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# MASTHEAD

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# UNCONVENTIONAL STUDY ABROAD CULTURE

## Why so few Harvard students study abroad during the semester and the international experiences they seek instead.

BY HANNAH DAVIS '25

College admissions officers flaunt study abroad rates and course credit transfers. At many schools, study abroad opportunities can be the pinnacle of students' college experiences. Yet, Harvard students rarely study abroad during the fall and spring semesters. Is it due to the lack of opportunity for credit transfer? FOMO if all your friends stay on campus? Pressure to not waste a second of the Harvard education? Studying abroad at Harvard looks different from the average school, but many students still take advantage of international experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic recently dampened study-abroad opportunities. In the 2021-2022 academic year, less than 6% of all United States undergraduates studied abroad. Even pre-COVID, less than 5% of Harvard students studied abroad during term in 2015, compared with the 23.2% rate at Big 10 schools in 2017. Harvard College's study abroad website flaunts that "over half of Harvard College students participate in an international experience during their time as an undergraduate." However, this statement may be misleading, because it could include students who study abroad over the summer or enter other international programs.

Robert H. Fogel '25 attributes the difference between Harvard and other schools to the culture surrounding study abroad opportunities. "If I look at my friends from home, I'm pretty sure I'm the only one not studying abroad during their junior year," Fogel said. "I think the reason that I ended up not doing it was simply part of that broader culture. If pretty much all my friends were going to be here at Harvard, it would take a lot to draw me away from all that."

The majority of Harvard students participating in international excursions capitalize on breaks from school including winter break and summer, rather than the traditional semester abroad experience. Student organizations, such as Youth Lead the Change, Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations, and Harvard Radcliffe Orchestra Foundations, also offer opportunities for students to travel abroad during school breaks or during the summer.

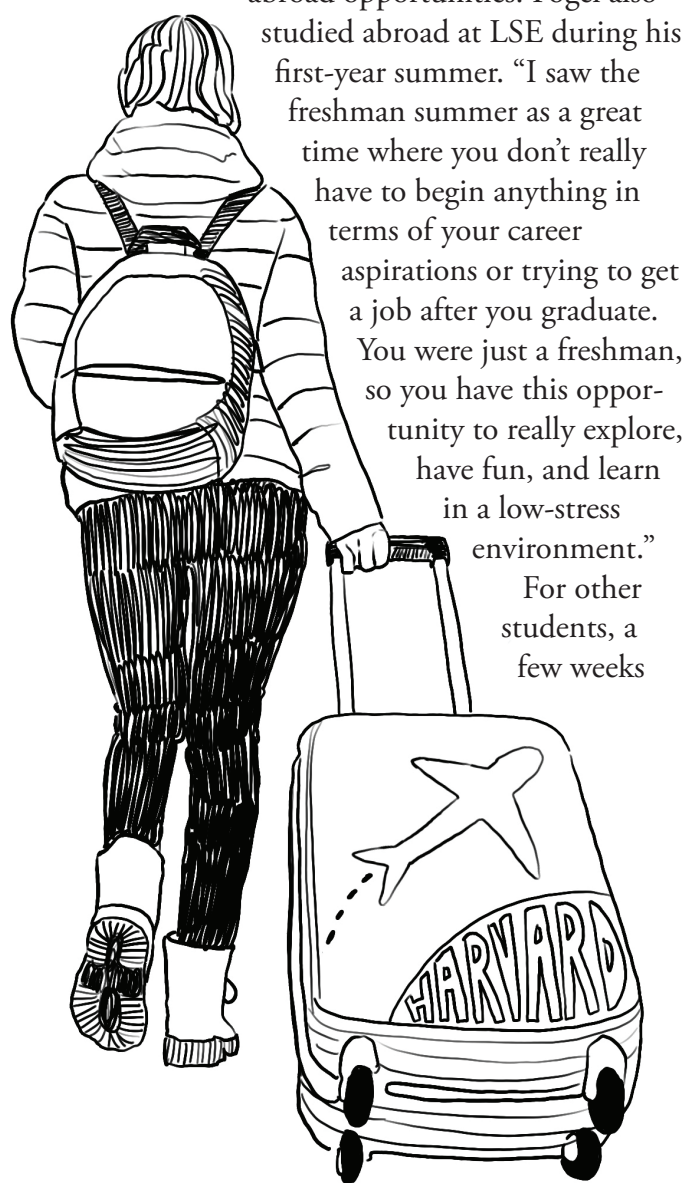
The *Independent's* Educational Director, Franny Connors '26, is considering studying abroad next year but understands why alternative programs are so popular. "There are so many free trips. People who do summer programs can get funding from the Office of International Education."

Sports teams may also inflate the rate of international student experiences as some go on international trips. Nearly 1,200 students, or 20% of the student body, participate in varsity sports. Over the 2023-2024 winter break, the Golf team went to Australia and New Zealand, and the Women's Field Hockey team visited Peru. Even if students seek additional experiences to travel and live internationally, taking a semester abroad as a

varsity athlete is difficult. Therefore, many choose to go during the summer instead.

Martin Nelson '25, a member of the Men's Lacrosse team, studied at the London School of Economics during his first-year summer. "LSE was a great chance to live abroad and get the study abroad experience without sacrificing our ability to train for an extended period of time," Nelson said. "On our team, and I'm sure all of the others, studying abroad isn't seen as an option during the school year. I'm grateful that I had the chance to do LSE over the summer."

Non-athletes also capitalize on summers through Harvard or other schools for study abroad opportunities. Fogel also studied abroad at LSE during his first-year summer. "I saw the freshman summer as a great time where you don't really have to begin anything in terms of your career



aspirations or trying to get a job after you graduate. You were just a freshman, so you have this opportunity to really explore, have fun, and learn in a low-stress environment."

For other students, a few weeks

over the summer is not long enough to provide the cultural and language experiences they desire. "Even if you do six semesters of French at Harvard, it's just not the same as living in France, where you can speak French every day and become fluent," Connors said. "It's also hard to be able to put roots down into place. And then I also want to see other places in Europe. You don't have much time to do that [in only a few weeks]."

Nevertheless, many students still hold back from studying abroad for fear of wasting one of eight precious semesters at Harvard. Fogel hesitated due to concerns about leaving friends and extracurriculars behind. "There's often a sentiment that I hear that Harvard is so great. *Why would I want to leave Cambridge? What opportunities could be outside Cambridge?* And sure, you know, we may have fantastic professors and some of the best departments in the world. But, there's so much more to learning that takes place outside of those strict definitions within

academia, you know, getting to explore a country and interact with people of various nationalities. Those are valuable experiences that many Harvard students won't have at all."

Bridget Sands '24 echoed that sentiment, thinking back to her study abroad experience in Barcelona. "I think back and it almost feels like a fever dream because it was so not a Harvard experience. I learned so much about myself and the world around me in such a different way... This is an experience that you have no idea what you're missing."

Credit transfer can also be a concern for students, particularly those with tighter course requirements. Planning credits ahead of time and coordinating with one's academic departments is essential to making study abroad during the semester a real possibility, particularly for those who change their course of study or who pursue a secondary or citation.

Sands studies Applied Mathematics and was relieved that the department supported her study abroad plans. "Once I realized I could get two credits directly to my major, I was fully signed on because that was my biggest concern," she said. "Dr. Margo Levine is the Associate Director of Undergraduate Studies in Applied Math. She was amazing in helping me find syllabi and classes that would fit certain credits of my applied math degree, which is huge."

Betsey Bennett '24 studies Psychology and studied abroad in Florence. She explains that not all concentration credit is that easy. "In the end, I had to take two classes in my concentration to equal one credit for Harvard, but I was still happy to get some credit."

Connors summarizes her takeaways from her conversations with other students as she debated studying abroad. "I think there's kind of an air of regret from upperclassmen and an air of 'I would never do that' from underclassmen."

Term time study abroad is not the norm at Harvard and may never be. Students need to plan far ahead to make it even possible to get credit and be courageous enough to bear the FOMO of a semester away. However, the international travel opportunities from sports teams, student organizations, and summer schools soften the blow of this cultural shortcoming. Students can still soak up their international experiences, even though they might look different from the stereotypical college study abroad.

**HANNAH DAVIS '25 (HANNAHDAVIS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STUDIED ABROAD FOR SIX WEEKS AT LSE DURING FIRST-YEAR SUMMER.**

**GRAPHIC BY OLIVIA PARK '27**

# VARO HOUSE: THE FUTURE OF HARVARD PARTIES?

NEW EVENT-PLANNING ORGANIZATION INTRODUCES ITSELF WITH A SURREALIST LAUNCH PARTY.

BY ANDREW SPIELMANN '25

Walking into Varo House's launch party on Friday, February 2nd, guests were struck with a sense that this party was something different—no small detail had gone unplanned or unnoticed. From the decoration to the guest list to the drinks menu, the founders of Varo House had clearly put a lot of thought into their first event, hosted at the Signet Society clubhouse.

Varo House is a new organization founded by Stephanie Hu '26, Jovan Lim '25, and Maia Posternack '26. They describe themselves as a “full-service event-hosting agency” focused on “elevating social gatherings and parties for its clientele of students and student organizations.” The *Independent* was able to attend their launch party on Friday and interview the founders on their motivation behind the agency and the event.

“Our entire mission is to help fulfill the vision of whatever client we're working for,” Hu explained. They intend to work with Harvard student organizations as well as individual students looking to plan an event, and their approach is tailored to the client: “We can be as full service as the client wants us to,” which includes planning, hiring staff, acquiring a venue, running an event, and even cleaning up. Their launch party was just a demonstration of what they can do.

Invited to the launch party were primarily leaders of student organizations—Varo House's potential clientele—who received wax-sealed invitations at their dorm rooms. They also invited members of the arts community—potential collaborators for future events—along with friends and plus-ones, bringing the guest list to 270 people.

It is safe to say the event was a success. The Signet was packed but with room to move. The dress code was masquerade black tie with “a surrealist twist” (Varo House is named after Spanish surrealist painter Remedios Varo). The crowd did not disappoint, with weird and wacky additions to their typical formal attire. This, along with the surrealist marketing materials, made the entire event feel a little more special than most. The music, drinks, and decoration established the team's ability to execute the event itself.

Upon entering, we were pointed to the two bars and the three different rooms. The main room was the “Space Room,” with lavish decorations, a bar with their special NEWS | 4 themed cocktail menu, and

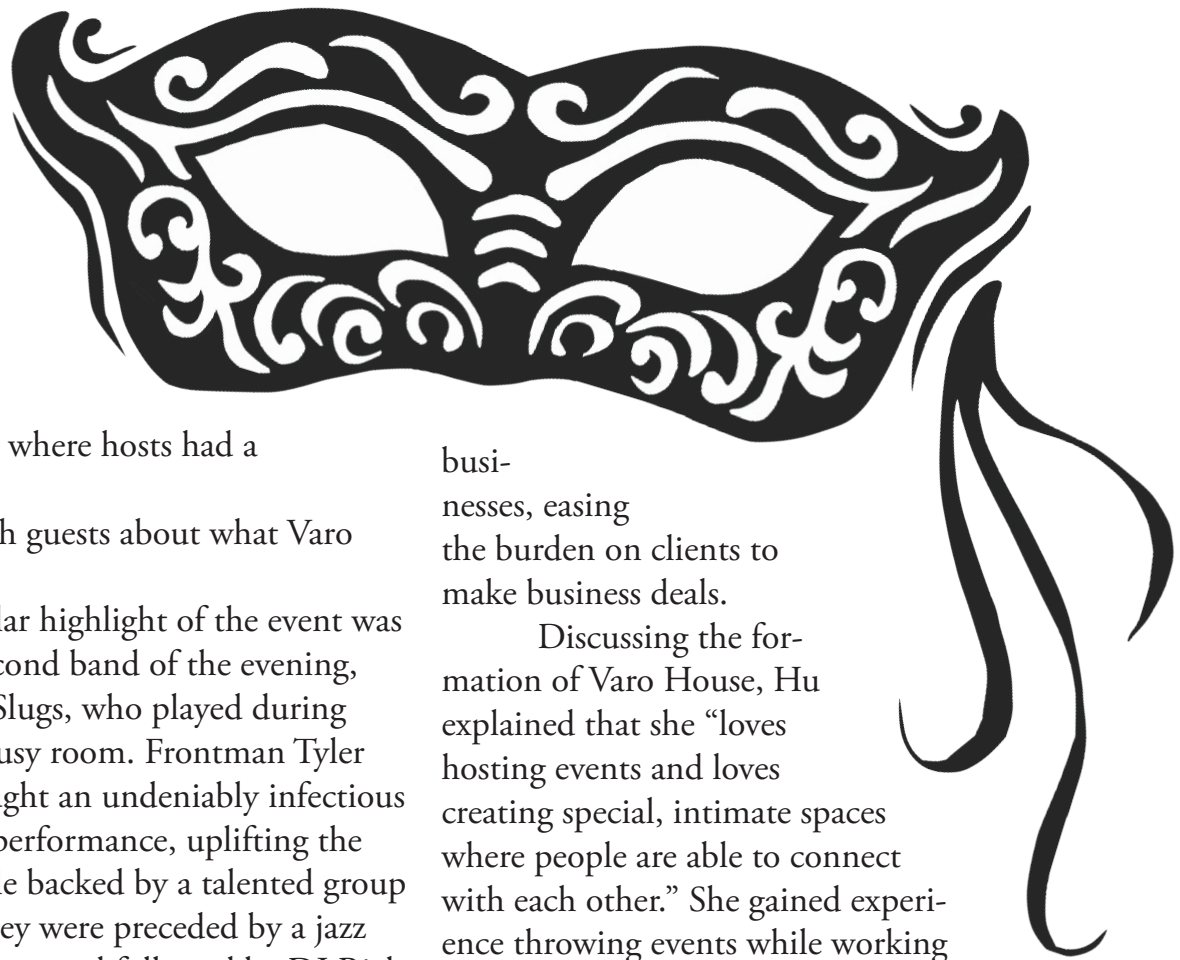
the performing musicians. Off to the sides were the “Salon Room,” for a more subdued hangout with snacks, and the “Supper Room,” where hosts had a more intimate conversation with guests about what Varo House is.

A particular highlight of the event was the set by the second band of the evening, Ekblad and the Slugs, who played during peak time to a busy room. Frontman Tyler Heaton '25 brought an undeniably infectious energy with his performance, uplifting the entire room while backed by a talented group of musicians. They were preceded by a jazz band, Out of Time, and followed by DJ Rick Zhou '25.

Posternack emphasized that the rooms, the drinks, and the music were all a part of their meticulous planning. “We wanted each of the three rooms to be different... We wanted [the music] to be a progression throughout the night—that's why it starts with jazz, then goes to indie rock and ends with house music... Even the fact that the cocktails were all based on surrealist artists.” For a client, much of Varo House's value lies in their ability to pay attention to all of the little details.

The collaboration with Harvard artists, including the musicians, photographers, and even the bartenders, is a particular selling point of Varo House. That was also a big motivation for Lim: “There is a lot of talent that exists, and they are amazing in their own special way,” and those artists usually only have platforms where “if you're in the [arts] crowd, you will attend such events. But I think our mission is to bring that to the forefront of what we do.” Indeed, many student organizations might not know where to start when looking for entertainment, so Varo House could be crucial in connecting the artists and the clients.

Another draw is Varo House's collaboration with sponsors, which reduces costs through marketing deals whilst supporting small businesses. At their launch party, flowers from Brattle Square Florist adorned the rooms, and the drinks contained spirits from Yobo Drinks. They plan to continue to build their relationships with



businesses, easing the burden on clients to make business deals.

Discussing the formation of Varo House, Hu explained that she “loves hosting events and loves creating special, intimate spaces where people are able to connect with each other.” She gained experience throwing events while working for a marketing agency last summer and learned “a lot about what it means to throw an impactful event that would be able to deliver on a brand's mission.” She quickly realized the potential market for similar events on the Harvard campus.

Hu reached out to Lim and Posternack in December—she explained that she was looking for people who “were great planners, were very detail-oriented, and tapped into the creative arts scene at Harvard.” They all “love event-hosting, love logistics, love detail work, and it is all very fun for us.” Thus, Varo House was formed.

To work with Varo House, potential clients need to negotiate a reasonable quote for a particular event, which would cover the costs of the party along with a fee for the service. This could be a good financial decision for someone looking to host a large event—Varo House can get the right deals and execute the event with much more expertise than your average social chair.

Varo House is already in demand, with one event planned for a client this week and discussions with several other prospective clients, potentially filling their schedule until Spring Break. Find them at [www.varo-house.com](http://www.varo-house.com) or @varohouse on Instagram if you are looking to elevate your gatherings but need some expert help to make it happen.

**ANDREW SPIELMANN '25  
(ANDREWSPIELMANN@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) LOVES A GOOD  
THEME.**

GRAPHIC BY ANNELISE FISHER '26

# A TROUBLING LOVE AFFAIR

A culture of hyperproductivity on college campuses has normalized caffeine addictions.

BY RANIA JONES '27

Here's a rainbow Starbucks tumbler that sits on the corner of my bookshelf in my dorm. In high school, I brought this cup to school every day, disguising the can of Celsius inside. The notion of parading the exposed can used to induce a peculiar embarrassment within me. But within the hallowed halls of Harvard, I now harbor little shame or fear as I sit in class, flanked by a cup of coffee on one side and a can of Celsius on the other.

I'm the first to admit that I can't imagine my days without caffeine. Yet even with every person you see sitting next to you already on their fourth cup of coffee, it's easy to forget that the drink might be doing more harm than good.

It's no secret that caffeine addictions are college students' way of managing academic stress and pressure. Need a place to study? Let's go sit at a coffee shop and try a new latte flavor. Need a late night library session? Let's get a Red Bull and hit Lamont. As a college student, the appeal of caffeine is transcendent: sip some coffee or crack open an energy drink, gain an extra boost, and obtain a few more hours of productivity. College campuses around the country have not only normalized absurd caffeine intake, but also romanticized it—college students have found a way to transform caffeine into a lifestyle.

Every morning, hundreds of Harvard students stop at Blue Bottle, Blank Street, Starbucks, Tatte, or any of the other countless coffee chains in the Square to once again reunite with their most faithful friend: a cup of coffee. Coffee shops nearby, like Blank Street, have even begun to offer coffee subscription services, helping students maximize the amount of caffeine they can afford every day. "Blank Street Regulars" is a membership that gets you discounts on coffee, pastries, merchandise, and more. For \$17.99 a week, members can claim any drink for free, redeemable every two hours, for up to 14 drinks per week.

What Harvard and other college students may fail to realize is that caffeine is a drug—the most commonly used drug in the world. Even though consumption of low to moderate doses of caffeine is generally

okay, an increasing number of clinical studies are showing that caffeine users easily become dependent on the drug and are unable to reduce consumption, despite knowledge of recurrent health problems associated with its continued use.

Regular caffeine intake has become an urgent health concern for college campuses around the nation. Jack Martin '26, a sophomore studying Philosophy, described coffee as a typical part of his daily routine, noting how he consumes caffeine "one to two times per day, typically a morning coffee and pre-workout." "I can't remember when I wasn't consuming caffeine regularly," Martin said.

Undeniably, few things bring college students together the same way coffee does. At Harvard, a group of students has banded together based on their shared affinity (or addiction) for caffeine, forming the Harvard College Caffeine Group, or HCCG. The HCCG totes themselves as Harvard's premier caffeinated beverage admiration organization, ironically sharing an acronym with Harvard's premier student-run college consulting group.

There's a pervasive culture of hustle and bustle here at Harvard, and the realities of a caffeine addiction often get pushed aside in service of this. Students here will go to great lengths to stay awake. Obsessed and absorbed in our manic lifestyles, defined by social overload, intense over-productivity, and suppressive expectations, it is no wonder that we fail to recognize or appreciate whether what we are consuming is at all beneficial to our health. Caffeine often feels like our best friend, emerging to save us from our half-awake state by restoring us to the more alert version of ourselves—but at what cost?

As students find themselves running on two hours of sleep a night, reviewing papers and rewatching lectures, it's not surprising that many of us turn to caffeine when searching for an extra boost. Maybe it would be naive to assume any better of Harvard

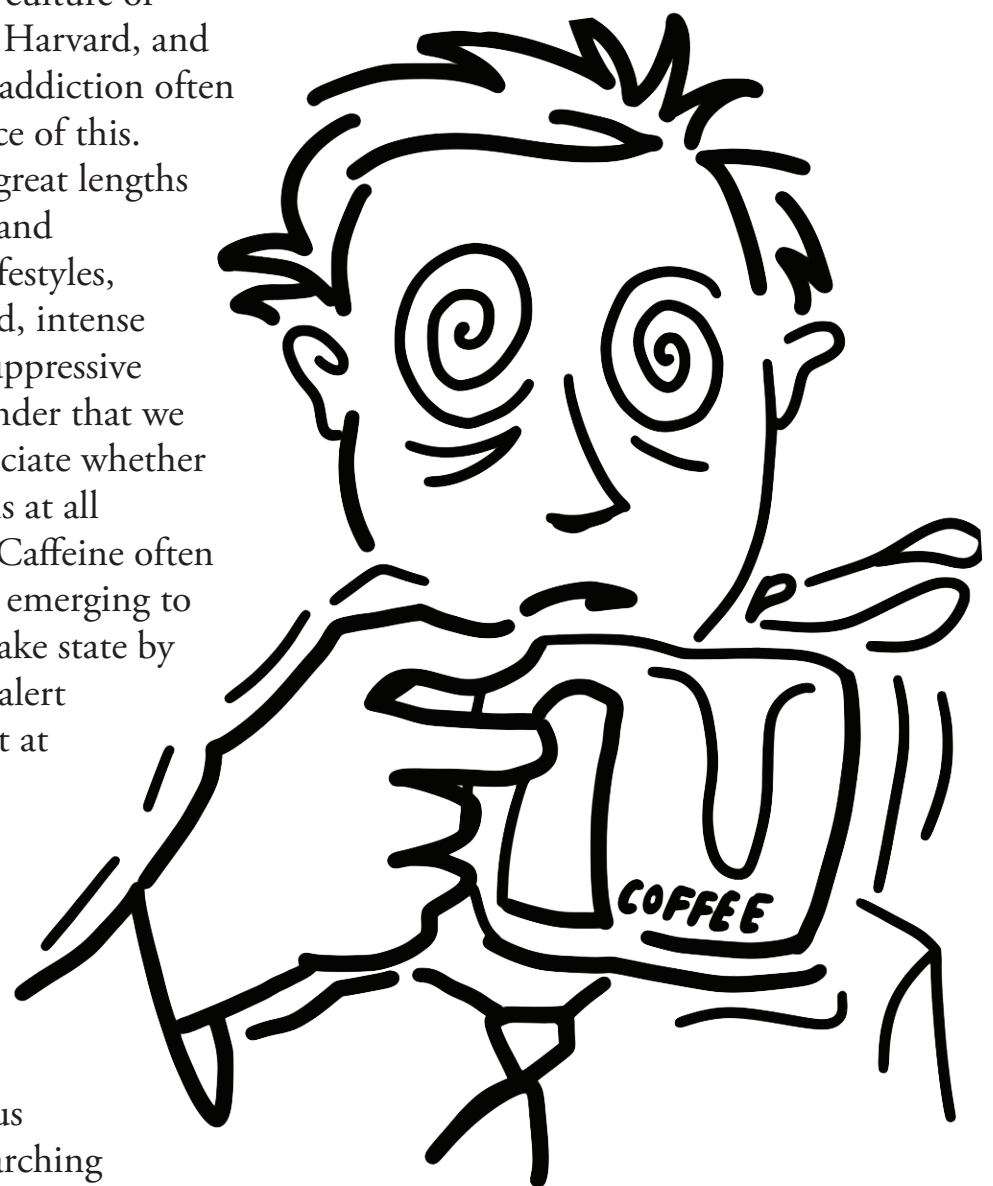
students, given the pressures and expectations that follow attending one of the most prestigious schools in the world.

Indy Sports Editor Luke Wagner '26 makes similar observations about Harvard students in his *Independent* article, "Harvard's Quest for Fulfillment," noting that "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." As Wagner discerns, the abundant academic environment at Harvard unsurprisingly drives students to prioritize their studies and career goals above other aspects of their well-being, including their health and sleep.

Like most things in life, caffeine consumption is alright in moderation. However, it's important to question the intention behind our behavior. When it's 2am at Lamont and you're considering that extra cup of joe, ask yourself, "Is it worth it? Is this the price I'd pay in order to stay locked in?"

**RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) PUT CELSIUS ON HER 2024 "OUTS" LIST.**

**GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26**



# IT'S OKAY TO BE SAD

NAVIGATING SEASONAL MOOD CHANGES ON A NEW ENGLAND CAMPUS.

BY EMMIE PALFREY '27 AND LAUREN BARAKETT '27

Feeling unmotivated? Having trouble finishing your work?

Experiencing difficulty getting out of bed or making plans with friends? Not able to enjoy reading Indy articles the way you did in the fall? You're not alone.

It's that time of year again. Hands-too-frozen-to-send-a-text, leggings-under-jeans, gets-dark-before-class-ends time. Winter has descended upon Boston, and the weather has plunged below freezing, prompting students to break out their scarves, hats, and gloves. Although the winter months are generally challenging for everyone, students coming back from break may be particularly unsettled by the abrupt shift in weather, and Harvard does very little to help.

While returning to the warmth of your dorm should offer immediate relief from the chilling outdoor temperatures, the dorms in the Yard are not always so comforting. Upon their return to campus, students received an email from Yard Operations explaining that they were experiencing "issues with the hot water in the Yard." Many first-years took cold showers during their first week back, extending their exposure to the chilly outdoors.

Students from warmer areas may have a hard time adjusting to Boston's brutal winter conditions. One such student reported feeling "on the downside." They explained "not only is the cold uncomfortable to be around in, but the period during which the sun set so early, like 4:30, was slightly depressing. I am used to living in the warm south with plenty of sunlight to help my mood, so it was a surprise to experience this type of northeast winter."

Even students used to the cold weather have trouble adapting to winter on campus. "It feels like between every class I come back to my bed and get back in and just want to fall asleep for the rest of the day," said one anonymous first-year student. While some exhaustion and lack of motivation can be common for hardworking students in the throes of the semester, abrupt changes in energy levels or disposition during the winter months are often indicators of seasonal mood changes or, in extreme cases, a more clinical phenomenon.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a mood disorder that affects an estimated 6% of the United States population. With the shifting seasons, your body naturally reacts to alterations in

sunlight patterns. However, individuals experiencing SAD struggle to adapt to these changes, particularly when coping with the reduced sunlight during the winter months.

While symptoms vary depending on the person, patients may experience a loss of interest in activities, social withdrawal, hopelessness, fatigue, irritability, anxiety, or difficulty concentrating. Though SAD has no definitive diathesis, according to Johns Hopkins Medicine, it could be that "shorter days and less daylight may trigger a chemical change in the brain leading to symptoms of depression." In other words, the winter climate may prompt an alteration in brain circuitry which mimics a depressive episode.

Other factors may be at play for those experiencing SAD. Increased levels of stress and light deprivation are associated with an increased risk for the onset of SAD. As many students know, there is nothing worse than leaving the Science Center after a long lecture and seeing that the sun has gone down. Here in Boston, it gets dark at around 4:30 P.M., with the sun setting around 5:00 P.M.. With limited hours of sunlight, the light of day can feel incredibly short while the outrageously cold walks between classes seem to drag on for ages.

Given Boston's abysmal winter climate and SAD's reasonably high prevalence rate, it would be reasonable to assume Harvard offers readily available resources for navigating seasonal mood changes. But, in fact, SAD is notably missing from the list of specialties of Harvard's Counseling and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) team. A patient presenting with a diagnosis or symptoms of SAD may well be properly treated by CAMHS clinicians, but unlike the thirty other specialties featured on the CAMHS website, students cannot find a clinician listed that specializes in treating this diagnosis.

This seeming lack of support for students with SAD on a clinical level, in addition to maintenance issues, such as the Yard's cold showers, means Harvard has a long way to go in terms of better acknowledging and accommodating the psychological harm that winter brings. That being said, hope is not lost for students suffering from the changing seasons.

If you're experiencing the winter blues, consider maintaining a regular exercise routine or partnering up with friends for workouts to stay motivated. Aim to wake up in the morning when it is



light outside and open your blinds to invite natural sunlight into your room. Keep your dorm comfortable by acquiring additional blankets or using space heaters. And lean into all that the winter has to offer!

Whether it's cozy cold-day outfits, movie nights and hot chocolate with friends, ice skating in Boston, or even comping the *Independent*, finding a silver lining to the gray winter clouds will make the next few months much more bearable.

If you are experiencing more severe depressive symptoms in sync with the onset of winter, there are resources available to help, in addition to seeking support from friends and family. It is important to seek quality mental health evaluation for symptoms of SAD, as it "can be misdiagnosed in the presence of hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, infectious mononucleosis, and other viral infections," according to the American Psychiatric Association. Though CAMHS may not advertise specific treatment for SAD on its website, the organization offers short-term counseling, medical prescribers, referrals, group sessions, and a 24/7 support line. You do not have to suffer alone, because help is well within reach. And heads up—before you know it, spring will be upon us!

**EMMIE PALFREY '27 (EPALFREY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)  
AND LAUREN BARAKETT '27  
(LAURENBARAKETT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WROTE THIS ARTICLE  
AS THE SUN SET AT 4:30 P.M.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27**

# BARRY IN THE BAFTUB

HASTY PUDDING THEATRICALS DEBUTED THEIR 2024 MAN OF THE YEAR AND 175TH PRODUCTION ON FEBRUARY 2ND, 2024.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 AND KYA BROOKS '25

The first ever “BAFTUB” award, a kissing cactus, and a “Murder on the Dancefloor.” These were just some of the many highlights of the Hasty Pudding Theatricals’ opening night of their 175th production, *Heist, Heist, Baby*. But before the show began, the group honored their 2024 Man of the Year, Irish actor Barry Keoghan.

Keoghan is most known for his roles in films such as George Mills in *Dunkirk*, Druig in *Eternals*, and Dominic Kearney in *The Banshees of Inisherin*. Most recently, he received critical acclaim for his role as Oliver Quick in Emerald Fennell’s *Saltburn*, garnering nominations for a Golden Globe and BAFTA Best Actor award. On January 26th, 2024, Keoghan was announced as this year’s Hasty Pudding Man of the Year. The Man of the Year is an annual honor presented by the organization to “performers who have made lasting and impressive contributions to the world of entertainment.” Past recipients have included Sean Connery, Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro, and Robert Downey Jr.

The night began with a roast of Keoghan, led by HPT producers Hannah Frazer '25 and Madison Pankey '24. “I’ve been quite nervous all day,” Keoghan told the audience. “I’ve never been on stage.” The roast began with Keoghan using boxing gloves to “fight” a large potato, an allusion to the Irish potato famine. Then he acted out an impromptu script, which concluded with him dipping his face into a plate of spaghetti and marinara. He was presented with the “BAFTUB” award, a giant inflatable bathtub for Keoghan to sit in which members of Hasty Pudding Theatricals then jokingly drank out of. The act was a spoof of Keoghan’s infamous “bathtub scene” in *Saltburn*, in which (spoiler alert!) Keoghan’s character drinks the bathwater of his friend Felix Catton, played by Jacob Elordi.

“Barry was awesome,” Frazer said in regards to Keoghan’s completion of the roast. “He was extremely gracious and had a wonderful sense of humor. Roasting him was an even better time—we had so much fun on stage and felt so lucky to be able to wipe spaghetti off his face.”

Following the roast, Keoghan appeared in a press conference. At the head of the table, Keoghan was accompanied by costumed Hasty Pudding Theatricals members Mira-Rose Kingsbury Lee '24 and Fred Larsen '24, as well as Press and Publicity Manager Chaelon Simpson '26. Simpson said that “it felt absolutely incredible” to sit with Keoghan and experience the night the way he did. “You never know when interacting with celebrities what their personality would be, but Barry is so incredibly down to Earth,” he said. “I had a chance to meet him before the press conference and through that I was able to immediately get rid of my nerves. He’s one of the most genuine (and funny) people I’ve met, no joke!”

Keoghan answered questions from the press about his acting career, the Man of the Year event, and coming to Harvard. He felt privileged to be named this year’s Man of the Year. “To see all the names that were before me...it’s such an honor, isn’t it? It really is,” Keoghan explained. While he initially felt nervous to go up on stage, his feelings washed away upon experiencing the event. “When I got up there, there was a bit of a high to it. I don’t

do stage [but] I’m gonna do some stage now,” he joked.

Keoghan was also asked about his background and journey into acting. Keoghan had a rough childhood—he and his brother were placed into foster care at a young age, as he had no relationship with his father and his mother struggled with addiction. Though Keoghan did not finish school, he realized early on that acting was something he could be good at, and he decided to follow these dreams. “Do what you love, and don’t let anyone put a dim light on it,” Keoghan said, giving advice to young people, especially those who come from troubled backgrounds like his own, pursuing acting.

The *Independent* asked Keoghan how his experience has been since arriving at Harvard Square and what it was like getting ready for the big night. “I automatically feel more intelligent being here,” he said, leading to a laugh from the room. “[My experience] has been great. The welcome is just unreal; seeing everyone out there and getting to enjoy that has been amazing, and getting to be part of that show that everyone has worked hard on, I feel involved. The experience has been really good so far.”

Keoghan sat in the middle of the theater and attended the show, accompanied by Pankey and Frazer. *Heist, Heist, Baby* featured a colorful array of devious characters in glittering, kaleidoscopic costumes. The protagonist, Rita L’Boutette, played by Isabella Peña '24, is a hungry, small-town journalist hankering for her big break. She infiltrates an exclusive museum gallery opening attended by Manhattan’s elite, which debuted the anonymous artist Spanksy and his work. Rita hopes her discoveries will land her a coveted position at the *Small Street Journal*. Little does she know, the VIPs have their own agendas.

The geriatric fracking tycoon Cassius Whatimafter and his dazzling young wife Eileen Onyoufinancially are in attendance, along with Holden Outhopeforyou-Girl, Cassius’s teenage pop star grandson. There is also Eli Zaboutizage, a fourth grader who seems suspiciously old, Arthur Bonesburiedhere, a lonely paleontologist desperate to find his lost fossil, and Alec Zis, a smooth-talking art critic who was Rita’s college crush.

During this fateful night at the museum, there is much scheming to be witnessed. A maniacal ghost queen, Helga Tboring, is on the loose and having an existential crisis. Mischa Nimpossible, a former Soviet spy, and Mel O’Dramatic, a struggling television star, are also sneaking around on a dubious mission.

The show featured sassy dialogue, dramatic dance sequences, and comedic one-liners. The humor

is hammy, quick-witted, and camp. The production concludes with a classic Hasty Pudding Theatricals ending, involving the entire cast in elaborate song and dance choreography. The audience reception was riotous and adoring.

Simpson was proud to see the night officially come together, as he got to see the company’s hard work pay off firsthand. “It has been a huge pleasure being able to see the show from behind the scenes. Last year, I watched *Cosmic Relief* and was so impressed by the Theatricals’ work,” he said. “Everyone is so hard working, and the cohesiveness between the multiple parts of the company is only strengthened by the amount of labor and love put into this project.”

Frazer was incredibly proud of her team and the work they put in to make the show happen. “Organizing the Hasty Pudding Theatricals Man of the Year event truly takes a village,” she said. “Our Business Staff and entire company has worked really hard to make this possible. Even though it was hectic, it was truly so rewarding to watch the event come to fruition.”

*Heist, Heist, Baby* is completely student written, with writers Sophie Garrigus '25 and Madeleine Dowd '25, composer William Murray '26, and Kingsbury Lee as Principal Lyricist. For those interested in seeing it, the show will be running in Cambridge from February 2nd to March 3rd, in New York on March 9th, and in Bermuda from March 13th to 15th. Tickets for HPT 175 can be purchased at <https://www.hastypudding.org/buy-tickets/>.

**LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) INTENSELY RELATED TO RITA, A STARVING JOURNALIST LOOKING FOR HER BIG BREAK.**

**KYA BROOKS '25 (KYABROOKS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WAS INSPIRED TO ATTEND A HIGH-STAKES ART GALLERY OPENING BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY.**

PHOTO BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26



# THE UNKNOWABLE: A PREVIEW OF LOWELL HOUSE OPERA'S UPCOMING PRODUCTION

Benjamin J. Rossen's original operatic ballet is a unique, stunning interplay of music and movement.

BY KAYLA REIFEL '26 AND LUCAS COHEN-D'ARBELOFF '27

*The Unknowable: An Operatic Ballet in Two Acts*, a stunning original production written by Benjamin T.

Rossen '23, presents a mesmerizing blend of emotion, music, and dance. Premiering on February 10th and 11th at Sanders Theatre, the show dazzles from start to finish. Featuring a diverse cast of performers both from within the Harvard community and beyond, the show poignantly portrays the complexities of family dynamics and the tension between personal desires and familial expectations.

Directed by Haley Stark '25, *The Unknowable* follows Edna, portrayed by Boston University student and dancer Lavinia Kosher, who is torn between attending a prestigious forum or a music festival. Edna opens the opera with a longing, emotional dance solo. Rossen's original score, with additional music by Hector Berlioz and Gustav Mahler, shines immediately. The piano builds in intensity throughout the opening number, grabbing the viewer's attention and refusing to let go. As the second scene unfolds, characters Adèle (Caroline Wolfe) and Immanuel (Marcus Schenk) initiate the narrative using their voices, marking the beginning of Rossen's brilliant libretto with plans for an upcoming dinner party.

The rest of the ensemble cast arrives for dinner, consisting of Grace (Logan Trotter), Sara (Sula Frausto), Thomas (Benji Pearson '25), Carol (Isabella Meyer '24), and Michel (Leo Balkowetz). Percussive, witty conversation rife with intellectual jokes and references ensues. We are soon introduced to vocalist Edith (Aurora Martin), who stands still on stage left as she begins to sing the inset operatic piece of Hector Berlioz's "Les nuits d'été." Edna is enthralled by the music, dancing to the vocals solo until she finds a dance partner and friend in Hannah (Katy Nairn '26).

But Edna is soon presented with a pivotal decision—she can spend her two weeks of summer vacation at a music festival or attend a forum with her mother where she will network for her job.

"She has to decide whether or not she wants to stay in this beautiful fantasy world that she is so enjoying and so prosperous and thriving in, or if she wants to return to her capitalist nine-to-five," said Lauren Perl '25, the production's co-producer. "And so it's a story that really is about ambition and about familial pressure in terms of chasing ambition, and I think that this is a story that rings true to a lot of Harvard students."

"The way I like to read into it is that Edna is unaware of what this siren song is that is calling her into this fantasy world," Perl said. "Another possible explanation is that Edna

is unaware of her

own personal goals and ambitions—that she finds herself and her desires to be 'unknowable.' This show is about chasing your ambitions and curiosity in the face of a demoralizing reality."

The second act follows Edna and Hannah as they embark on a metaphysical journey through dance, song, and emotion. We meet Anna (Emerald Barbour), who stands still to the side and sings the second inset operatic piece, Gustav Mahler's "Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen." As the lines between reality and fantasy blur, an ensemble cast of "spirits" join Edna and Hannah in dance. Anna continues to sing Mahler's piece as Edna reckons with the conflict between reality and the sublime transcendental world she has discovered. The opera appears to maintain a stark yet cooperative dichotomy between the body and the voice until the show takes a turn in the middle of the act.

In this pivotal moment, the two primary dancers, Edna and Hannah, are imbued with voices in the form of opera singers Edith and Anna. Four characters effectively become two, and the lines between sound and movement are blurred in such a manner that intensifies the work's larger themes of identity, reality, and the transcendental realm. The show ends ambiguously, leaving us to contemplate the delicate balance between the worlds we inhabit and those we dream of.

*The Unknowable* is the second work written by a Harvard undergraduate or recent graduate produced by Lowell House Opera, with the first being Benjamin Wenzelberg's '21 *Nighttown*, performed in Sanders Theatre in 2022. Rossen first began drafting *The Unknowable* as his Harvard senior thesis, and he is now pursuing a Master of Music degree at the New England Conservatory. Before the pandemic, the Lowell House Opera mostly mounted productions from the opera canon,



but it has since shifted toward original productions from within the Harvard community. The organization learned of *The Unknowable* through an open call for new productions last May, according to Kenneth Kaufman '69, President of the Lowell House Opera Board of Directors.

"I think we will continue on the newer path that we've charted, in looking to create opportunities for productions which are composed by students, or where the libretto is written by students, or where the production team, even the senior members of the production team, are students or recent graduates or other people affiliated with Harvard," Kaufman said.

Reflecting this commitment to fresh, student-driven creativity, *The Unknowable* blends music, dance, and narrative in a seamless spectacle. The success of the opera rests on an extremely solid foundation of talented musicians: violinists Enoch Li and Cristian Maloney, violist Joshua Cai, and cellist William Tan play with fervor and passion without missing a beat. Rossen, also the music director, masterfully executes his original compositions at the piano. The orchestrations provide a foundation from which the soaring operatic vocals emerge to highlight the movement of the dancers.

The production's staging is clean and effective, differentiating time and place while neatly conveying the emotional progression of the plot. Choreographer Emily Parker's work is astounding, displaying complex emotions and storylines through movement. Overall, *The Unknowable* is smart, self-aware, and impressive. For anyone interested in vocal or dance performance, it is a must-see event.

*The Unknowable: An Operatic Ballet in Two Acts* is showing at Sanders Theatre on February 10th and 11th, 2024. Tickets can be purchased at the Harvard Box Office.

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**PHOTOS BY CRYSTAL MANYLOUN '26**





# SPORTS SPOTLIGHT: (HISOM OKPARA

## A profile on Harvard men's basketball's rising star.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND SANTI KELLY '26

Hisom “Chiz” Okpara '26 began his athletic journey when his family moved back to the United States from the United Kingdom in 2010. Born with a passion for sports, his first love was soccer. His father, who recognized Okpara's height and build, encouraged him to explore basketball as well. “My dad wanted me to play basketball due to my height and how big I was... He thought simultaneously playing soccer and basketball would help me lose weight.” Okpara loved soccer and played until he was a sophomore in high school, but he ultimately hung up the cleats to focus on basketball.

In high school, Okpara excelled at Brunswick School, Vermont Academy, and La Lumiere School. Despite transferring multiple times during his high school career, his continued excellence within each program launched him to the top of many recruiting boards. By his senior year at La Lumiere School, he received a 4-star rating from ESPN and was projected a Power-5 starter by 247sports. After receiving offers from some of the nation's top programs like Penn State and Vanderbilt, Okpara chose to continue his basketball career with the Crimson.

Choosing Harvard over other offers was influenced by Coach Amaker, head coach of Harvard Men's Basketball, who emphasized career longevity in any professional field, rather than just a four-year athletic career. “Coach Amaker, when he was recruiting me, kept preaching ‘for forty years, not four,’” Okpara explained. He emphasized that Power Five schools “[would] use my talents for four years and then...won't be as prominent as a school that can help me long term like Harvard.”

When it was time to transition from high school to college, he found the change rather seamless. Okpara had attended boarding school since eighth grade as a means of progressing his academic and athletic talent. Having lived away from home for so long, he had grown accustomed to independent living and time management. “Time management was something that was instilled in me at a very young age,” he stated. “Limiting my distractions and just knowing when to do what.”

Balancing rigorous basketball practices with academic commitments at Harvard poses its challenges, but Okpara's life experience and preparation have allowed him to excel even in the face of adversity. Like the majority of his peers, Okpara expressed his appreciation for simple technology like Google Calendar as well as effective communication skills. He attributed his success to “getting ahead of [my week] and... communicating with a teacher that I can't do this, communicating with my coach that I can't do this.” In these ways, Okpara manages to navigate the busy world of being a student-athlete.

While setbacks have been part of Okpara's journey, his resilience and determination have only strengthened his resolve. Reflecting on adversity, Okpara acknowledged the challenges of transitioning into limited playing time on the Crimson's team. “Last year was probably one of the first years in my whole basketball career where I

couldn't really play a lot,” he shared. “I was blessed to play the amount of minutes I played.”

However, with the support of his teammates, coaches, and family, he overcame not having the opportunity to contribute as much as he wanted and emerged as a stronger player and leader. “This year, that was



a huge pivot...jumping into a new leadership role on the team and...the opportunities I have...to help my teammates win.” Chiz noted the camaraderie among teammates at Harvard is a vital component of their success. “We're a very young team, and we're very close-knit,” Okpara emphasized. “We all have a common goal in mind.”

Beyond basketball, Okpara has learned valuable life lessons at Harvard. “Harvard has helped me appreciate the present more,” he reflected. Okpara commended his experience on the Harvard Men's Basketball Team, highlighting that “the people I've met through the basketball team...and also the kids we have helped with, and the various community service helped me realize this is much bigger than basketball.”

As Okpara sets his sights on the future, his aspirations extend far beyond individual accolades. Qualifying for the Ivy League tournament and eventually the NCAA tournament are among his goals for the rest of the season. With a commitment to personal growth and team success, Okpara envisions a journey filled with triumphs both on and off the court, embodying the true spirit of a student-athlete poised to make an impact.

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# INDY SPORTSBOOK: SUPERBOWL EDITION

A collection of the best bets for Super Bowl LVIII.

BY ANDREW CHRISTIE '26

The Super Bowl, arguably the biggest sporting event of the year, champions a winner of a long and grueling NFL season. This year, we are coincidentally getting a repeat matchup of Super Bowl LIV, a game in which the Chiefs bested the 49ers with a final score of 31-20. This time, the 49ers are looking to rewrite the script, and they may just have luck on their side.

Over the course of the last 19 Super Bowls, only three teams have won while not wearing white jerseys, and in line with this trend, San Francisco will be donning their white uniforms come Sunday night. That said, one of those three times was when the Chiefs bested them in 2020, so anything can happen.

With it being one of the most watched sporting events in the U.S., there will naturally be a large betting market on this game. The most popular bets are straight up bets (who will win the game), a team to win by a certain amount of points, and the total points in the game. Many books also allow you to bet on more random aspects of the game, like the direction of Christian McCaffrey's first rush and how long it will be. Personally, we think that Left and 9 yards or fewer +330 looks to be a good bet. We have highlighted a couple of bets we think are worthwhile below.

Travis Kelce over 6.5 receptions (-160): if the Chiefs are looking to hoist the Lombardi trophy once more, Kelce will be instrumental in their plans. The 49ers, with one of the best rush defenses in the NFL, will presumably stop Isiah Pacheco on the ground, leading Kansas City to look elsewhere for offense.

They have a relatively inexperienced wide receiver group, so a lot of the receiving burden might fall on Kelce's shoulders. Good thing he is one of the greatest tight ends in recent years—he caught 11 passes for 116 yards against the Ravens in the conference championship, and he will be looking to build off of that impressive performance.

Another bet to keep your eye on: Travis Kelce to propose to Taylor Swift (+1200). While only

available in Canada, this wager is a small representation of a larger phenomenon that has been the topic of discussion in the media—Taylor Swift's involvement in the NFL. Ever since Kelce and Swift were rumored to be dating, it is safe to say that there hasn't exactly been a lack of media coverage. From fans speculating whether or not Swift was being smuggled in and out of football games in a popcorn machine (yes, this was a real question) to doing in-depth analysis on the impact her presence has on team performance, Swift has greatly impacted the media coverage this season.

Christian McCaffrey (CMC) anytime TD (-225): we would be remiss in not mentioning CMC anytime TD scorer, one of the most frequently winning bets of the past year. CMC had 14 touchdowns in the regular season and followed that up with two touchdowns in each of the 49ers two divisional rounds. The 49ers will look to take advantage of their dominant rushing game and take the pressure off Brock Purdy, so look for McCaffrey to be getting significant usage this game.

One of the most entertaining bets of the Super Bowl is guessing which color Gatorade will be poured on the winning coach. Every year, people will DM players, email equipment staff, and try to contact anyone they know working at Gatorade to see if they can predict the color of the end-of-game victory Gatorade shower. The Chiefs shocked many last year with purple Gatorade (+1000), a seldom used color. Orange looks to have

good value at +330. Not only has orange been the most frequently used color since 2001, but it also was used by the Chiefs in 2020 when they defeated the 49ers.

Another bet the Indy Sportsbook loves to place is the result of the opening kickoff coin toss. Heads has shown

up marginally less, appearing 47% of the time. While the coin toss itself is random, it recently has been indicative of who will go on to win the Super Bowl. Prior to last year's game, there was an eight year streak where the winner of the coin toss would end up losing the game. Just something to consider when placing your live bets.

Arguably, the most research intensive of the trivial bets is the over/under on the National Anthem. This year's singer, Reba McEntire, is predicted to sing a much shorter rendition of the song than what is historically traditional. The current line is set at 90.5 seconds, much lower compared to the usual length of around two minutes. The best bet is to choose the over—singers usually tend to draw the anthem out on this stage, and we think McEntire will follow this trend. Two years ago, a similar line was set (95.5 seconds), but the actual performance was over 20 seconds longer than the line, so look to include the National Anthem over in your betting slate come this Sunday.

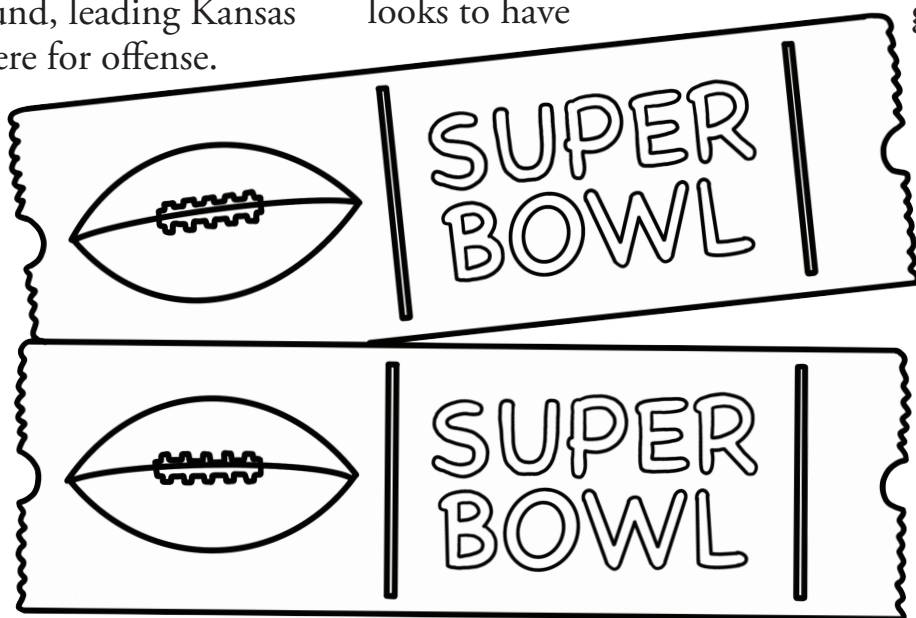
Good money might be on the Chiefs this year, at least if you put stock in the moon cycles. That's right, one fan went to extreme depths and researched the Chiefs performance based on the moon phase that will be occurring on Sunday. While playing under a waxing crescent moon, the Chiefs are 19-1 in the last five years. Some may be quick to discount this reasoning, but this kind of thing has happened before. On Thanksgiving, the Lions were playing under a waning gibbous, a moon phase that they lost their last twelve Thanksgiving Day Games under. They then proceeded to get upset by the at-the-time struggling Green Bay Packers, so maybe the Chiefs will have lunar power on their side.

Regardless of which team you think will win, this matchup is sure to make it a very entertaining game, and, who knows, you might just make some money.

ANDREW CHRISTIE '26

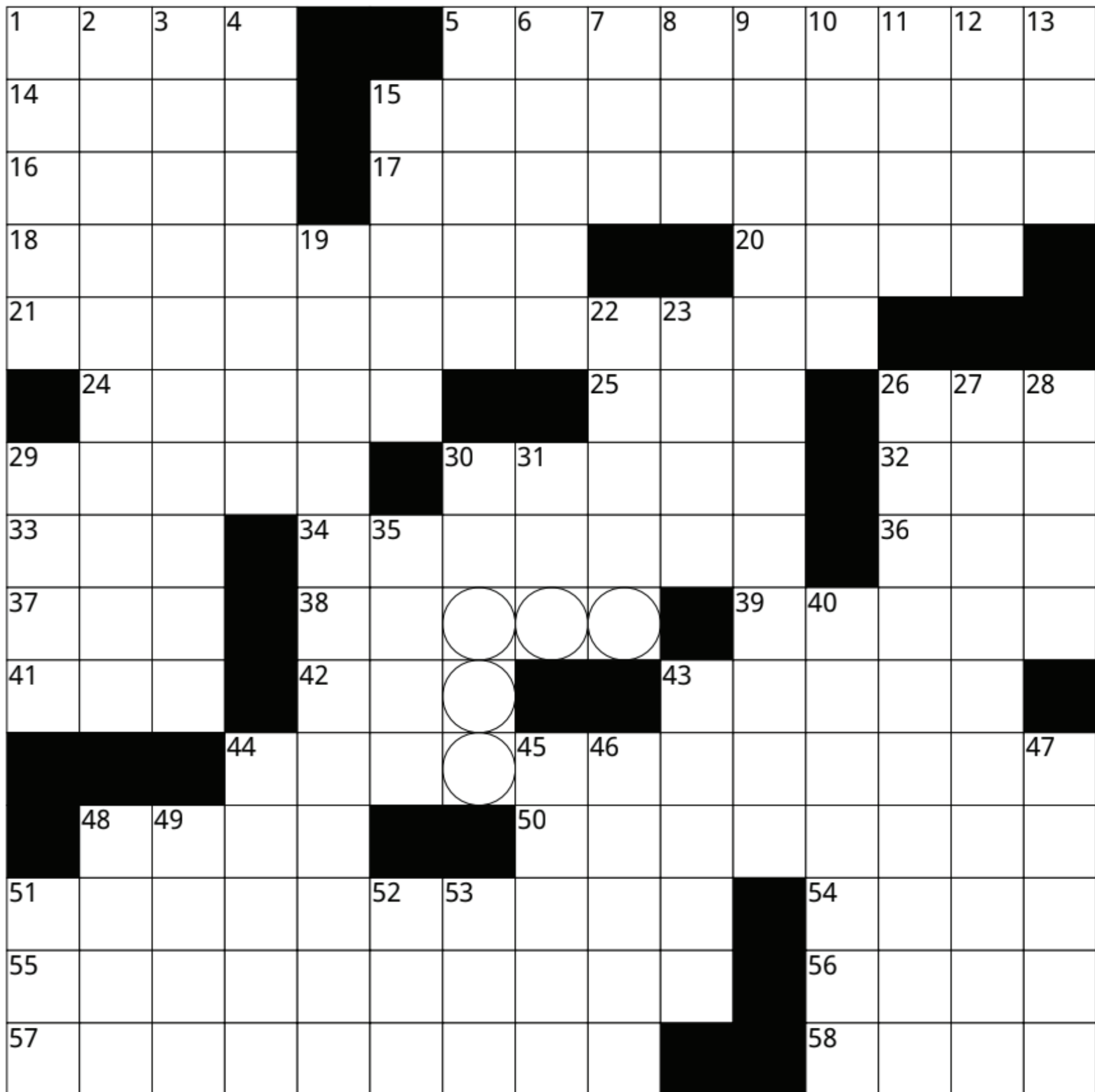
(ANDREWCHRISTIE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A CONSISTENT MONEY MAKER, AND ONE SHOULD CONSIDER LISTENING TO HIS BET SUGGESTIONS IN THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



# PLAY HARD

BY HAN NGUYEN '27



## ACROSS

- 1 V
- 5 18th century French painting style
- 14 Foreboding sign
- 15 Schools for ministers-to-be
- 16 ID
- 17 Solar-system models
- 18 Intentionally hidden
- 20 Kind of secret
- 21 Flexible fee schedule
- 24 Litmus reddeners
- 25 Front of stack cut
- 26 "Come again?"
- 29 Clean \_\_\_\_
- 30 Bush
- 32 Request on Wheel of Fortune
- 33 "You've got mail" ISP

- 34 Flowering shrub
- 36 Hwy's
- 37 NBC skit show
- 38 Harvard Men's Frisbee Team
- 39 Carnival attractions
- 41 Crimson \_\_\_\_
- 42 Make haste
- 43 Phony
- 44 Abandoned for fiat money
- 48 \_\_\_\_ on the back
- 50 Prosodic pauses
- 51 See ya later \_\_\_\_\_
- 54 \_\_\_\_ 'acte
- 55 It's shorter than a full-length film
- 56 \_\_\_\_ Vogue
- 57 Hoarders' disorders
- 58 Track figures

## DOWN

- 1 "Pay attention!"
- 2 Words after "Can you come over?"
- 3 Upright
- 4 Called off a relationship
- 5 Enter again
- 6 Baseball's Vizquel et al.
- 7 The Bengals, on scoreboards
- 8 UNO
- 9 Stock traders
- 10 "\_\_\_\_ Ben Jonson!"
- 11 \_\_\_\_ grievance
- 12 Spencer of "Criminal Minds"
- 13 PreCheck org.
- 15 "Wheel of Fortune" turns
- 19 Sits in the front passenger seat
- 22 Subaru spot, say
- 23 Missed \_\_\_\_
- 26 Through blood, sweat, and tears

- 27 Deserving more credit
- 28 Megan Thee Stallion's new single
- 29 Prince Albert's prov.
- 30 Started a line?
- 31 Charlemagne's domain: Abbr.
- 35 Punxsutawney groundhog
- 40 Results from
- 43 Bel \_\_\_\_ cheese
- 44 Manners of walking
- 45 Writer F. \_\_\_\_ Fitzgerald
- 46 Fruity desserts
- 47 Screendom's Laura and Bruce
- 48 Epithet of Athena
- 49 City map
- 51 Egypt's cont.
- 52 "\_\_\_\_ we there yet?"
- 53 QB targets

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

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