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HARVARD

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# independent

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969





# MASTHEAD

December 7, 2023

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*The Sustainers are a group of Independent alumni committed to supporting our mission by funding one month of office rent each year for at least five years.*

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DAVID SMITH '75  
RANDY BUCKLIN '82  
MARK PELOFSKY '84  
JULIE DAM '93  
WILL RECKLER '99

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# The Centre Held/Holds/Will Hold Just Barely.

BY NOAH TAVARES '24

**A** good journalist knows when to use a quote. Joan Didion, Harvard class of nineteen ninety-never, wrote, “The impulse to write things down is a peculiarly compulsive one, inexplicable to those who do not share it, useful only accidentally, only secondarily, in the way that any compulsion tries to justify itself.”

## 1. The Newsies

“Ummm, yeah, I run a student newspaper.” Most people are quite confused when I explain that I am involved in journalism. I study engineering, work in finance, build technology, and spend time making “performance video art.” I don’t signal newspaper, or journalism, or media. I don’t even have a good definition of “news.”

I joined the *Independent* because I was afraid of forgetting how to write while I took math classes. When I virtually attended the student organization fair and clicked on the Indy, I was the only one in the Zoom room. Opposite of me was the then Editor-in-Chief of the Indy. She was a senior in my math class. It would’ve been awkward to immediately leave. She told me an very intriguing story about rebellious students, revealing investigations, and legacy. So, I showed up at the first comp meeting. There were three other students. It turned out the staff was about five people. I was surprised. The Indy was small.

But then, Arsh Dhillon '23 and Mary Julia Koch '23 took the reins, and the Indy started growing. Really quickly (too quickly?). They made me an editor (too early?) despite my complex relationship with grammar. I was editing stuff and writing stuff and meeting designers/musicians/lawyers/people that were interesting. That was exciting. And then Arsh left and I was made President. Mainly, because I had been there the second longest after Mary Julia, who taught me journalism and was now my co-equal.

So I ran a newspaper. We kept growing (now 114 members of staff). We returned to weekly print (every single Thursday). We made videos (millions of views). We broke the news. We broke news.

And finally, I realized what the Indy was.

1. *Magic*. One of the few insightful things I’ve ever said about the Indy is “Somehow we print every Thursday.” People manage to write. People manage to edit. People manage to draw. And it gets delivered to people that

want to read our words. There is no reason why it should work other than the perpetually miraculous fortune that we capture every week.

2. *A privilege*. I spend time and effort on the paper with no reward but joy. To be an Indyite is a totally consumptive performance. This is a privilege. We reject norms and we reject what you think is right because we have a paper and you don’t. That is a privilege.

3. *The rhizome*. Emerging from the tangling relationship of staff is something that breathes and lives from every inside to the outside. I am responsible for nothing we do in the same way I am responsible for everything we do. We belong to no one but ourselves.

## 2. It’s your fault

Sometimes during my tenure as president folks have complained. Sometimes these folks are Indyites. Sometimes they are not. Broadly the complaints fall into 3 categories: 1) complaints about the organization. 2) complaints about an issue. 3) complaints about an article.

So now I will respond to all previous complaints and all future complaints. The *Independent* is a reflection of you. Our organization is a result of your participation. Our issues are a result of your tremendous voluntary work. Our articles are written for your enjoyment. Of course, they are written by us for us but that does not excuse the “you” from the “us”. We have grown substantially over the past four years. Clearly, students continue to comp. Writers continue to write. Most importantly, our audience continues to read.

You vote with your attention. If you don’t like it, don’t pay attention. But, you like it. The TikToks, the listicles, the opinion, the investigations, the crossword, and the drama are a conveniently specific oasis.

You are smart and work hard. I can’t presume to lecture you, but maybe I can endeavor to think with you, laugh with you, and cry with you. Our independence is shaped by our compassion and empathy for our readers. We are independently in the community.

So yeah. It’s your fault.

## 3. The grass is greener

The grass is definitely greener after I

retire. Without realizing it, my vision for the Indy was constricted by the scarcity I experienced when I started. Now, the Indy stands in abundance. Our next leaders, writers, designers, and business people dream magnificent dreams.

Eliza Kimball '25 is the next President. She works harder than gravity.

Andrew Spielmann '25 is the next Editor-in-Chief. His temperament is Mediterranean (and he edited Arts).

Mir Zayid Alam '25 is the next Head of Business. He will make money (this of course is something new).

Layla Chaaraoui '26 is the next Managing Editor. She can write (important to a newspaper).

The future staff will remember to break convention. They will write. You will read. Everything will be better than it was.

## 4. Gratitude

It’s proper that gratitude breaks the rule of threes. Also, I have a lot to be thankful for. I couldn’t write a note for everybody here, but I will thank you in person.

Thanks Marissa, you showed me the Indy. Thanks Arsh, you taught me independence. Thanks MJ, you taught me English. Thanks Marbella, you did everything I couldn’t.

Thank you Board of Advisors (both formal and informal), each of you have done something with me that will stay with me forever.

Dolls, videos, semesterly reports...

Thank you Editors, you produce.

Thank you Designers, thank you Designers, thank you Designers.

Thank you Comp Classes, your energy gave me energy.

Thank you Business Staff, we had fun.

Thank you reader.

**NOAH TAVARES '24 (NOAHTAVARES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**



# The Loaded Gun My Last Editor's Letter

BY MARBELLA MARLO '24

Last year, Elon Musk experimented with our sacred trust in social media authenticity. He took the blue check, which has monopolized our faith in abstract virtual spaces over the past decade, and made it available for purchase. For only \$8.

With the departure of a streamlined authentication process came the arrival of numerous impersonated celebrities, athletes, and businesses. One tweet from a fake account impersonating a pharmaceutical company, Eli Lilly & Co., wrote, "We are excited to announce insulin is free now." In hours, Eli Lilly's stock plummeted by 4.35%—a nearly \$15 billion drop in its original market cap



price. But the tale of impersonation, misrepresentation, and false words is one as old as time. In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin often wrote under numerous and often comical pseudonyms. While his actions did not cause a financial phenomenon, Franklin's decision to post words unattributed to him shows us the innate and complicated desire for human beings to say things without consequence—something both increasingly relevant and dangerous.

It's no secret that social media has completely distorted our traditional methods of digesting news. While there are traces of romanticists reading the physical daily paper, the vast majority of us receive our news virtually, instantly, and from anyone with a social media account. The implications are expected: when news platforms are democratized, the power can easily fall into the hands of the wrong voices. But this does not necessarily lead to harm. The widespread ability to share stories has enabled us to criticize misconduct, raise awareness for generosity, and let the world know that their actions matter. Our advisors often refer to the *Independent* as a loaded gun. If used improperly, it can ignite catastrophe.

But I'm not writing this to warn the *Independent*'s newly elected executive members of the increasingly urgent stakes they hold each week. Yes, the

Indy is a loaded gun. But

I am confident it is also one of the most unique opportunities a college student can immerse themselves into—a rapidly growing, inexorably relevant, and wholeheartedly legitimate weekly newspaper that allows students to publish their voices to a listening crowd, and is genuinely a product of their individual work—not the outcome of a constitution written years ago by a distant staff member. The *Independent*'s benchmarks in just the past handful of years speak for themselves. From 12 issues in 2021 to 20 in 2023, a staff of 19 to one of 115, and a presence on campus more pertinent than ever, the *Indy* has risen to the opportunity to create a platform on campus for open, creative, and engaging conversation, all while curating a community along with it.

We might hold this loaded gun, but we also are learning how to use it, and it is especially important to learn how to recover from mistakes. My tenure as Editor-in-Chief has been far from perfect; part of managing a rapidly growing and complicated news cycle is the ability to adapt to new ideas while respecting and maintaining a sense of tradition. Yet to effectively continue to progress in terms of the quality and ingenuity of the words we write, we must constantly look to the past and preserve the values of our founding mission.

The *Independent* is the fruit of a paradigm shift towards more contentious discourse. We were established in 1969 to offer an alternative perspective to the mainstream—a narrative we continuously remind ourselves of, yet one exceedingly difficult to accurately execute. We might write with the intention of provoking thought, but publishing these words can often come with an unexpected negative response characteristic of a true counterpoint. To be consistent in our mission demands the ability to process feedback of all kinds, all while continuing to commit to the excellence that our founders established nearly 55 years ago.

At the beginning of this year, I wrote in My First Editor's Letter that I was committed to devoting my tenure as Editor-in-Chief to establishing credibility in the publication. I was determined to have every article, "undergo a more thorough fact-checking process, more sets of eyes, more discourse, and generally a more representative resonance," and I am so proud to say that we have successfully implemented that, or

minimally a version of it. But as Aristotle said, "Excellence is an art won by training and habituation." While there might be a foundational vehicle at your disposal, it's time to grow.

I encourage you all (readers, staff writers, and critics alike) to start viewing your world as a pitch for an *Indy* article. When you encounter new people or ideas, do not just report or process these events as an objective daily news (or *Crimson*-esque) story. Ask yourself more than the stated facts. How did we get here? Who does this impact? Can we hear their perspective? What will this mean in a week's time? In a year? Why does this matter? **Why should we care?**

To the *Indy* staff specifically, I encourage you to continue setting high standards and holding yourselves to them. Keep digging for deeper pitches, richer sources, and higher-quality prose. No article (or sentence) gets left behind. Keep arguing, being passionate, and voicing your opinion. The most important aspect of a loaded gun is that its holder knows when to fire.

To Mary Julia and Arsh, thank you for demonstrating how to lead with poise, assertiveness, and care. I hope I was able to come close to the legacy you left. To Noah, thank you for steering me in the right direction when I would get overwhelmed by detail. I am continuously amazed by your charisma and imagination, and I would not trade a single moment this year for a different outcome. To Piper, thank you for your unprecedented level of patience on Wednesday nights when articles would have extra spaces, commas, or an incorrectly angled apostrophe. We would be nowhere without you. And finally, thank you to Declan for bringing sports back. I can confidently say you made the *Indy* cool again.

To Eliza and Andrew, our new President and Editor-in-Chief, I cannot wait to see what this next year holds for you. You have a whole family of supporters cheering you on, and I trust you will continue to make the *Independent* something great.

Indylove,  
Marbs





*D*ear *Indy* Readers,

My name is Piper Tingleaf and I have been the Design Editor for the *Independent* since Arsh Dhillon '23 passed it on to me in Spring 2022. The aesthetic and unique design of the *Independent* originally spurred me to join the paper, and I strived to emulate that aesthetic throughout my time as Design Editor. When I stepped into the role, I had no idea what “Adobe InDesign” was and had only recently begun to feel comfortable designing artwork digitally. I wanted to maintain the standard Arsh set, and as I grew closer with the people in the *Indy*, I came to appreciate the gravity of my role. I needed to put my best foot forward to showcase their work properly.

When I put together my first issue, *The Love Issue 2022*, I had a rude awakening. That night, Mary Julia Koch '23 and I stayed up until 4:30 A.M. to finish the issue. I finally understood the magnitude of what Arsh did every other week to create a paper unlike any other on campus and how hard Mary Julia and other editors worked to ensure the quality of each article was up to par.

I realized I could make my time at the *Independent* as involved or as uninvolved as I wanted it to be. I could shirk and do the bare minimum as

Design Editor, or I could put my all into each issue. My Wednesdays consisted of me harassing the editors in our group chat, frantically trying to wrangle all of the design, and yelling at my laptop screen when InDesign buffered or stopped cooperating. My roommates knew when Wednesday arrived, they would find me hunched over in the common room with a concerned, focused look for hours on end. Despite the arduousness with which I describe the layout process, the reward of seeing the issue in print made it all worth it.

When Marbella Marlo '24 and Noah Tavares '24 stepped into their roles as Editor-in-Chief and President, respectively, and reinstated a weekly schedule, I felt apprehensive and warned them that the artistic integrity of the paper might suffer. Marbella and Noah's faith in me, the editors, the writers, and the rest of the design team ultimately drove this initiative to success. Marbella worked tirelessly as Editor-in-Chief and Noah utterly transformed the popularity of the paper. I am grateful to be among such a diligent and passionate cohort of *Independent* executives.

Eliza Kimball '25 and Layla Chaaraoui '26 were my saving graces each week, running around (all over

iMessage and Google Docs) gathering any information I needed and correcting details that elevated the paper from “good” to “near-perfect.” El Richards '26, Annelise Fisher '26, and Alma Russell '26 are stars, and the paper would not have been as beautiful or complete without their artwork each week. I am so excited to pass my role as Design Editor on to El and Annelise. Their artistic and InDesign prowess surely surpasses mine and I cannot wait to see them shine.

Ultimately, I joined the *Independent* to create artwork, but I stayed for the people. The connections I made and the friendships I forged with people I would not have otherwise met through the *Indy* are so special to me. I am thankful for each member and wish all of you the best as you embark on your *Indy* journey.

Indylove,  
Piper Tingleaf '24



# An Ode to the Snow Day

## How our sacred snow days have been sacrificed.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

Growing up in Philadelphia, many snow days were scheduled all throughout elementary and middle school. My day consisted of hot chocolate, snowmen, and sleeping in, giving me some of my fondest childhood memories.

The death of the “snow day” is another one of the many long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The once-beloved snow days are now the dreaded “virtual day,” with classes being held on Zoom, assignments posted for asynchronous completion, and awkwardly silent breakout rooms for group activities. The excitement of a snow day is gone, and what was once a break from reality turned out not to be a break anymore.

The initially promised “two week” pause in time in March 2020 turned to months, leading to over a year of doing school and activities from home, utilizing virtual and online methods to continue our education and daily lives. People soon realized that being in person is not all that necessary. Poor weather? *We'll meet on Zoom.* Different time zones? *Let's do Zoom.* Can't meet face to face? *See you on Zoom.* The comfort of home is nice, sure, but Zoom calls in bed are nothing compared to the sacred *snow* day. A day at home is no longer a day off.

Snow days represent excitement, nostalgia, and simplicity. It's a day off we got to make our own due to reasons beyond our control. How you chose to spend your time was completely up to you. Your Wednesday felt more like a Saturday, with no school, classes, or waking up early. Most importantly, the snow day meant a *break*.

Snow days are a “free” absence—both necessary and not a personal choice. Snow days left you feeling energized, eager to pick up where classes and conversations had left off. If anything, snow days were essential to our physical and emotional development, giving us a way to grow individually while remaining ready for when we'd return to school. Breaks aren't a bad thing, they are crucial for our well-being and mental health.

Today, an actual day off has been replaced by still conducting our daily schedules, but online. Virtual culture has forced us as young adults to always be online; checking our emails, completing assignments, and being ready for the possibility of having a Zoom call scheduled at any hour. COVID-19 has disrupted the boundaries that the snow days had provided to us, interrupting any sense of personal space or time. What once broke us from rigidity now seems redundant, making actual time off suddenly abnormal.

With taking a break now feeling like a burden, it is no wonder why college students, at Harvard especially, feel burnout and exhaustion, especially as the semester comes to a close. Students have just one day off before Thanksgiving, Indigenous Peoples' Day, forcing them to push through relentless months of midterms, new class material, clubs, and activities. Thanksgiving “break,” just three days, is filled with an impending sense of doom, knowing that coming back to school means final exams, papers, and projects galore. The spring semester is no different: with only spring break offering students time off, a similar feeling of dread hangs over students as they approach their return.

When at Harvard, getting real time off is difficult to accomplish. Even with drastic weather conditions, it takes colleges a lot to cancel class, fearing “falling behind” in the syllabus or calendar year. Additionally, classes' strict absence policies and required participation points make taking time off suddenly unappealing. The rise of virtual platforms like Zoom and Canvas have heightened our pressure-cooker environment, providing us with little to no viable excuses for time away. Even if we feel that we need a break, we often don't take one due to a petrifying fear of falling behind.

It is time to bring back the concept of the snow day. A day off not just because it is scheduled, but because **why not?** A day off should actually mean a day off, allowing us to do what



ever  
we'd like to do  
on our own terms,  
regardless of what the schedule for that  
day was supposed to look like. The  
snow day represents more than just bad  
weather; it  
represents childlike joy and adventure  
that we would be remiss not to  
incorporate into our lives as college  
students.

At some point in my time at Harvard, I would love to have something like a real snow day, just like in elementary school. A day not taken over by stress or computers, but one where life stops, ready for us to rejoin it when we're ready. Maybe I won't exactly roll around in the snow like I did as a child, but I would relish the opportunity to take a break, a *real* break, without the feeling of punishment or strain. We owe it to ourselves to listen to our minds when it tells us to slow down. Rest is not a liability but a reward. It wouldn't hurt to feel like a kid again in the process.

LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26  
(LAYLACHAARAOU@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) WILL START SLEEPING  
WITH A SPOON UNDER HER PILLOW  
AGAIN.  
GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



# Selected Satire Comedy Pieces

BY DENNY GULIA-JANOVSKI '26

## LinkedIn

I am proud to announce that I have accepted a position as an incoming Summer Analyst in local distribution of petroleum products at ExxonMobil. I want to take the time to thank Dan. Dan, I know you probably aren't on LinkedIn and that you live off the grid to hide from the government. I hope you know you served as a mentor when you fell asleep on the counter and I was forced to pump my own gas. With this opportunity ahead of me, I'm looking forward to gaining invaluable experience and will continue to uphold the highest standards of service and integrity.

Worked up through the corporate ranks at Greyhound and was promoted to a corner office with a \$300,000 company vehicle. Drove 40-50 passengers daily, serving as an instrumental figure and mentor during their daily commutes. Left because of an assault charge.

### Entrepreneur

2 yrs 11 mos  
San Diego, California  
April 2014 – March 2017  
Worked as a freelance pharmaceutical distributor with a clientele of 30 people. After losing 3 of my clients to car accidents and 7 of them to overdoses, I retired from Small Pharma.

### Incident Report

Date: 10/25/2021. Time: 15:30  
Location: Near the outskirts of the forest, by the Shepherd's Trail, behind Old McDonald's farm.  
Involved Parties: Suspect, Unidentified Boy (deceased)  
The following is a transcript of the conversation:

*Can you tell me what exactly happened here?*

I...I don't understand why he did this to himself. He was so young...so young...

*Can you elaborate on that?*

I was minding my own business, Officer, when...a boy crawled up to me, crying and sobbing. He said he was tired, tired of the loneliness, the mockery. He felt isolated, ignored even. He said he wanted to prove to everyone that he wasn't lying.

*And then?*

And then...he just...walked right into my mouth. I was shocked, I didn't know what to do. I tried to spit him out, but...but it was too late. He was gone, already digested. I... I need a minute. *It's ok...just calm down. Deep breaths...yes, yes like that. Here's a tissue. Did you call for help when this occurred?*

I tried, Officer, I really did. But nobody came. They all thought it was just another false alarm. Nobody came to help.

*I see. I'm sorry you had to go through this, Mr... Mr...*

Mr. Wolf.

*Mr. Wolf. We'll update the boy's family and let them know what happened. I think I know who the real murderer is.*

You do?

*It's... it's society that has failed the boy. He must have been so lonely...so desperate. What a tragedy...*

## Investment

It's Rachel's birthday tomorrow. What do you think I should get her?  
How long you been together for?  
Coming up on 3 years now. Why?  
I mean you should go all out. No holding back this year. I'm thinking like a \$350 budget.  
You think so? I'm not sure sh-  
You should get her some Garden Yogis. What?  
Yeah a collection of garden gnomes in yoga poses.  
As a gift?  
Yeah, I mean they don't break or take up too much space or anything. Top notch quality. I'm not sure she'd like them. I mean I was thinking like a nice bracelet would be pretty cute.  
You know what I think is cute? Garden gnomes doing Warrior I.  
Maybe we should keep thinking.  
Or like garden gnomes doing a high crescent lunge. Isn't she into nature and garden stuff?  
Is this what it is? Listen man, I'm not gonna buy that junk you bought last year

as an "investment." What investment? They're priceless to me.

I didn't even know you kept that shitty

collection.  
Where else would it be? I've got 250 lbs of terracotta clay spread across my garage. Nobody wants a dozen garden gnomes in an eagle pose. You just said they're top notch quality!  
Yeah to you, I need to unload them. I'm your best friend...  
They...they...look real. And they really are top notch quality.  
I'm gonna go with the bracelet.  
...  
But if the bracelet is too expensive...  
20 gnomes doing the downward doggy. Huh?  
20 gnomes doing the downward doggy. What if she hates it? I don't want her to break up with me because of some shitty gift.  
Hey man, just remember. Love doesn't compound interest.



Experience:

### IHop

1 mo  
New York, New York  
Underwater Ceramics Repairman July 2019 – July 2019  
Worked as an Underwater Ceramics Repairman at IHop. Washed over 300 dishes a day for one day. Gained invaluable experience and knowledge in the short time I was there. Left because of disagreement with management about tip jar discrepancy.

### Chipotle

19 mos  
Jackson, Wyoming  
Line Cook Overseer January 2018 – July 2019  
Handled possible E. Coli samples at Chipotle. Individually handled 3 petri dishes and made notes of changes within them in 30 second intervals. Left because of disagreement with management about tip jar discrepancy.  
Self-Employed  
3 mos  
Miami, Florida  
November 2017 – January 2018  
Took a voluntary career break and interned as a defendant for an assault case.



### Greyhound

8 mos  
Miami, Florida  
Transportation Executive  
March 2017 – November 2017



**DENNY GULIA-JANOVSKI '26**  
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**GRAPHICS BY ANNELISE FISHER '26**











# Indy Sportsbook: Year in Review

## Part 2

Recapping every pick from this column's sophomore semester.

BY DECLAN BUCKLEY '24

A large portion of *Indy Sportsbook's* content has been dedicated to extolling the virtues of responsible sports gambling. It is a great way to bring even more excitement to the sports you love and can make you deeply invested in ones you never even thought about. We have greatly enjoyed all the highs and lows of our picks during our second semester of writing this column. At the end of the day, however, gambling truly boils down to one thing: making money. While tax season may not begin for another month, the time has come for us to tally all of our gains and losses during the Fall 2023 season.



We undertook a similar venture in our final column of this past Spring. For those who forget (though we cannot see why anyone would not have every edition of *Indy Sportsbook* ingrained in their memory), our inaugural semester produced decidedly mixed results. There were weeks it seemed that we could not miss, and others where we spent over 800 words getting things wrong (please do not bring up the Sex Issue). Overall, we were happy with the promise we showed and felt confident we could bring more consistency to the column next semester.

Spoiler alert: we did not.

We began the year with a preview of the NFL season. We emphasized the dangers of betting on rookie quarterbacks, telling you to take the under on the Panthers (7.5), Texans (6.5), and Colts (6.5) win totals. Our very first pick ended up setting the down for what would be another bumpy road for the column: Bryce Young has been a disaster, C.J. Stroud is an

MVP candidate, and Anthony Richardson's season ended after an injury in Week 4. Elsewhere, we were spot-on about the 49ers being a juggernaut and our faith in the Falcons looks promising.

Our next column warned against following sportsbook-generated parlays, which have a high propensity for failure. Instead, we focused on less-promoted sports that give the user more of an edge. Our remarkable success with non-NFL sports leagues continued, as we correctly predicted the Toronto Argonauts to beat the Hamilton Tiger-Cats. In what was nearly our greatest success of the semester, we correctly predicted a WNBA Finals matchup between the New York Liberty and Las Vegas Aces.

Alas, dominant performances from A'ja Wilson and Kelsey Plum meant that Vegas defeated our pick to win it all. Frank Robinson's "horseshoes and hand grenades" quote never feels truer than when you come oh-so-close to winning big.

This semester saw us publish two different columns focusing on the English Premier League. After a disappointing opening performance thanks to a shocking Luton Town win and unlucky goal over/unders, we were determined to do better the second time around. Thankfully, we did this and more. In what was perhaps our most successful column of the year, we correctly picked both the Manchester Derby and El Classico. Other highlights were a Darwin Nunez goalscorer prediction and a 3-1 Premier League match record.

Our mid semester recap bragged extensively about our success with a tone that borderlines on hubris in retrospect. The column's picks exhibited an inconsistency that at this point has

become *Indy Sportsbook's* calling card. Two of our three award picks—Josh Allen for NFL MVP and Mikal Bridges for NBA MIP—were done and dusted mere weeks later. We correctly chose all four teams to make the MLB Championship Series, but swung and missed on the Phillies to win it all (our accuracy in picking which teams will come *close* to winning championships, but lack thereof in picking the winner itself, seems pretty emblematic of our overall performance). As should be expected for a column written by Boston sports fans, we are anxiously awaiting for our Bruins and Celtics championship bets to hit.

Our final attempt at being the school's most rogue financial advisors brought us our most exciting opportunity yet—betting on Harvard sports. Though our predicted winner of The Game sadly fell just short, there was never any chance we would pick Yale anyway. We take some solace in the fact that two out of our three prop bets hit. Additionally, this column marked our debut as (pretend) oddsmakers ourselves due to the lack of FCS lines available. We are happy to report our lines were remarkably similar to the ones eventually posted.

As the semester comes to a close, we once again can look back on both wins we are proud of and losses we would like to forget. Perhaps that is the nature of gambling, particularly for amateur ones such as ourselves. While we may never achieve a semester that even approaches being an alternative to investing your money in the S&P 500, that will not stop us from trying.

**DECLAN BUCKLEY '24  
(DECLANBUCKLEY@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE STEPPING  
DOWN AS SPORTS EDITOR NEXT  
SEMESTER AND WISHES HIS FELLOW  
INDY SPORTSBOOK STAFF THE  
BEST OF LUCK IN THEIR FUTURE  
GAMBLING ENDEAVORS.  
GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27**



# Welcome (Back) to the Excelsior Podcast A madhouse of personalities makes up the newest Independent podcast.

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

**H**ello Indy reader! For those of you who have listened to the *Excelsior* podcast, it's nice to see you again—in writing this time—and please enjoy this deep dive into your favorite podcast. For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about, now's your chance to rectify that.

Let's get the boring stuff out of the way. *Excelsior*, published by The Harvard *Independent*, is a pop-culture podcast focused primarily on movies, TV shows, video games, and the like. We create an enjoyable balance of comedy and deep, thoughtful analysis of your favorite content. At its core, *Excelsior* is a group of lifelong friends who want to share our insanity with the world. We cover everything from major blockbusters like *Oppenheimer* and the Marvel Cinematic Universe to news and events within entertainment, including the writer's strike and the Rotten Tomatoes controversy. You can find us wherever you get your podcasts: Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, and Amazon Music.

*Excelsior*, named as an homage to Stan Lee's iconic catchphrase, began as a comic book/superhero movie magazine that I took over during my sophomore year of high school. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, I wanted to make something that could bring people together while we were stuck at home. Thus, the podcast was born. Our core friend group started recording every few weeks, and the first season was *rough*. We had no funding or equipment, and we used our phone mics to record six feet apart, sitting across the room to comply with social distancing guidelines. Production quality has skyrocketed since then. With unique cover arts for every episode, a suite of different audio and video tools that make each episode both fun and professional, and years of experience under our belts, *Excelsior* has evolved in so many amazing ways, and I can't wait to see where it goes from here.

Three years, four seasons, and nearly 70 episodes later, I am so happy to still be doing this. With the studio now scattered across the country, all at different colleges, the podcast's core mission of keeping us together and welcoming the world into our bedlam is more alive than ever. Let's say that over winter break and J-term, you wanted to look back and get "caught up" so to speak on the *Excelsior* Cinematic Universe. Where should you start?

*Excelsior* is not structured like most podcasts. I host each episode,

joined by a rotation of some of my closest friends (more on them below). Although each episode is self-contained (each episode is about a different topic), we have numerous running bits that we reference constantly. At the end of this article is a list of some of our best and favorite episodes. All of these can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Amazon Music, and I have marked which can be found on YouTube with an asterisk.

Alright. I think it's time to meet the studio! First: Jordan Wasserberger '27, host extraordinaire.

## Jordan Wasserberger: Host Extraordinaire

Howdy everyone! *Excelsior* has been my baby over the last few years, and I'm glad to see it's found a home here at Harvard—I'm so excited that I was able to bring it to the Indy, and I can't wait to see where this partnership takes us. It's also been great to see the reaction from an entirely new community of listeners. I cannot express the joy I feel when a dedicated listener approaches me in Cabot or Berg to say how much they hated my opinion on something. Please do reach out with any comments, questions, or concerns about our podcast—we appreciate each and every one of you.

A little bit of background about me. I'm a freshman living in Weld, studying economics. My biggest passion is the video game industry—I can talk for hours about all things gaming and have had to cut 3 monologues from *Excelsior* because they weren't relevant at all—I was just bursting with excitement. As the only one of the group who's that passionate about video games, I'm looking for new ways to bring it to the podcast. Stay tuned for some exciting interviews and other special episodes in the future.

In the studio, I tend to have the more extreme opinions (see my

"double thumbs down stinkeroo" *Five Nights at Freddy's* review). I am also terrible at remembering said extreme opinions. One of our longest-running gags is my complete inability to recall what score I gave a previous project, even one we reviewed just a few days before. I can't explain it.

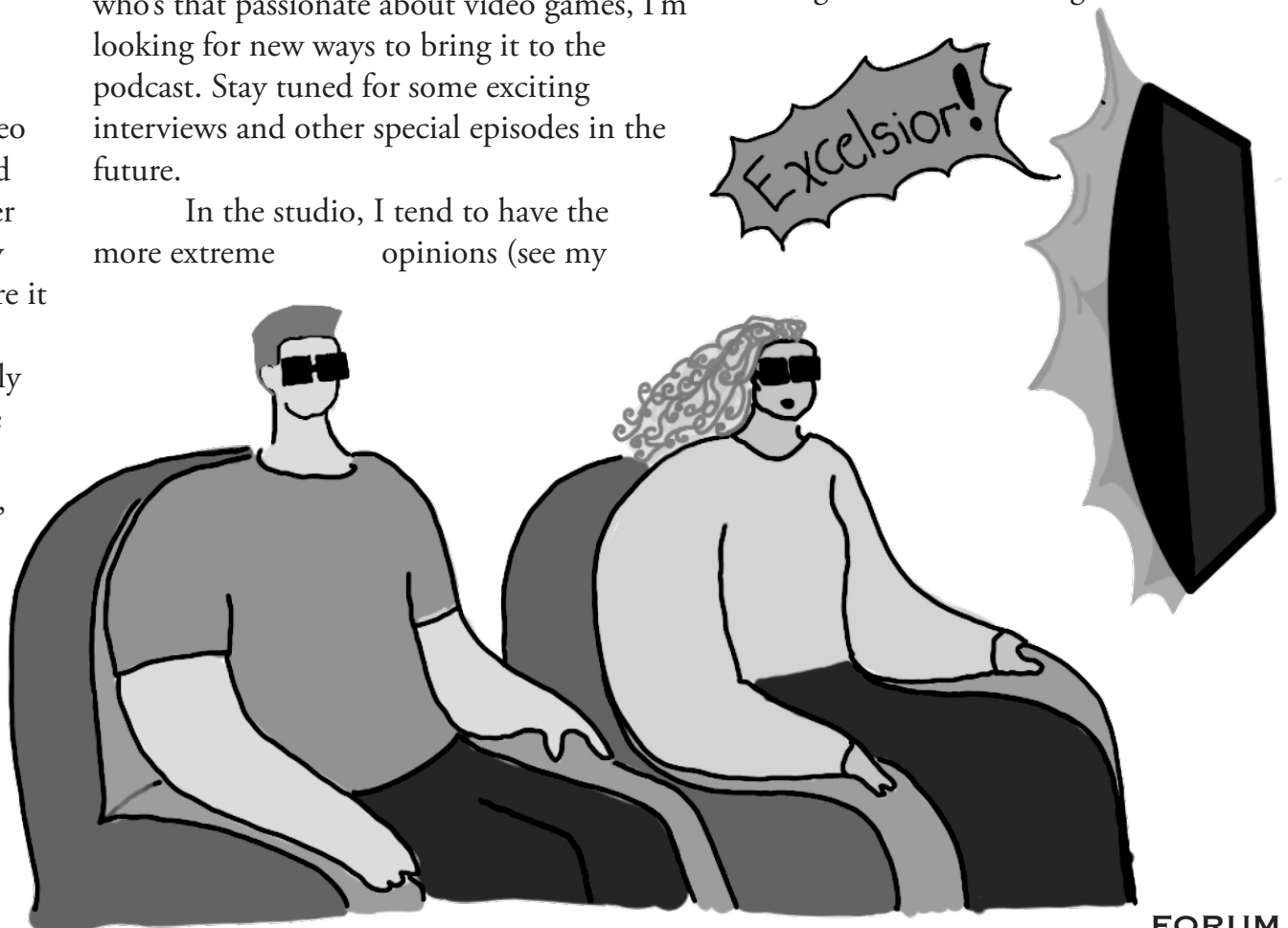
Rather than just hearing from me, I thought it might be fun to let the other studio members comment. Enjoy.

**Patrick Stinebaugh, University of Southern California '26:** Jordan is the greatest example in history of someone not letting a lack of talent hold them back. I marvel at watching him attempt to do the bare minimum. It's so... effortful for him.

**Logan Dracos, Duke '26:** Jordan has somehow attached himself to the two most absolutely mediocre franchises of all time, and swears by them again and again. It makes one wonder if he's even qualified to host a podcast on such topics... I'd rather listen to pots falling on a ten-hour loop than have to listen to another rant about *Destiny* or *The Walking Dead*.

**Ethan Waggoner, University of Chicago '26:** It truly amazes me how a man of so many words can say nothing at all. I have never witnessed someone be so consistently incorrect with such fire. To not have the slightest clue what you're talking about and exhibit such passion and love is what makes Jordan truly one of a kind.

Big thank you to all of them for those heartfelt messages. So kind. Moving on!





### Patrick Stinebaugh: Movie Guy™

As the above suggests, Patrick is the movie guy to end all movie guys. As part of the USC screenwriter program, Patrick is one of the top 30 screenwriters in the country. Patrick brings a level of deep, analytical thinking to Excelsior that no one else can match, often drawing on elements of a particular project that the rest of us couldn't notice. His monologues are second to none, and once you really get him going, you'll more likely than not learn something completely new.

Although Patrick may one day win an Oscar for best original screenplay, he also unapologetically loves *The Maze Runner: The Death Cure*. Not the book, the movie. This movie, which many consider to be a complete failure, and has a 43% on Rotten Tomatoes. Alas, no one is perfect. Patrick and I rarely see completely eye to eye on any one of our takes, and so I take to heart those special moments where we are united (like in our newest episode: "Too Many Snakes, Not Enough Ballads").

### Logan Dracos: CEO of Sex Appeal

A computer science major at Duke, Logan is the balancing force of the group. He is often the one to reel us in when we delve down any number of rabbit holes and is the epitome of thoughtful analysis combined with gut-wrenching comedy.

Usually a more reserved voice (until he isn't), Logan has delivered some Oscar-worthy performances on *Excelsior*, and shines in many of the featured episodes below.

He has the most agreed-upon good takes of any of us (yes, I tallied), which is a pretty amazing accomplishment. Logan is the only member of the studio who has missed a joke so badly that I felt it necessary to include it in the description of the episode. Enough roasting Logan though, because nothing will top the fact that for nearly a quarter of the episodes he's a part of, I forgot to mention him in both the description and the posted clip on Instagram. Sorry buddy, that's on me.

### Ethan Waggoner: The Megaphone of Insanity

Ethan Eddie Waggs Waggoner (you will hear me call him all four of those names in any given episode) has been my best friend since Day One of high school. I have never met another human being with Ethan's capacity for formulating and stating abhorrent opinions with the confidence of LeBron James dunking on a bunch of toddlers. Ethan's most notable contributions include, but are not limited to:

1. "Because Star Wars Episode IX is bad, I should never watch a single piece of past or future Star Wars content ever again."
2. "I will not watch *The Walking Dead*, purely out of spite for Jordan."
3. "Movies need more simplistic side characters," (he said in reference to Gamorra in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*).

As the years have gone on Ethan has only solidified these opinions. We bring up these takes consistently, and whenever he's there he adamantly insists that he's right, regardless of what we say in response.

I introduced Ethan, quite intentionally, as "the megaphone of insanity." I've covered the insanity part well enough, but I don't think you all quite

understand just how loud this individual is. When I edit each *Excelsior* episode, I have to take special care to normalize and modulate Ethan's audio, because it is normally multiple decibel levels higher than the rest of ours. Not because his mic is weird, or because of how he's recording, it's just all him.

### Excelsior Episodes to Watch

#### 1. Episode 33: Season 2 Finale

Unequivocally the best *Excelsior* episode of all time, the Season 2 Finale

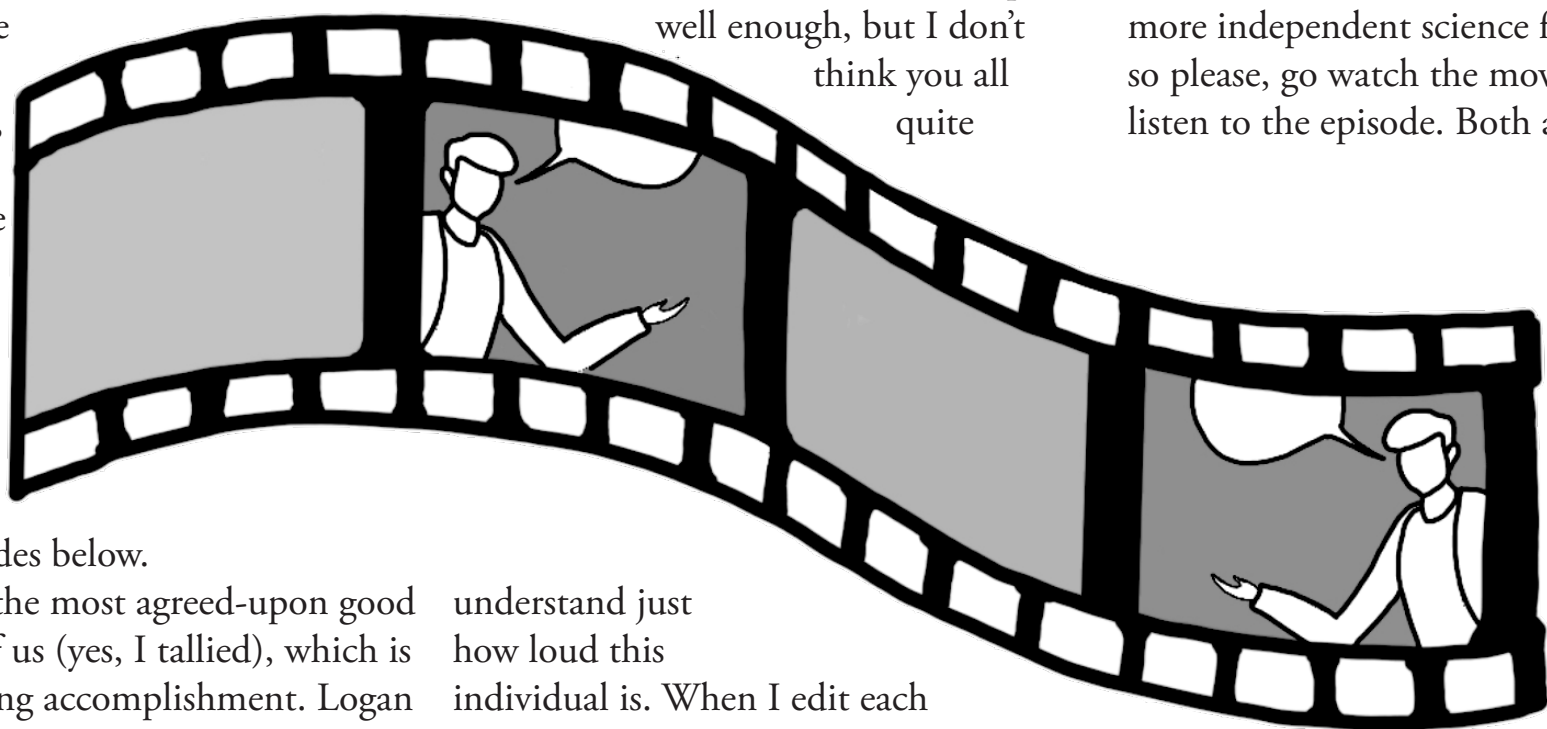
was initially recorded as the last *Excelsior* episode ever. For nearly four hours on the last day of high school, we sat and ranked nearly every single animated film ever made. The emotions of leaving high school and saying goodbye to each other and the podcast resulted in nothing short of a spectacle. Yes, this episode is a bit chaotic, and ends in a physical altercation between all the members of the studio, but nothing captures our friend group quite like this extravaganza. Enjoy it.

### Episode 41: 2022 Holiday Special\*

The 2022 Holiday Special is our second try at ranking the entirety of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and we actually made a pretty great, if imperfect list. Episodes like this are always fun for us—the MCU played such a massive role in all of our childhoods, and we rarely get to have conversations about it as a whole, in such an all-encompassing way. If you're a Marvel fan at all, I promise you will have a good time with this one.

### Episode 59: The Creator: A Box Office DISASTER\*

The first episode published by the Independent, our review of *The Creator* is probably our best review ever. It's the perfect blend of comedy and analysis, with some truly hysterical moments. I'm putting this here as both a plug for us but also the movie itself. We need more independent science fiction films, so please, go watch the movie, and then listen to the episode. Both are great.



**JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27 (JWASSERBERGER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO HAVE SOMEONE YELL AT HIM IN HARVARD YARD ABOUT ANY NUMBER OF HIS RIDICULOUS TAKES ON EXCELSIOR.**

**GRAPHICS BY ISABEL EDDY '24**



# Harvard's Quest for Fulfillment A Call to Rediscover the Joy of Learning Amidst Prestige and Pressures.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

The purpose of a Harvard education is supposedly the joy of discovery, the thrill of intellectual curiosity, and the personal satisfaction of mastering a challenging concept. However, the prevailing vision of many Harvard students is that college is simply a pathway to a universally desired outcome—a prestigious, high-salary career. This vision is hard to escape. Harvard's student culture perpetuates an environment where personal development is relegated to secondary consideration, a mere footnote in the grand narrative of pre-professional education and GPA maximization.

Evaluating education solely based on job prospects or social standing, an approach fostered by Harvard's culture, misses the mark significantly. Education, in its truest form, should transcend the confines of perfect GPAs, economic benefits, and material success. It should prioritize the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity and a lifelong love for learning, fostering well-rounded individuals who contribute meaningfully to society. I recognize that adhering to this perspective can pose a considerable challenge, and it's not always easy to step back from the environment of such a polarizing place. However, Harvard University and its students need to shift from a myopic emphasis on career-centric goals to a more holistic and growth-oriented approach, reclaiming the true essence of education.

The issues manifested by Harvard College students stem from practices ingrained much earlier on in their academic careers. Even before students arrive on campus, there is a noticeable absence of initiatives to foster intellectual curiosity. Many ambitious high school students find themselves dedicating countless hours to meticulously crafting academic profiles, often foregoing the pursuit of subjects they genuinely enjoy. In high school, I was encouraged by college counselors and teachers alike to pursue the debate team, the school newspaper, and leadership roles. My roommate once admitted that his high school life had the singular objective of gaining admission to prestigious schools like Harvard. The relentless pursuit of the "next step" in education, while understandable, leads to a deleterious mindset, one where the journey of learning is overshadowed by the destination it is presumed to lead to.

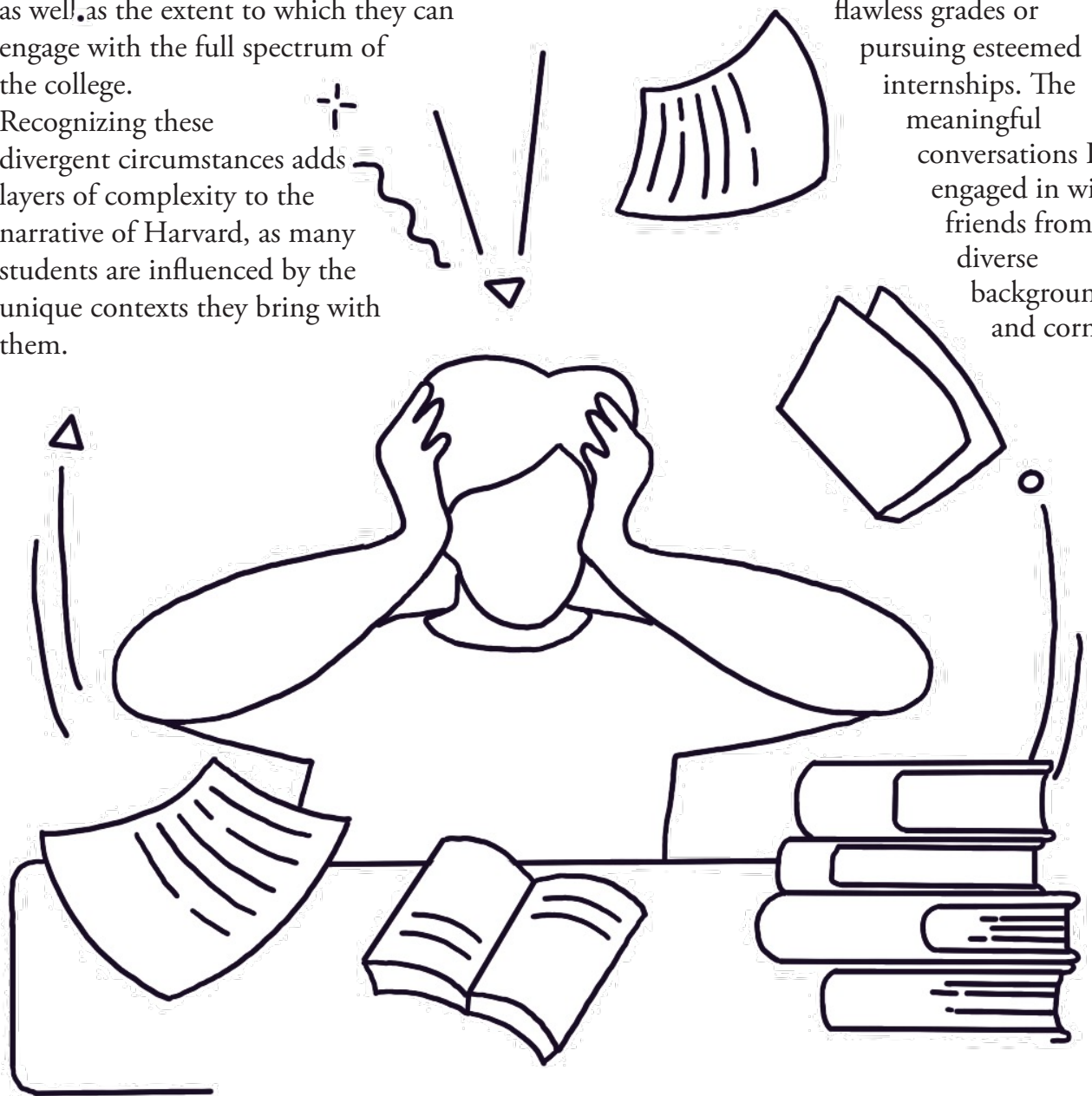
Many Harvard students entered the University with a strong focus on their academic path, having meticulously crafted impressive college applications. Upon arriving at Harvard, they find themselves in an

environment that continues to prioritize grades, club involvement, and networking, perpetuating a cycle of the pursuit of prestige. While striving for academic excellence is commendable, students must recognize that there is inherent value in relishing and appreciating the rich tapestry of experiences that university life offers. Not everything has to be a means to an end.

However, it is imperative to consider the external forces that wield a profound influence on students' experiences. Undergrads arrive with vastly different backgrounds that ultimately shape their experiences and create a dynamic tapestry of identities, perspectives, and conversation. Some face the weighty responsibility of providing for their families—their journey through Harvard is intricately intertwined with the financial pressures of their households. In stark contrast, others may come from more affluent backgrounds, affording them a broader spectrum of choices and opportunities. These circumstances influence both the pragmatic decisions students make about their academic pursuits, as well as the extent to which they can engage with the full spectrum of the college. Recognizing these divergent circumstances adds layers of complexity to the narrative of Harvard, as many students are influenced by the unique contexts they bring with them.

focus: leveraging the Harvard brand to pave the way for prosperous career trajectories or as a conduit for securing financially advantageous relationships. While Harvard outwardly emphasizes its dedication to fostering intellectual curiosity, the prevailing culture within the community often appears tilted towards a more career-centric mindset. It's disconcerting that Harvard students are enveloped in a somewhat precarious and narrow-minded vision, fixating predominantly on outcomes. A dominating focus among students revolves around immediate and tangible outcomes, such as securing high-paying job opportunities after graduation or landing coveted summer internships with prestigious companies.

Harvard is not solely accountable for this phenomenon. I acknowledge having slipped into the mindset of prioritizing grades and prestigious internships. However, I am earnestly committed to breaking free from this worldview. The true enrichment of one's mental faculties and the profound expansion of cultural understanding far surpass the significance of achieving flawless grades or pursuing esteemed internships. The meaningful conversations I've engaged in with friends from diverse backgrounds and corners



In my candid conversations with peers and friends, I've come to observe that many students, whether overtly expressing it or not, navigate their Harvard journey with a primary

of the world on this campus have proven to offer enduring value, eclipsing the potential impact of any class or grade.

GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26  
FORUM | 13



In a scenario where education is viewed solely as a stepping stone to the next life phase, the concern arises: *how can students allocate time to explore their true passions and develop a genuine appreciation for their education? Can one genuinely claim to have fully utilized their time at an institution like Harvard if their focus is perpetually fixed on what lies beyond college?*

Even though Harvard is touted as a stepping stone to future prosperity, it's crucial to engage earnestly with the traditional college experience. Focusing narrowly on terminal outcomes can lead us into suboptimal situations where we are enthralled with the letters in our transcript, forcing us to endure more than we ought to for the sake of long-term objectives. At the start of my Harvard career, I took only STEM classes, thinking something in that field would set me up to make the most money out of college. However, I quickly realized that creating molecular structures and solving 4D integrals was not the way I wanted to spend my time here.

I will never forget watching people cry in the Matthews Common Room because they could not find the time to complete their work. There persists a grim acceptance at Harvard that life is inherently fraught with hardships that must be endured, all for the ultimate reward of living up to conventional standards of academic success and securing a prestigious position in the workforce.

This is not to suggest that academic endeavors

and professional experiences are trivial. Rather, I advocate for a recalibration of priorities, where the purpose of one's time at Harvard is not singularly defined by wealth accumulation and focus on the next step of life.

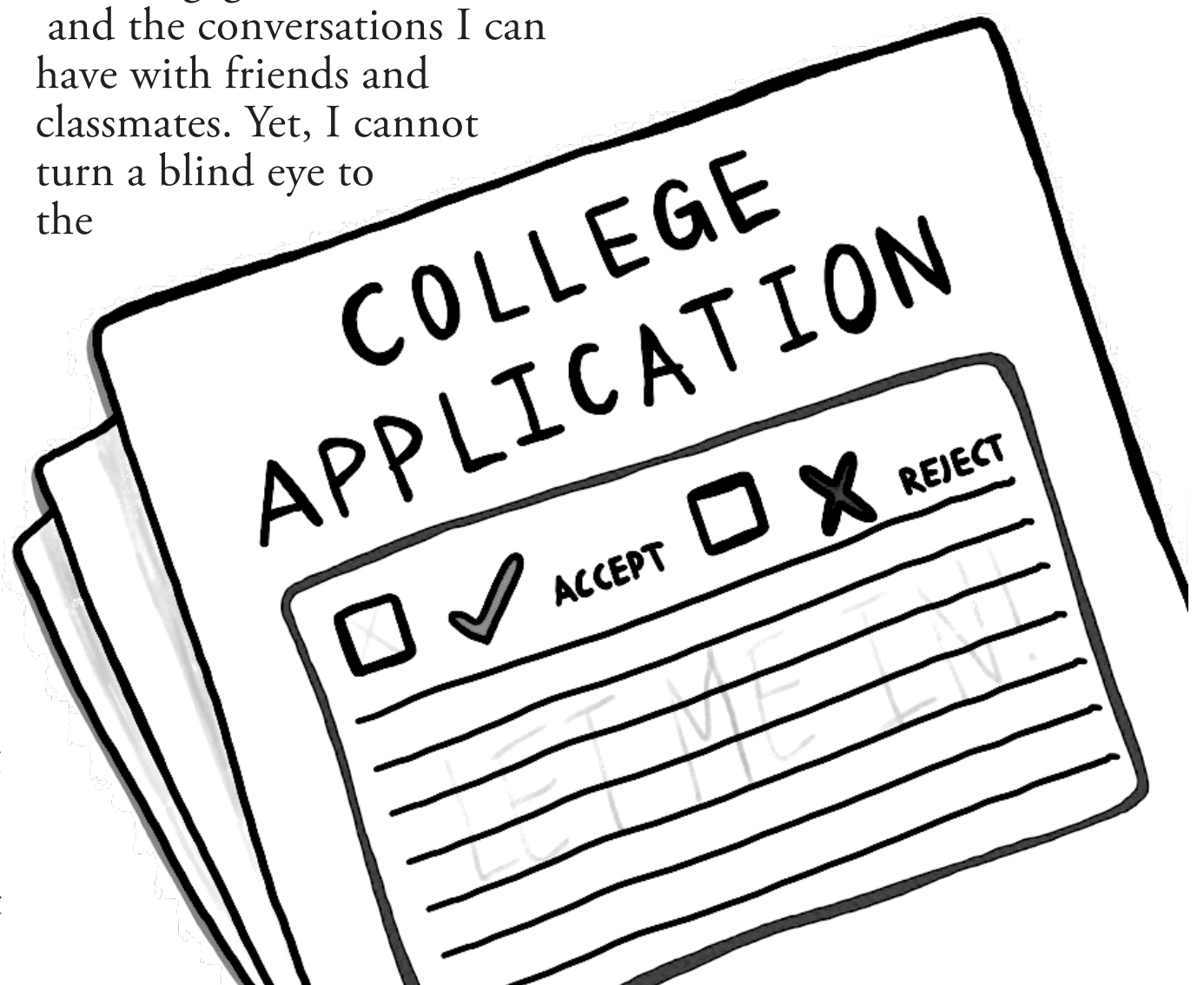
Countless narratives from individuals reflecting on their lives affirm that true fulfillment seldom stems from academic accolades or the first rung on the career ladder. What inspires people to get up each morning, what imbues their lives with meaning, is often disconnected from the conventional markers of success we are conditioned to chase. Rather, it lies with the people and the relationships closest to them.

As a member of the Harvard community, I am acutely aware that the education I receive is unparalleled in many respects. I am completely blessed and fortunate to be at this campus just because of the different voices I can hear, the speakers I can engage with, and the conversations I can have with friends and classmates. Yet, I cannot turn a blind eye to the

concerning desires of many of the student body. Harvard, as an academic institution, should recommit itself to serving the educational mission and its students first and foremost. Students should shift their focus from what job they are going to get to something more holistic and growth-oriented. The University must realign its focus, ensuring that academic pursuits are not unduly influenced by the weight of the endowment or the whispers of donors. Only then can Harvard truly fulfill its promise as a leading light of higher education, unshadowed by the specter of commercial interests.

**LUKE WAGNER '26 (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES FORUM FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY ALMA RUSSELL '26**





# Crossword

BY REBECCA ACKERMAN '25

1	2	3	4	5
6				
7				
8				
9				

## ACROSS

- 1 Nick name?
- 6 Winter coats
- 7 Cutting down,  
after "on"
- 8 Less cooked
- 9 Beloved princess

## DOWN

- 1 Dig find
- 2 Vietnamese  
garment
- 3 Nigeria's currency
- 4 Woodenware
- 5 Latin stars



COVER ART BY EL RICHARDS '26  
LAYOUT BY ANNELISE FISHER '26 AND EL  
RICHARDS '26

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