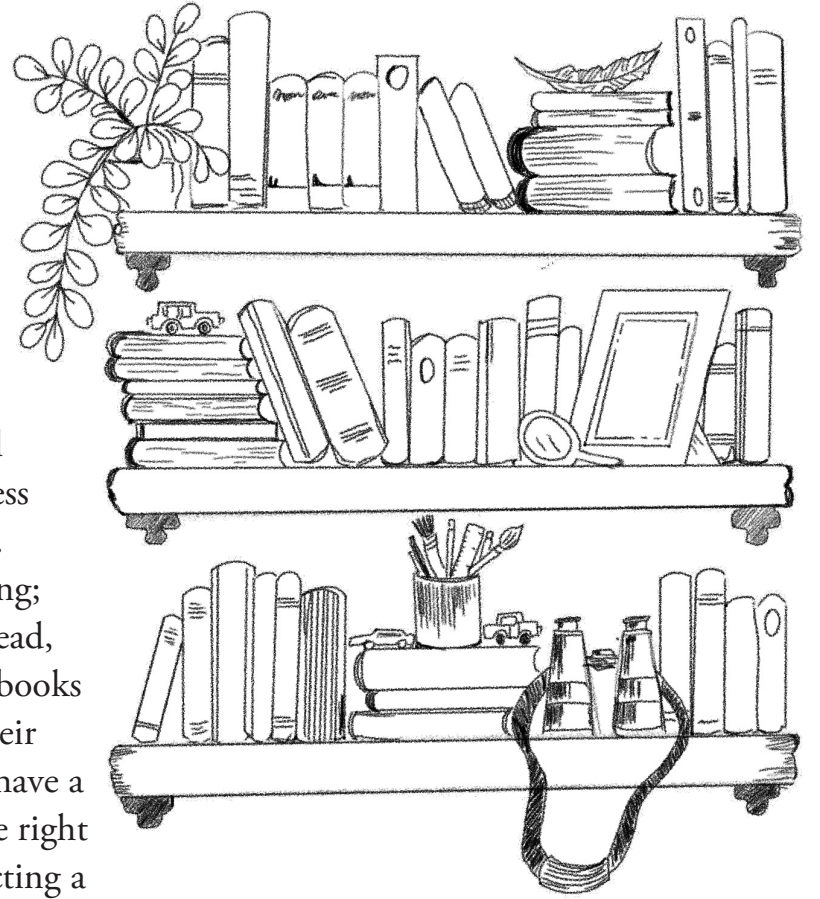
The chaotic sea of books that engulfs every corner of my home is not just a tripping hazard—it's a testament to the role they played in my childhood. It was impossible to avoid reading, constantly surrounded by an abundance of books. Everywhere I turned, I was met with a new story. Their constant presence brought a gravitational pull that seemed to pull me in without me even knowing it. I was always reading. I treated books like scattered toys, picking up an errant novel and reading 30 pages whenever I was bored. Taste-testing books became my favorite pastime. As I became a stronger reader, 30 pages became 300, and I pored over anything I could get my hands on. I vividly remember delving into *To Kill a Mockingbird* in third grade. It wasn't a deliberate choice or a calculated decision; it was a spontaneous act fueled by curiosity. I picked it up, not fully grasping the weight of the narrative or the cultural significance it held. Still, I devoured its pages, captivated by the story before me. It was a testament to the whimsy of my reading, where the allure of a book often lay in the unplanned and unexpected.

A few years ago, my family tried to sort through our books, discarding and donating just enough that we wouldn't trip over stray novels on the way to the bathroom in the middle of the night. I found that most books fell into three categories: books that we had already read, books that we would read in the near fu-

ture, and books that were destined for a life nestled on our shelves. Most of the books in the first and last categories would be given away.

This minimalistic filtering method inevitably leads to mistakes. There's no real way of knowing what you'll want to read in a week, much less months or years down the road. Our tastes are constantly evolving; many of the books we plan to read, we quickly forget; many of the books we choose to part with make their way back into our lives. Books have a peculiar way of finding us at the right time, and in the process of selecting a subset to stock the shelves, we deny ourselves the chance of letting this happen. Minimalists like Marie Kondo advocate for keeping only items that spark joy. Despite her fame, her advice does not apply to books. Take my father's book collection. Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* is a horrifying story about a 14-year-old who joins a group of mercenaries hunting Native Americans. Reading it certainly does not bring my father joy, and yet it stands on his bedside bookshelf. He even made room for *The Road*, another McCarthy novel that tells the post-apocalyptic story of a father and son traversing an obliterated world. The tale is so dark that my father has never finished it, despite starting it many times. He loves both of these books and will likely never part with either of them. Kondo's own website reads, "Through the process of selecting only those things that inspire joy, you can identify precisely what you love – and what you need." In this instruction, Kondo fails to recognize the value of books and other belongings past their ability to engender joy.

This summer, my co-archivist Luke Wagner '26 and I swapped titles back and forth, sharing stories like *As Breath Becomes Air* and *Tomorrow*, and *Tomorrow*, and *Tomorrow* with each other. In these exchanges, I found the essence of my family library—a shared space where stories intertwine, creating connections that transcend pages. The books that line my walls carry bits and pieces of my family members in them, just as the books Luke



recommended to me represent parts of him.

Had my family embraced a minimalist approach, adhering to Kondo's principle of keeping only what sparked joy, these literary conversations, born out of a vast and varied collection, never would have taken place. The stacks that stand tall on coffee tables and nightstands, the survivors of my family's unsuccessful attempts to declutter our bookshelves, are not just a physical testament to our rejection of the simplistic ideology called minimalism. They represent a lifeline to a passion for reading that I carry with me today.

As I walk through the halls of my home surrounded by the literary haven that is my family's library, I am grateful for the clutter, the chaos, and the seemingly endless stacks. For, in each book, there's not just a story waiting to be read; there's a piece of my own narrative, a chapter in the ongoing saga of a reader shaped by the whimsy and wonder of a library that refused to conform, a library that allowed stories to spill over their edges and into the very core of my being. I do not know where I will live, nor what my home will look like, but I can assure you of one thing: I will always live in a library.

JONAH KARAFIOL '26 WRITES FORUM FOR THE INDEPENDENT. FORWARD ALL BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS TO JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU. GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26 FORUM | 3

Point/Counterpoint: Simplicity in Our Studies

THE PROS AND CONS OF THAT LONG HARVARD INTRO YOU'VE BEEN PRACTICING.

BY SACHI LAUMAS '26 AND GAURI SOOD '26

Sachi: “Hi, I’m a sophomore in Winthrop House concentrating in art history.”

Students at Harvard should minimize the number of qualifications (such as double concentrations, secondaries, and citations) they choose to get in favor of diversifying the classes they take in college. Choosing a majority of classes based on requirements limits students intellectually and narrows their approach to academic thinking. Undergraduate studies might be the only time that students will enjoy their levels of intellectual freedom. Chasing after a stack of degrees is a waste of the precious time and resources Harvard provides us.

Gauri: “Hi, I’m a sophomore in Leverett House double-concentrating in psychology and government with a secondary in computer science and a Spanish citation.”

Students should maximize their academic careers at Harvard by attempting to get a double or joint degree alongside a secondary, citation, or similar qualification to maximize both their expertise in multiple subjects and their attraction to employers. Career opportunities multiply with the addition of degrees, and it is still possible to enjoy a diverse curriculum while taking on several forms of academic specialization—you just have to be intentional about your choices.

Sachi: The best way to spend your time at Harvard is by taking classes in a diverse set of fields. The beauty of a liberal arts education at a school like Harvard, which has strong departments across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, is that we can explore more than just one or two academic fields. Focusing on stacking up qualifications instead of taking advantage of the strong across-the-board resources at Harvard is not the optimal way to spend your short time here.

Gauri: I think there’s a best-of-both-worlds situation here that we are forgetting about. Degrees themselves are interdisciplinary. As a first-year, I found myself gravitating toward a few government classes, purely out of interest. Solidifying my decision as a government double major came almost entirely from having already fulfilled several of my concentration requirements, either from first-year exploration or courses counting for more than one requirement. Additionally, several concentrations have tracks that not only facilitate but encourage interdisciplinarity—mind/brain/behavior is a clear example. Out of my psychology concentration requirements, three classes also count as mind/brain/behavior advanced requirements and can be fulfilled through an extensive list of courses ranging from six different departments. This allows me to explore departments while simultaneously fulfilling a requirement—not just completing one goal or the

other.

Sachi: Not all of the classes you take here should need to serve a purpose (such as meeting concentration requirements) or appeal to someone reading your resume. Harvard’s limited number of elective and general education requirements mean that there is space in our schedules to take classes purely out of intellectual curiosity. When else in your life will you be able to spend time taking a class on Taylor Swift (ENGLISH 183TS: Taylor Swift and Her World) or GAGA movement (TDM 143: GAGA Movement)?

Gauri: Who says that your concentration needs to appeal to a recruiter? Perhaps a Harvard student’s sheer intellectual obsession with a field is the sole reason for their choice to continue studying it. Additionally, the community that is fostered within a department is arguably one of the best experiences at Harvard, and a second concentration can foster lifelong friendships and academically novel experiences. With only one concentration, the freedom to explore different subjects may seem endless, but this freedom is short-lived. The trap of introductory classes is a prevalent one at Harvard, with many departments such as psychology and sociology excluding students from specific courses until introductory requirements are fulfilled. These introductory courses are often the most painstaking ones in their field, especially in comparison to their arguably more captivating advanced course counterparts. Perhaps you can ignite a spark with Introduction to Sociology, but you might not be able to prolong the flame without taking additional courses.

Sachi: Using the extra space in your schedule to take electives in niche departments is a way to foster those same close relationships while avoiding the trap of the introductory class. Small and mid-sized departments offer opportunities to get to know professors without the full commitment of pursuing a concentration. Students can engage with leaders of these departments by taking electives in them, allowing for academic connection separate from their concentration. If a student truly wants to pursue interdisciplinary study, a joint concentration is a better alternative to a double concentration because of the reduced course requirements. Whereas a double concentration stacks up course requirements, a joint concentration also allows for interdisciplinary study while offering more space in your schedule for exploration due to

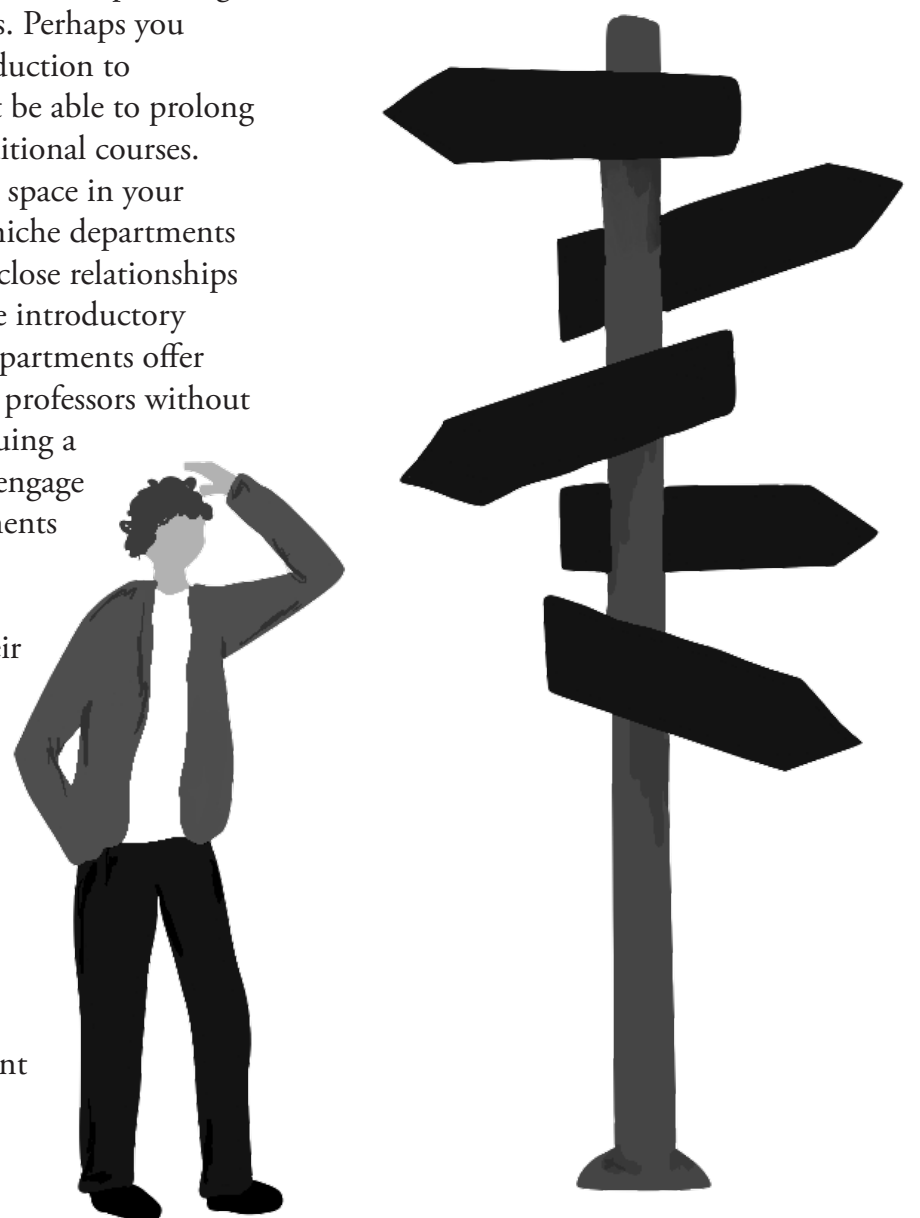
the lessened number of course requirements.

Gauri: Students from some departments, such as psychology, simply do not have the privilege of a joint concentration. I love the field of psychology, but do not personally plan to go into a clinical or therapy-oriented career. I am therefore interested in diversifying my own career opportunities with a double concentration, an inevitably shared experience of students in other departments at Harvard. It’s hard to widely prescribe concentration structures to students because each person has individualized goals. Therefore, they should expand their horizons by engaging in as many degrees as possible—something that will open doors for many future careers.

SACHI LAUMAS '26 (SLAUMAS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS AN ART HISTORY CONCENTRATOR WHO WON'T SHUT UP ABOUT HER ANIMAL BEHAVIOR CLASS LAST SPRING.

GAURI SOOD '26 (GAURI.SOOD@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MIGHT CHANGE ANY OR ALL OF HER STATED DEGREES IN MY.HARVARD AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT.

GRAPHIC BY ANNEISE FISHER '26



How to Build A Minimalist Class Schedule

SHED YOUR ACADEMIC MASOCHISM. IT'S SELF-CARE.

By KAYLA REIFEL '26

"Harvard is hard."

At one point or another, we've all come to the unfortunate realization that the phrase is actually true. But does Harvard have to be so academically rigorous? There's no need to buy into the Harvard academic overachiever stereotype (I'm looking at you, LS50 and Math 55 first-years) when you can minimize your course schedule and maximize your time for extracurriculars, socialization, sleep, and anything else that will help you maintain some semblance of sanity at this institution. For those who wish to opt out of excessively demanding course loads, there are quite a few ways to simplify your schedule.

1. It's easy to get caught up in comparison, but figure out a way to disregard peer pressure. Do not take on a heavy course load or make any academic decisions based only on the recommendations of others. Just because your blockmate is doing it does not mean you need to. This is a prerequisite for any of the following tips.

2. Simplify your classes. This is a pretty obvious one. The easiest way to have a less demanding schedule is to take classes with fewer demands. The Q-guide has pretty accurate and detailed descriptions of the typical hours spent on each class, along with the professor's grading style, course expectations, and skills that are best suited for the class. Word of mouth, Sidechat—and if you're feeling bold, social media polling—are all good sources as well.

3. Take seminars. They meet once a week, there's no discussion section, and participation makes up a good chunk of your grade. There are generally final projects instead of final exams. With a schedule composed only of seminars, four-day weekends are suddenly more than possible, and you can spend more time managing course material on your own schedule rather than spending valuable time in multiple, impersonal lectures.

4. Enroll in optional attendance classes only. Comb through syllabi to find classes that don't count attendance toward your participation grade. It's even better if the lectures are recorded. It's difficult, but not impossible. The class can be fully a synchronous and you can maximize efficiency by watching lectures at 2x speed.

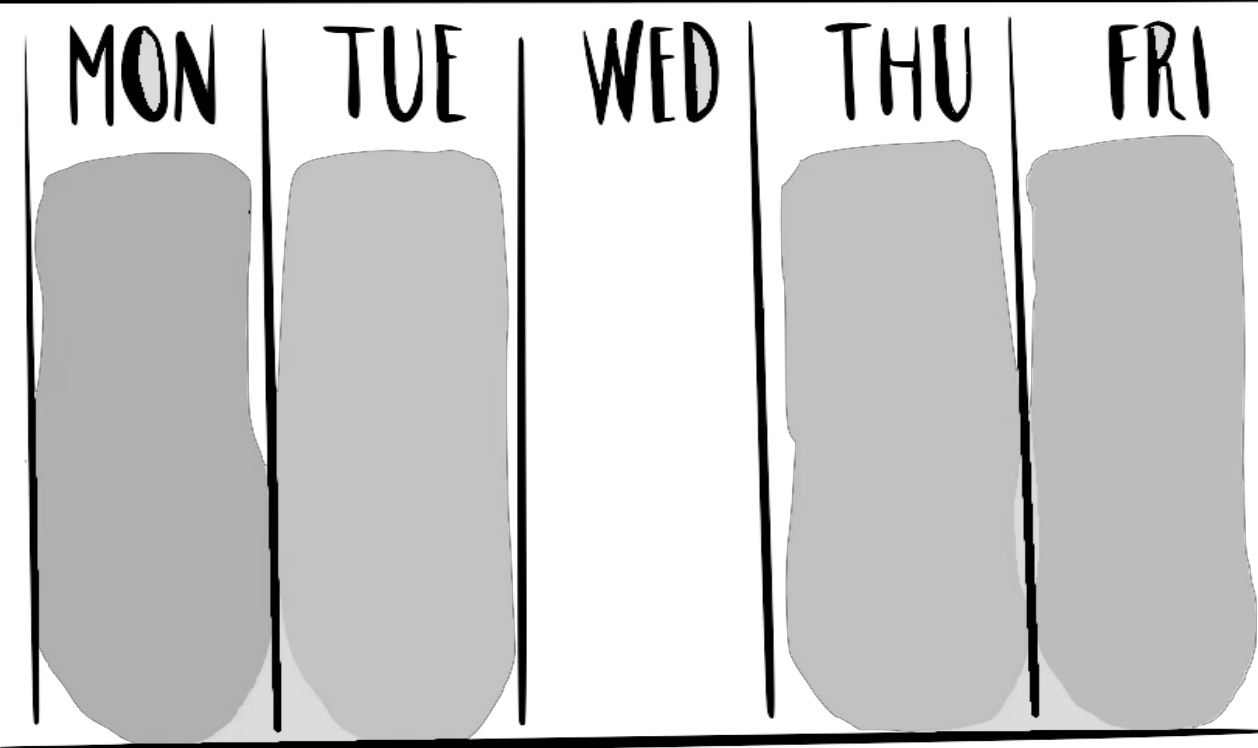
5. Intentionally plan your courses based on their exam schedules well in advance. If you're taking two p-set-based classes, don't pick two classes with p-sets both due Sunday evening and the same midterm schedules. Instead, pick classes that stagger so you're not a wreck every Sunday and during the $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ points of the semester.

6. Pre-meds, you don't have to follow the crowd. Life and Physical Sciences A is a softer introduction to biology and chemistry than Life Sciences 1A. Chemistry S-17 (the summer version of Chem 17) is rough but allegedly more doable than organic chemistry during sophomore fall.

The Physics as a Foundation for Science and Engineering courses (colloquially called AP50a and AP50b) involve a twice-per-week trek to the SEC and group-based projects, but you're essentially guaranteed a good grade as long as you do your work. It's a much more enticing option to some than the large, exam-based physics courses of Physical Sciences 2 (PS2) and Physical Sciences 3 (PS3). In most concentrations, there are similar alternatives to harder, more widely known courses. Do not be afraid to do some digging.

7. Take three classes. If you need a lighter semester and no fourth class is calling to you, just take three. It's not as radical as it sounds. You'll have to do a five-class semester or a class over the summer to meet the required 128 credits to graduate, but this can still be a good tradeoff and a better option for some to spread out their course load differently.

There are multiple courses of action you can take to make your academic load easier. But even if you do your best to make academics easier for yourself, Harvard can still be a very challenging place. Minimizing your course schedule can help, but it's important to minimize life at Harvard wherever possible. Harvard's toxic culture of overcommitment and overachievement is one of the greatest inhibitors of student well-being at this school, and the negative stigma surrounding taking easier classes should end.



KAYLA REIFEL '26
(KAYLAREIFEL@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS EXCITED TO
SEE WHAT THE SEC LOOKS
LIKE WHEN SHE TAKES AP50A
INSTEAD OF PS2.

GRAPHIC BY
ANNELISE FISHER '26

How to Beat Burnout

Why having it together will (hopefully) change your life.

BY CLARA CORCORAN '25

Toxic productivity culture defines the way we interact with nearly every component of our lives on Harvard's campus. Though it can feel insurmountable to tackle the vast and varied tasks that accumulate in light of our inattention to them, we owe it to ourselves to seize a free moment when it does arise. Though the scarcity of free time on Harvard's campus is seemingly cherished among its students, beneath this facade is a real struggle to relax.

Decluttering your life is not simply making your bed and journaling once in a while. While helpful and productive, I argue that the extent to which burnout plagues Harvard students necessitates concerted time and effort toward stepping back and micro-analyzing what in your life you can reposition to account for the toll of constant stress on our lives.

In order to declutter your life in earnest, your actions need to align with your individual definition of what it means to be put together. For some, being put together means going through an old drawer and throwing out scattered papers and pens, while for others, it means fostering strong relationships, pursuing intellectual growth, and taking the time to focus on your emotional well-being. Wherever you fall and no matter how superfluous or overwhelming the typical self-care instructions may feel, embracing the decluttering process necessitates introspection, self-awareness, and a willingness to embrace a change that resonates authentically with your vision of a fulfilling life.

With that, I propose the following highly idealized schematic to indulge in your free time and escape burnout:

First, go to sleep and genuinely forgive yourself. Whatever your initial response to that sentence is, the essence of it is to forget what happened the day before, what work didn't get done, what awkward interaction you had, how late it is, and simply sleep in. Don't set an alarm and *actually* don't worry about sleeping in until 1:00pm. If you're not rested, your foundation to truly feel put together becomes precariously fragile.

Once you're up, make the biggest to-do list of your life and *be thorough*. No one is checking what you add, so if crossing off "wake up" from your theoretical list brings you joy, absolutely add it: embrace each and every task you accomplish and allow yourself to indulge in making it beautiful (add a few stickers, make the font something new and eccentric; the sky's the limit).

Feed yourself well. Without pressuring yourself to eat what you think is socially acceptable, get whatever breakfast is going to make you feel well-fed and nurtured (not punished!). If you're a coffee drinker, walk yourself to your favorite coffee shop and guzzle down

something that you consider to be perfect. Take a few vitamins, even if you don't *believe* in their direct benefits, and maybe add an electrolyte drink or Emergen-C to the rotation for good measure. Clean and fill up your water bottle.

Now, as dreaded, deep clean your space. No. Stone. Left. Unturned. If your surroundings reflect time, love, and having your life together, perhaps you'll gradually internalize a sense of having things together too. Despite the aggression that underlies this way of thinking, it's worth it. Wash your sheets, scrub your desk, vacuum, clean the mirrors, clean the inside of your backpack, do the dishes, pick up your packages, fold your clothes, disinfect everything, color-coordinate your closet, throw away clothes, toiletries, and other in items you no longer use (EMPHASIS ON RANDOM PAPERS!). Move around a random piece of furniture, open the windows, light a candle you love, and, most importantly, allow yourself to leave your living space without it existing as a burden in your life.

Now that your space is in order, do your favorite workout. Whatever you have the bug for, be it a class, watching a video from your room, or lifting at the MAC, go where the endorphins most reliably hit and *sweat*. No better way to forget about your problems than by literally running from them!

Once you're sufficiently exercised, shower more than you've ever showered in your life. I mean that. Break out the loofa, shave, pumice your heels, do a hair mask, and appreciate the languor you're allowing yourself. Though I'll admit that this is rather excessive, this day is supposed to be a retroactive gift to yourself above all else. Once you're out of the shower, do your skincare routine, do a facemask, slather on some lotion, and put on something comfy that is *not* sweatpants—we are trying to achieve a baseline of 'put together' after all.

Leave your space and, critically, walk to whatever space on/off campus is inspiring you most as of late. Make a playlist for your exact mood, based on a picture, to set the tone for the month, or whatever will even get you excited to listen to music and express yourself. Explore a new genre. Get out of whatever rut exists in your life even if you can't name it.

Next, organize your tech: delete old tabs and screenshots on your computer, review large files, delete or

backup pictures from your phone, organize your folders on Google Drive, and eliminate the distraction of action items constantly in your central line of vision on your desktop. Go through emails and sort them systematically such that, again, they're not hanging over your head. Allow yourself to be free from their burden and move on with your life. What's more, go through old texts and their associated actions/notifications you've been avoiding and face the music. Respond to everything and reach out to the friend you've been meaning to connect with while you're at it.

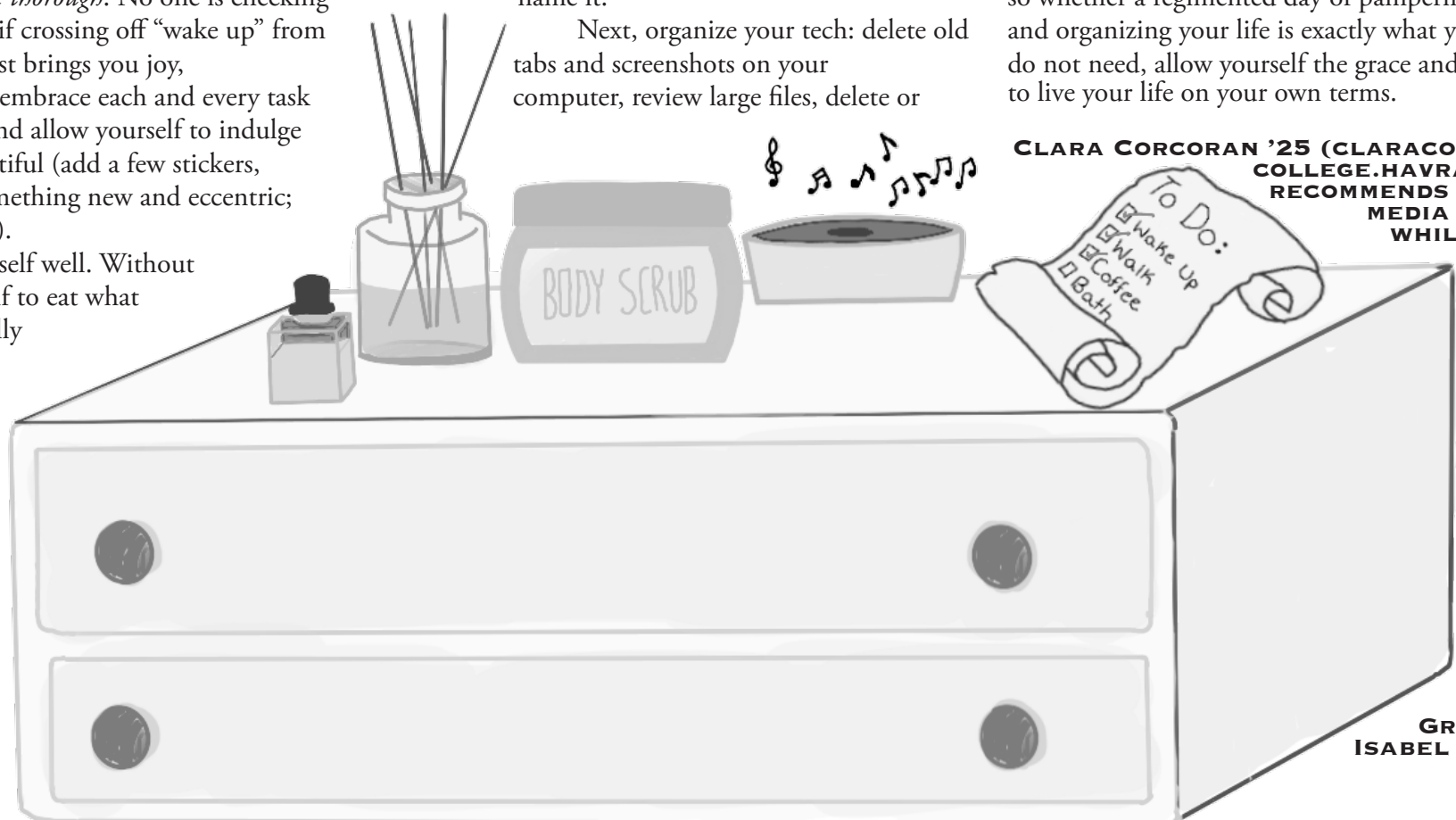
To top off your mindfulness, journal for ten minutes. Time yourself but, again, allow those emotions to flow. Whatever is left in you that's bugging you, attempt to let out. While easier said than done, make the task small by timing yourself but do allow the space for fun with prose and some beautifully dramatic paragraphs about how school sucks and why love life is the way it is for x, y, and z reasons.

Finally, now that you've followed the rubric for the most perfect, hard-core day of organization in your life, you have a choice (!). Overwhelmed with schoolwork? Go conquer your task list: write every single thing you have to do down and just get started. Follow the Pomodoro method, listen to your new playlist, or find a new study space to make the exercise of it all feel fresh. If not, then, as I recommend, engage in a *meaningful* social activity: go thrifting with friends, have a picnic, get outside, get moving, and get talking about the things that actually matter to you with people you care about.

Though some scheduled, theoretical day may seem like the perfect solution for your end-of-semester blues, the rise of minimalism makes it easy for us to imagine how a streamlined life will solve all of our problems. However, to allow yourself to feel the chaos inherent to life is one of the hardest lessons of our adolescence. Getting back 'on track' will never truly lead you to perfection, and the apex of the decluttering process should be knowing that you care enough about yourself to pour time into each component of your life.

Plus, what's better than procrastinating school work with self-care? The struggle to feel anxiety-free on Harvard's campus is no small one, so whether a regimented day of pampering yourself and organizing your life is exactly what you do or do not need, allow yourself the grace and freedom to live your life on your own terms.

CLARA CORCORAN '25 (CLARACORCORAN@COLLEGE.HAVVARD.EDU) RECOMMENDS A SOCIAL MEDIA CLEANSE WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.



“Lizzie McGuire, You’re An Outfit Repeater”

The challenge of being a college minimalist.

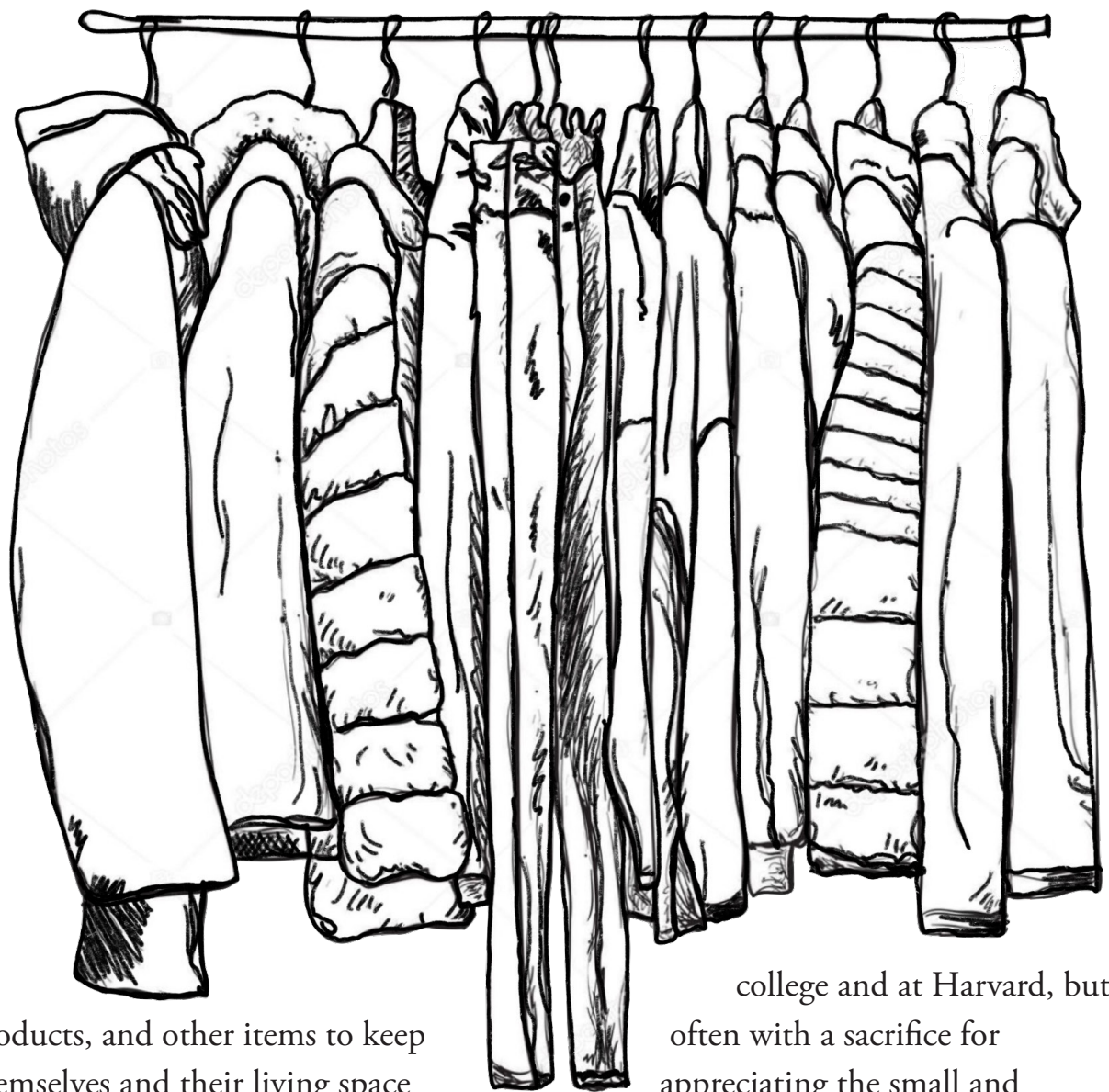
BY KATE OLIVER '26

At the end of each school year, a mass influx of sales pervades email chains and social media of items that college students want to get rid of. Basement trash rooms overflow with shelving, carpets, clothes, and other objects students either do not want or do not have the ability to store. Purchasing cheap room decor in September to only throw it out in June produces an inevitable cycle, making it difficult to believe it is even possible to be a minimalist college student.

Nationally, college students have a spending power of \$583 billion. While a large portion of this money goes to staples such as food, laptops, and travel, a considerable amount funds the consumption of disposable and avoidable material goods. It is estimated that students spend nearly \$160 on new clothing during each back-to-school season. This value varies across sexual expectations, personal preferences, and financial abilities—as a girl, there is pressure to never wear the same thing twice. Themed parties and costumed opportunities force me to scramble to find something different in my closet each time.

While college students no longer are able to raid their parents’ closets, they can often turn to their friends. Yet when all else fails, cheap online options can reliably promise a reasonable delivery time. Fast fashion companies like Shein or Forever 21 offer quick, cheap solutions, despite their contributions to global waste. Because of the little value and utility of these often hastily purchased items, their shelf life will rarely last longer than six months in my closet, either as a result of being lost or ruined.

The next battle is the dorm. Most experts recommend buying new sheets every two to three years in order to prevent the accumulation of dust mites and other allergy triggers. While Harvard does provide storage space, students will also need supplies, trash bags, bath



products, and other items to keep themselves and their living space clean. Not to mention room decor—which has an average cost of \$1,367 nationally per person each year. This is a sizable amount, but dorm decor can either enhance or inhibit concentration and creativity when studying in your room.

The commonly recommended opposition against the excessive accumulation of goods is to shrink a wardrobe to 37 items. While this number is intended to create ten reusable outfits and reduce clutter in a closet, it also insinuates the sacrifice of outfit variability that students, specifically women, are expected to acquire. Due to a lack of excess personal funds or a tendency to get lost, college students do not typically want to invest in long-term pieces that can be worn multiple times. Moreover, the unpredictability of housing and employment limits the ability to maintain large closets of staple products. In the debate between long-term and convenience, the latter often wins for the sake of wearing the “right” thing.

Minimalism can be achieved in

college and at Harvard, but often with a sacrifice for appreciating the small and frivolous things. If I had stuck to the same 37 items since I moved in as a first-year, I would not have been able to represent the experiences or growth I have made since then. Minimalism comes into conflict with the transformative environment of college; trying to focus on consuming so little draws focus from discovering more about yourself in true collegiate spirit. There is beauty in discovering your style, not just with clothing, but through every other avenue of expression available.

KATE OLIVER '26 (KOLIVER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STILL WEARS SWEATERS SHE BOUGHT IN 8TH GRADE.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26





Point: Good For the Soul

How minimalism can improve our lives.

BY EMMIE PALFREY '27

Purge. Oust. Eradicate. Dispose. You've heard the stress-inducing rhetoric of professed minimalists, arguing that non-essential items are wasteful and should be removed. You've heard the crazy stories of libertarian minimalists who own exactly one hundred things and live in remote locations. Minimalism might bring to mind a modest lifestyle, a beige interior, and an empty home.

But minimalism has nothing to do with modesty. According to the *Minimalists*, a group of three popular filmmakers and authors dedicated to sharing the true minimalist lifestyle, the concept simply applies to the act of limiting excess in one's life in order to focus on individual values, finding "happiness, fulfillment, and freedom." True minimalism can accommodate any amount of wealth, style, and expression and can greatly improve our quality of life.

The notion of the indirect relationship between happiness and material possessions stems from extensive research. The American Psychological Association suggests that a reduction of materialism can garner freedom and satisfaction in our everyday lives and that consumerism "can promote unhappiness because it takes

time away from the things that can nurture happiness, including relationships with family and friends." Conversely, minimalists let go of excessive consumption in favor of intangible values. Typically correlated with a reduction in avarice, minimalism allows us to focus on the immaterial aspects of our lives that are truly fulfilling.

If there's someone who proves that anybody can be a minimalist, it's Kim Kardashian. In a 2022 interview with *Vogue*, the reality TV star showed off her multi-million dollar minimalist home, a beige mansion complete with multiple kitchens and her three favorite cars.

Kardashian told interviewers that the calmness and lack of clutter in her home helps her wind down from the chaos of the outside world. In ridding herself of a colorful, cluttered home, she feels at peace amidst a crazy public life.

It's easy to reject Kardashian's self-proclaimed minimalism due to her life of extreme luxury, which does not fit with the common understanding of minimalism's

modesty. Despite this dichotomy, houses like Kardashian's, which are free from excessive clutter but inclusive of luxury, exemplify the myriad of ways in which the values of minimalism can be implemented and enjoyed. A home can be outrageously expensive or have a unique interior and still allow inhabitants freedom from the aspects of unfulfilling materialism.

Anyone who makes a conscious effort to remove excess and prioritize their values is

practicing minimalism.

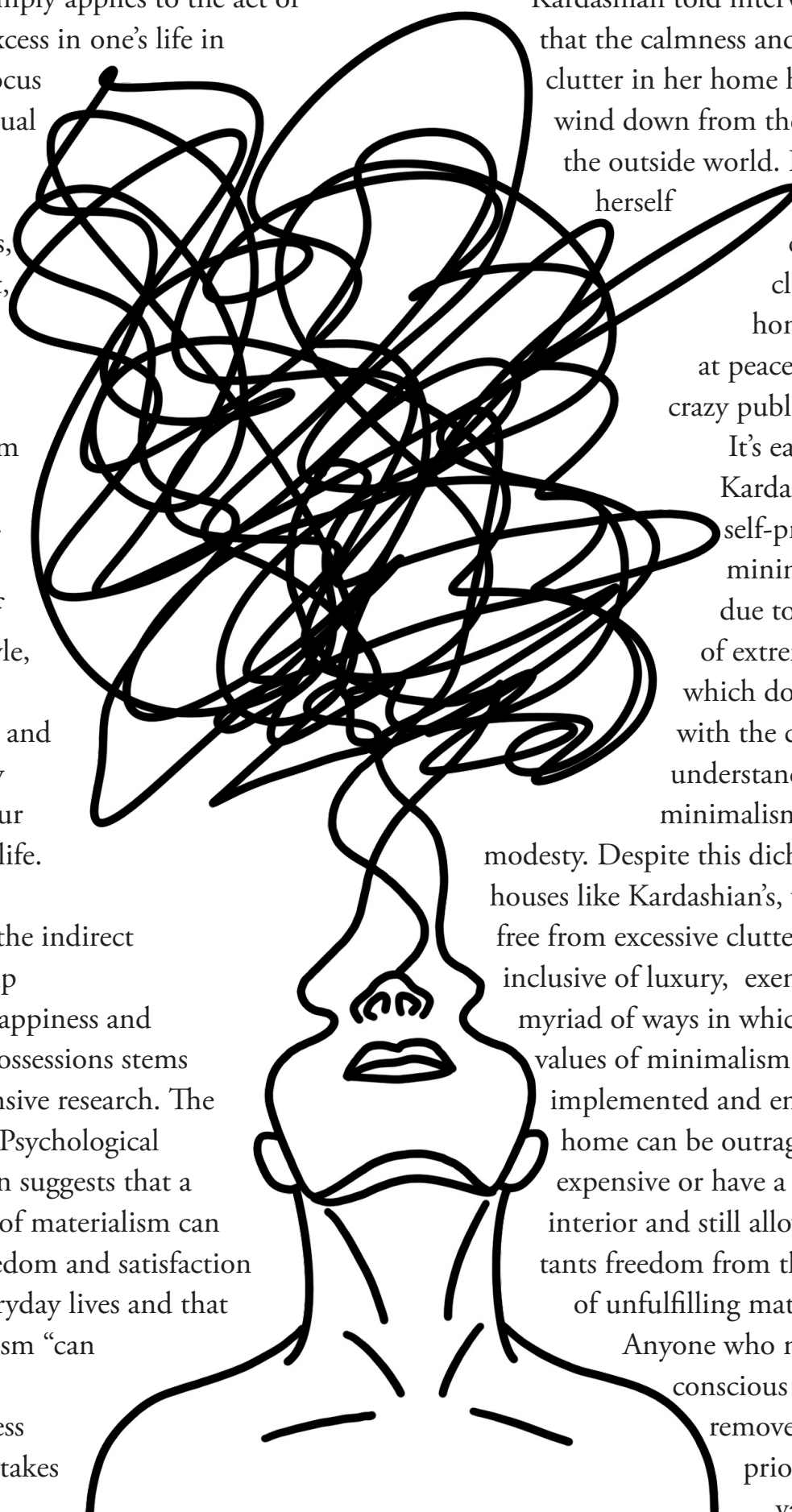
People can still reap the benefits of minimalist lifestyles with an appreciation for material goods such as clothes, shoes, and elaborate decor. Intentional care in specific enterprises, such as careful decoration in interior design, while engaging in simple and versatile clothes; or conversely embracing an extravagant wardrobe while living in a simple home can rid people of consumption that does not hold value to them. Shifting the priority of minimalist lifestyles to fit the spaces we value can allow us to simplify our lives while still embracing the artistic expressions that bring us joy.

Minimalism can be extremely beneficial to college students. *U.S. News & World Report* reveals that nearly half of American young adults aged 18-25 feel stress to the point where "they can't function" on a daily basis and that amongst college students, nearly 70% experience daily stress. Embracing minimalism in college life—such as simplifying dorm decor, building a capsule wardrobe, or being generally selective about how to fill one's schedule—can allow students to maximize their personal goals and reduce stress in other areas that do not align with their values.

Regardless of your lifestyle, there is space for minimalism. It's about honing in on your values and taking the pressure off everything else. Minimalism lets us dive deeply into what we care about, what makes us individual and gives our mind a break from all the clutter. Focus on what's important, and let go of the rest.

EMMIE PALFREY '27 (EPALFREY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A MINIMALIST WITH A BRIGHT, COLORFUL ROOM.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



Counterpoint: More is More is More

How maximalism can improve our lives.

BY RANIA JONES '27

I've barely made it past the entrance of Cabot Library when a friend studies my outfit and asks, "Is someone making you wear those pants for hazing?"

"No," I laugh, bowing my head towards my silver, denim, distressed pants.

I get the biggest adrenaline rush when people's eyes dance around my outfit, they smile, and they don't know where to look. I strive to be someone who provokes thought, someone whose sense of self draws eyes in so many directions that people feel excited, tantalized, and intrigued.

More is more. The slogan of maximalists. Maximalism, which focuses on quantity and quality and surrounds the self with as many things as possible, is a style or way of life that embraces excess and extravagance. Maximalists want to have everything they desire, and they want it to be loud, colorful, and sometimes chaotic. The philosophy is simple: express yourself through extravagance. It should be avant-garde and sometimes outrageously fun and wild. At its core, I believe that maximalism encourages you to be yourself.

In recent years, minimalism has garnered significant attention for its mental health benefits and streamlined aesthetics. The idea of reducing our belongings to just the essentials is very appealing to many people. Minimalism is popular because it leads people to believe that by simplifying our lives, we are reducing our anxieties and giving ourselves more time to focus on the things that really matter. Yet, the belief in the benefits of owning less is one-dimensional. In fact, a 2011 study demonstrated that individuals participating in creative activities experienced substantial improvements in their mental health, revealing that practicing maximalism

could be psychologically rewarding.

Despite the potential benefits of minimalism allowing people to rid themselves of unnecessary stimuli, maximalism allows us to embrace and celebrate everything that makes us who we are. Rather than promoting clutter or chaos, the purpose of maximalism is centered around intention and cohesion. The most successful uses of maximalism are ordered, considered, curated, and magical—giving users a strong identity and allowing them to combine many opposing complicated elements in a sophisticated manner. One of the most liberating aspects of

maximalism is the freedom it offers for creative expression, empowering us to break from constraining, traditional norms.

It is critical to recognize the potential role that overconsumption plays in maximalism, especially in the age of climate crises. However, maximalism is all about celebrating freedom and joy, not about things. Though an incorrect use of maximalism can lead to the accumulation of a large number of frivolous objects, it does not necessarily need to be this way.

Being a maximalist has nothing to do with being materialistic.

Maximalism maintains an emotional quality, as it provokes us to draw upon the things that we love. It's about curating memories, pushing boundaries, and challenging rules. It's about intrigue and the magic that all this mess can make. Maximalism is a reminder that there is beauty in chaos. It allows us to take ownership of our personalities and bravely embrace the things that represent us. We can find echoes of comfort in clutter and mayhem.



RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)

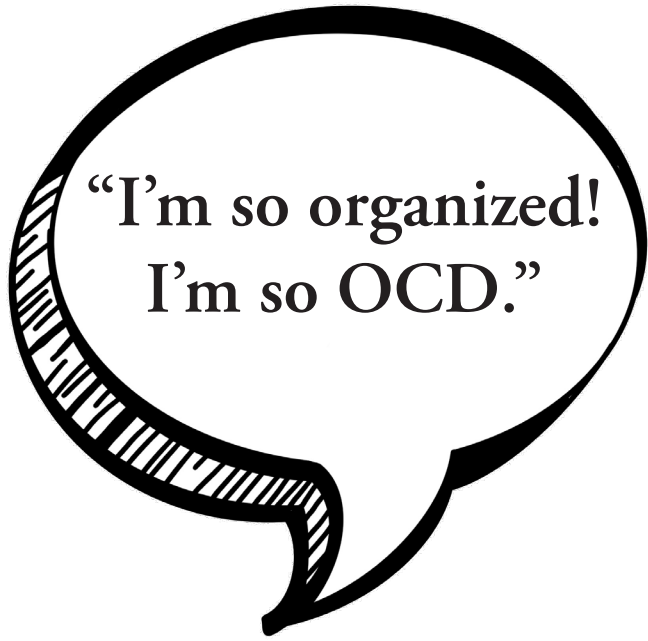
WROTE THIS IN HER SILVER, DENIM, DISTRESSED PANTS.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26

I'm (Not So) OCD

Why using "OCD" as an adjective should no longer be in your vocabulary.

BY EMMIE PALFREY '27



You've heard it, I've heard it. You've probably said it. I've said it, too. Except I'm not exaggerating, because I have a mild and clinically diagnosed case of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. It's never been life-threatening, nor has it caused me any sort of extremely disruptive pain (though it can for some patients), but it does mean that my brain works just a little bit differently than the neurotypical eighteen-year-old. And almost nothing drives me crazier than the phrase, "I'm so OCD."

Let's clear a few misconceptions up first. The Mayo Clinic explains that OCD is a mental illness composed of intrusive thoughts that lead to unwanted obsessions and manifest as compulsive and repetitive actions. The compulsions, or actions, are what ease the obsessions. But the intrusive thoughts eventually return, and the cycle continues. Studies have demonstrated that OCD is inherited and is often comorbid with other psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and eating disorders.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, neurodivergent conditions cause peoples' brains to work differently than the typical brain. Though OCD is characterized as a mental illness, it can also qualify as a neurodivergence, because people with OCD process information differently than the neurotypical person. Other neurodivergent conditions include Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, and ADHD.

The good news is that OCD is highly treatable. A combination of talk therapy (typically cognitive behavioral therapy or exposure and response prevention) and medication (often antidepressants) have proven highly effective. Though having

OCD should be nothing to be ashamed of, patients often experience shame and embarrassment as a result of highly unpleasant and uncontrollable intrusive thoughts.

What comes to mind when you think about someone with OCD? Possibly a freakishly neat person, an extreme perfectionist, or someone who's very clean. And like all myths, there are some truths to each of these. People with OCD can have obsessions about order, a loss of control, or germs.

The reason for this misunderstanding likely stems from the popular culture and media's portrayal of the illness. TV characters with OCD are often, as Firstpost notes, "reduced... to quirks and punchlines." Consider Monica Geller, one of the stars of the TV show *Friends*, whose compulsive tidiness is tirelessly mocked by other characters. Whether or not the directors intended for her to have a diagnosable disorder, her blatantly abnormal behaviors are not received seriously. This is unfortunately just one of many examples of television characters with clear obsessive-compulsive tendencies who are written in for comic relief: fans have noticed that Claire Dunphy in *Modern Family*, Emma Pillsbury in *Glee*, and Sheldon in *The Big Bang Theory* show similar patterns.

Somehow, among the mayhem of popular culture icons with quirky obsessions, ritualistic routines, and germophobia, the use of OCD as an adjective emerged, most commonly in the phrase, "I'm so OCD," which is often used to self-describe neat, germophobic, or organized tendencies. Someone who likes to have their bookshelves in color order or refuses to share a fork with you might coin the phrase as an explanation for their quirk. And while this might seem harmless, the larger implications of these phrases are grave.

Misidentifying commonplace characteristics with clinical OCD delegitimizes its seriousness. A disturbing number of patients with OCD are at risk of taking their own lives. Research shows that nearly 36% percent of patients with OCD report chronic suicidal thoughts, and nearly 11% have attempted suicide. Throwing around "OCD" as an adjective

doesn't directly contribute to the suicidal dangers of the illness, but it does downplay its severe risks.

On hypercompetitive campuses like Harvard, abuse of terms like OCD can have more serious consequences. *TeenVogue* explains that schools with high achieving students are correlated with higher rates of anxiety and depression, making it that much more pressing to respect those who have it.

Considering that OCD patients are known to experience shame and embarrassment, lighthearted comments about obsessive tendencies can't help. Therefore on a high-achieving campus like Harvard's, it is more important than ever that the significance and seriousness of the illness not be reduced to an adjective.

If you are seriously struggling with obsessions or compulsions, I encourage you to reach out to a clinician or mental health resource. Though obsessive-compulsive cycles may feel impossible to break, with the proper support, symptom improvement can be well within reach.

Dr. Natasha Sancho's TED talk, "Debunking the myths of OCD," breaks down misconceptions about OCD and explains the daily struggles of those who suffer from it. "Knowing your own brain is lying to you while not being able to resist its commands can be agonizing," she says. "But with knowledge and understanding comes the power to seek help." Using "OCD" as an adjective should be permanently eradicated from common vocabulary, as it dismisses the severity and implications of clinical Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Having OCD isn't a choice, a quirk, or a personality trait—nor should it be treated as such—but we can find strength in seeking support and communally destigmatizing prevalent mental health issues.

EMMIE PALFREY '27 (EPALFREY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STILL LOVES "FRIENDS," "GLEE," AND "MODERN FAMILY."

When Student Life Is Under Control And Utter Chaos

A new play by Harvard students, for Harvard students.

BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26

Before the Harvard Undergraduate Association (HUA), the Harvard Undergraduate Council, known as the “UC,” governed all student affairs until its abrupt abolishment by a student referendum in 2022. Stories of the events that resulted in the UC’s demise have become part of the lore incoming students learn upon being admitted to Harvard. Even so, the full story of the UC may remain foreign to both current students and alumni who were not physically present for the drama’s unfolding. One student playwright, Chinyere “CJ” Obasi ’24, and co-director Texaco Teixeira-Ramos ’26 seek to answer the question of whether members of the Harvard community should care about the collapse of the UC and how it reflects the influence Harvard has on all of us in the upcoming play, *Under Control / Utter Chaos*.

Obasi made his debut in Harvard theater as a writer for the 2021 Froshical, *The Fortunes*. He has since worked as a director among other roles, and, now a senior, is co-directing his own creation. *Under Control / Utter Chaos* is his way of fulfilling a promise he made as a first-year to his graduating class to write a play for them. Obasi recalled how telling the UC’s story as a play “started out as a joke,” during his sophomore year while he was working on adapting and directing Shakespeare’s *King John*. While at a party, a friend inquired about what Obasi would write next. At the time, UC was beginning to reach its demise, so Obasi jokingly remarked, “Maybe a UC play?” His friend then tweeted about it, encouraging Obasi to make his comment into a reality.

What started as a 50-minute short sketch play of the last UC meeting evolved into a unique three-act production that shows what, as Obasi said, happens when you “put the brightest people in a room for four years, let them cook, and watch the fireworks.” In the tradition of William Shakespeare, Obasi chose to give his play two names to fully encompass the ordered and chaotic nature of both the UC and organizing a theater production.

Teixeira-Ramos has become a familiar face in the world of Harvard theater as a participant and later film proctor in the First-Year Arts Program (FAP), an actor in *In the Heights*, a crew member for *Something Rotten*, a performer in *Footloose*, and a producer for the *Great Comet*. For them, art has always been a

“means of connecting with communities.” *Under Control / Utter Chaos* specifically represents “something so real and tangible to the Harvard community.” Almost immediately after being accepted to Harvard, they were forced to reckon with the imperfections and complications of the University after learning about the dramatic end of the former student government. Working on *Under Control / Utter Chaos* has allowed them to grapple with the question, “How does Harvard shape you as an individual? How does Harvard manipulate you as an individual? And what do you become as a member of the institution known as Harvard?”

Students who watch the play will likely admire the clever renaming of well-known student publications as they quickly decipher the true identities of *The Daily*, *The Political*, *The Conservative*, and *The Alternative* as well as the new name for Harvard—“The College” or “The Institution.” For characters, name changes from real people allow for greater creativity in storytelling while shifting the focus away from critiquing the individuals to examining pertinent ideas, behaviors, and morals on campus.

This also allows for the script of the play to be incredibly flexible. Depending on when you go to see the play you may hear actors say different lines, making their own unique contributions to the plot. Actors also transform from playing characters into playing themselves for one scene. While practicing this part, cast members were initially surprised by how other people perceived them during rehearsals. Audience members could imagine how former UC members watching this play and recognizing themselves might be in disbelief at how their actions and words were remembered by their peers.

The play should not be confused as an attack on any particular UC member. The humanity of the characters is respected, and there are no clear heroes or villains. Watching *Under Control / Utter Chaos* should serve as a space for everyone who has ever been affiliated with Harvard to reexamine concerns about how, as Teixeira-Ramos said, “Harvard treats its students, how Harvard students treat each other, and how Harvard alumni enter the world.”

Key moments in the play highlight the issues of race, elitism, journalism, identity, and the body among Harvard students. While writing *Under Control / Utter Chaos*, Obasi underwent many intensive hours of research by interviewing people who played a significant role in the

UC and its ending. No UC story would be complete without addressing the man credited for leading the call to abolish the UC—Michael Cheng ’22. Obasi’s final interview was with the former UC president, where they discussed how the play would depict an incident when racist slurs were posted on Cheng’s door in the midst of his campaign to abolish the UC.

Also as a journalist for the *Harvard Political Review*, Obasi uses *Under Control / Utter Chaos* to explore how student journalists can develop unhealthy obsessions with the subjects they cover and the overwhelming layers of elitism in Harvard campus culture that harms both those from elite and more humble backgrounds. How students wish to express their personal identity may often clash with how they believe Harvard expects them to behave. Obasi grew up “reading a lot of plays by Sarah Kane and Caryl Churchill and other primarily white female playwrights who incorporated the body [as] an important part of the narrative,” which inspired him to write about physical, visceral ailments that have manifested in students in the play who have been harmed by the institution and their peers. This works to enhance the drama of the play’s story and shine a light on how “the stress Harvard causes you impacts your body.”

After the play, students may wonder if there will ever be a student-run production about the complaints students have about the HUA. Some of these complaints are similar to the ones people had about the UC, like the overly competitive and ambitious personalities it attracts. There are also new complaints about insufficient funding for clubs without strong alumni bases and the end of free summer storage in Houses. When that play comes out, it will be another opportunity for Harvard affiliates to reflect on how the University has shaped them and how they have changed each other’s experiences.

Under Control / Utter Chaos goes up in the Loeb Ex Theater at the Loeb Drama Center from Thursday, November 30th to Sunday, December 3rd. Tickets are free—look out for emails and posters around campus.

**ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26
(AADEBAYO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.
EDU) HAS TICKETS TO SEE UNDER
CONTROL / UTTER CHAOS ON
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1ST.**

Intergalactic Entanglement

BY KYA BROOKS '25

In a black sea of ephemera, we are falling.

Two luminescent bodies swim the midnight landscape.

Metallic skeletons push through space-time.

Our spacecrafts are diametrically opposed, traveling perpendicular.

Some divine being from our ancient past extends her grace.

A celestial object flashes in the jeweled sky. The veil of eternal night is lifted.

For an instant, your form is alight.

Warm faces press against cold windows. In this everlasting winter, I feel your heat signature.

In my mind, I traverse your cosmology, lost in a labyrinth of skin.

We are two teenage refugees on passing ships, on our way to different galaxies. Our love is estrangement.

We are graph undefined, two hyperbolas divided by asymptotes, rushing toward our separate infinities. We are perpendicular lines on a three-dimensional plane, never destined to intersect. Still, we meet, just to smite Euclid.

In a millisecond, you leave me. Your image loiters like a mirage — fading fonder, fading faster. Until even traveling at light speed, I cannot reach you. Our love is red-shifting.

I float through soundproof corridors, lost in liminal, screaming in lowercase. Only churning machinery disrupts this monastic silence.

My inner world pulses with illusory intrusions. Across frayed edges of my mind, I feel your spectral sensations. How else to distinguish this temporal haze— these ebony nights and ivory days? Our memoir is ghostwritten in the unconscious, across daydreams and lapses in judgment.

Our love is phantom.

Perhaps some cosmic quandary conspires against our love.

In the quantum realm, are your particles entangled with another? Have you some other paramour, whose gravitational pull is stronger?



Did her cosmic ray pierce your heart, and atomize your head? Does her icy inferno last longer?

No space siren can separate us. I lie in wait among the nebula, where her star expires and mine emerges. Our love consumes everything with its hunger, and gives back nothing. Our love is a black hole, from which even light cannot escape.

Between us, there lies a distance occupied by nothing and everything—

by a canvas of speckled black, by the cold fabric of space-time, by the universe and her material. Our love is empty space. Our love is chasm.

Find me in the dark matter, where zero divides into itself,

and starships vanish without a trace. I linger in the negative space, dematerialized, waxing and waning, and waiting for you. Our love is vacuum. Our love is void.

But our forever is not so long. In time, I will lose you.

I will lose you to stardust, distilled into the elements from which we are made and unmade.

I will lose you to space-time expansion, to invisible forces pulling from the margins, rupturing the continuum.

I will lose you to the heat death of the universe, born from primordial oceans of fire, ending when stars exhaust their fuel and orbits decay.

Until absolute zero reigns and time loses directionality, we find each other in the space between, arms outstretched toward ever-fading possibilities. Our love is counterfactual reality.

KYA BROOKS '25 (KYABROOKS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) EAGERLY AWAITS HER OWN EXTRATERRESTRIAL ROMANCE.

GRAPHIC BY ALMA RUSSELL '26

STACKS

BY REBECCA ACKERMAN '25

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

ACROSS

- 1 What is upcoming?
- 6 Spooky
- 7 Not just see
- 8 Dr. Dean ___ of talk radio
- 9 Beasts of burden

DOWN

- 1 Kentucky college or its city
- 2 What one does during this period
- 3 Great Lakes native
- 4 Lovers' lane?

COVER ART BY SERA MCDONALD '24
LAYOUT BY EL RICHARDS '26, ANNELISE FISHER '26,
AND PIPER TINGLEAF '24

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