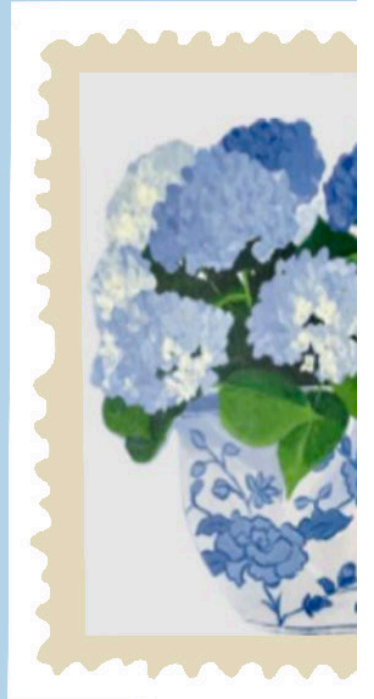
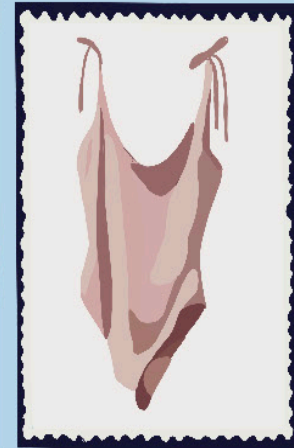
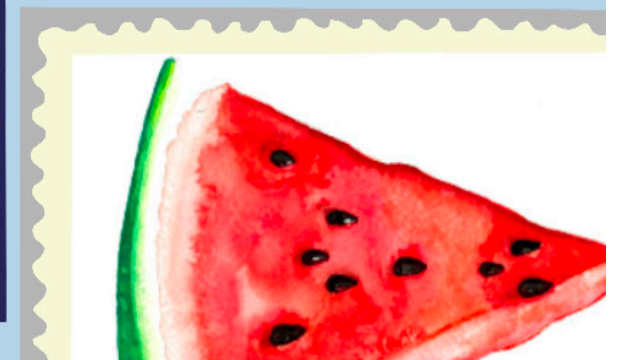
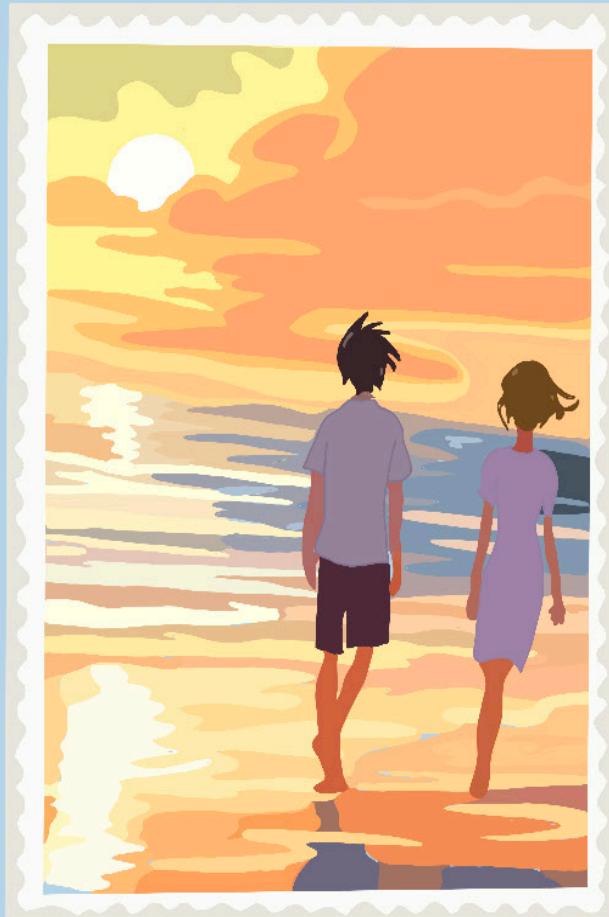


# INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



*The Summer  
I Turned  
Indy*





# MASTHEAD

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# ABOUT THE

# INDEPENDENT

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the *Harvard Independent* provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The *Independent* has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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## Dearly Departed Dean

Dean Rakesh Khurana is set to complete his tenure as the Danoff Dean of Harvard College in June 2025.

BY RANIA JONES '27

**H**arvard College Dean Rakesh Khurana, the longest-serving Harvard College Dean in more than a century, will step down at the end of the 2024-25 academic year, marking the end of his 11-year tenure.

Dean Hopi E. Hoekstra, Edgerley Family Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, announced Khurana's decision to depart his deanship on Aug. 29 in an email to College affiliates, followed shortly by an email from Khurana himself. Khurana began his email by sharing how serving as Dean of the College "has been one of the greatest honors and joys of [his] life."

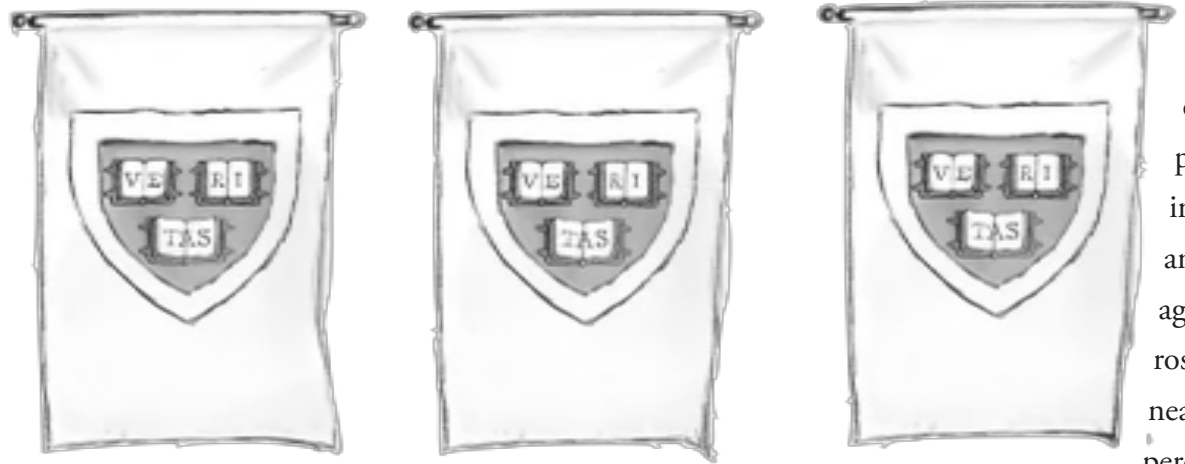
In his email, Khurana revealed that he was prepared to leave his role last year, but at "the request of senior leadership, [he] agreed to remain for an additional year to support transitions at the University." Khurana's decision to stay for an additional academic year was intended to provide stability for the University's administration amid the leadership turnover ignited by former Harvard President Claudine Gay's resignation earlier this year.

Following his departure in June 2025, Khurana plans to stay at Harvard, where he holds additional faculty positions in the College's Sociology department and at Harvard Business School, according to College spokesperson Jonathan Palumbo.

Prior to his appointment as Dean in 2014, Khurana's leadership journey at Harvard began in 2010 when he and his wife, Stephanie R. Khurana, served as Faculty Deans of Cabot House until 2020.

Throughout his lengthy tenure, Khurana oversaw several significant changes to the College. In 2018, Khurana testified, representing the Harvard administration, in the three-week-long admissions trial that examined whether Harvard's race-conscious admissions policy discriminated against Asian-American applicants.

In 2014, the organization "Students for Fair Admissions" filed a lawsuit against Harvard University, alleging that their admissions process unfairly discriminated against Asian-American applicants by considering race as a factor, specifically claiming Harvard used a "racial quota" system. In June 2023, the Supreme Court ruled against Harvard, declaring that their race-conscious admissions policy violated the



Equal Protection Clause, effectively striking down affirmative action in college admissions. Khurana remained insistent that the College's race-conscious admissions policy was not unconstitutional. He also was part of a group of Harvard administrators who traveled to Washington D.C. in 2022, when the Supreme Court heard arguments in the case.

Khurana spearheaded the launch of the Intellectual Vitality initiative which sought to promote a free exchange of ideas on campus, amidst concerns of student self-censorship. In 2018, Khurana established the Dean of Students Office, where he combined the former Office of Student Life and the Freshman Dean's Office. The DSO is dedicated to building a campus residential and social community that is welcoming, open, and accessible to all students. Combining the Accessible Education Office, the Housing Office, the Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct, and the Office of the Registrar, Khurana also led the creation of the Office of Student Services in 2022.

Most recently, Khurana faced public scrutiny for his role in sanctioning students who participated in campus protests last semester during the 20-day pro-Palestine encampment in Harvard Yard, which drew significant media attention. Many students and faculty members deemed Khurana responsible for the Administrative Board's decision to deny 13 seniors their diplomas at Commencement over their encampment involvement. However, the Harvard Corporation, the University's highest governing body, released degrees to 11 of the 13 seniors in a sudden reversal over the summer.

Over the years, Khurana's favorability has fluctuated. In 2015, shortly after he became Dean, 82 percent of graduating seniors said they viewed Khurana favorably. In following years, the figure sank to 62 percent among the Class of 2016, reached an all-time

low of 42 percent in 2017, and once again rose to nearly 52 percent within the Class of 2024.

Dean Hoekstra, in her email on Thursday, applauded Khurana for his leadership, thanking Khurana for his ability to guide "the College through both periods of renewal and unprecedented challenge, with a vision rooted in empathy, inclusivity, and a fundamental commitment to Veritas." Hoekstra further emphasized her gratitude for "Rakesh's continued service this past year, providing continuity during the changes in leadership at the FAS and the University."

Khurana's presence is acknowledged and embraced by undergraduates, including his relentless efforts to photograph and celebrate students in all corners of Harvard's campus. Dean Hoekstra details how Khurana's engaging Instagram account, the Deanstagram, where he shares daily gratitude for Harvard's community of students, is evidence of Khurana's "distinctive leadership style, characterized by approachability and a genuine commitment to listening to the voices across the entire Harvard community." Hoekstra shared how "no one can take a better selfie."

To conclude his own email, Khurana shared his optimistic view about Harvard's future. "Institutions often seem as though they will endure forever, but we must not take for granted the stability and strength of this great university, and the depth of talent we have assembled," he wrote. With a legacy of fostering an equitable, resilient, and hopeful College, Dean Khurana's vision and impact on our community is rooted in laughter, love, and a commitment to Veritas.

**RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL MISS KHURANA'S SIDWAYS-ANGELED SELFIES DEEPLY AND DEARLY.**

**GRAPHIC BY NATALIE MENDEZ '26**



# A New Democratic National Convention

Harvard students reflect on the Harris-Walz ticket and the newfound patriotism at the DNC.

BY HANNAH DAVIS '25

From Aug. 19 to 22, Chicago welcomed 50,000 delegates, volunteers, and attendees to the Democratic National Convention. The DNC occurs every four years in the midst of the election cycle, serving formally as an opportunity for delegates to elect the Democratic nominee and informally for the party to share its message with the American public.

A handful of Harvard students were fortunate enough to attend the event, either through Harvard's Institute of Politics (IOP) or through other programs and jobs. This was the first year the IOP was able to sponsor a small group of attendees, exposing undergraduates to political leaders, strategists, and media while enabling them to share the IOP's mission.

Hana O'Looney '26 shared her IOP-sponsored experience at the DNC. "Each day of the convention, I met incredible legislative staffers, local Democratic Party organizers, union members, and activists who shared their incredible life journeys to get to their current level of involvement in politics to get a seat in Chicago—it was inspiring."

Despite the fact that Chicago has hosted the most presidential nominating conventions of any city, this year's DNC was particularly memorable. Biden bowing out of the race and endorsing Vice President Harris for President turned the DNC on its head and shifted the energy of the convention. Instead of addressing the American people as an incumbent candidate, President Biden gave a farewell address and enabled a new era of the Democratic Party to take hold.

However, as Biden delivered his final address, the DNC

highlighted the potential for a new wave of energy and support for the party and the new ticket from a diverse group of voters. According to a Gallup poll, 78% of voters are "more enthusiastic" about voting than usual, compared to only 55% in March. Analysts attribute this jump in large part to Biden ending his re-election campaign and endorsing Vice President Harris.

"The energy was electric," Da'Vion Tatum '25, an invitee of the Congressional Black Caucus PAC and a political content creator, said. "When I tell you, people were invigorated when they found out that Biden stepped aside and Kamala Harris stepped up, and you could feel that. You could also see that people saw hope again. That is contagious."

Signe Smith '27 attended the DNC through the IOP. Even attending through a different program than Tatum, she too described the energy as "electric." She attributed the energy to "so many people from all over repping their states, whether they were delegates or regular people. Especially day one, people were decked out in star-spangled whatever, like a whole America getup."

O'Looney echoed Smith's sentiments. "The energy at the DNC was truly insane. I can honestly say that I've never felt the spirit of people more excited to elect a candidate than what I saw, heard, and felt at McCormick Convention Center—and I've been involved with a lot of political campaigns."

She further described her perspective on how the Harris-Walz ticket impacted the energy. "Instead of forced enthusiasm motivated by fear

of the opposing ticket, I think this convention demonstrated authentic energy motivated by excitement for the home team," said O'Looney. "Kamala Harris and Tim Walz were both wonderful, the party did an incredible job of showcasing their humanity and lifelong careers of public service, and I left each day of the convention inspired by the capacity of mankind to serve and the direction of political leadership in this country."

This newfound energy for the Democratic ticket is evident in polls too, not just on the convention floor. Real Clear Polling, which aggregates data from top polling agencies, shows Harris leading Trump 48.1 to 46.3 as of this week.

The Harris-Walz ticket could be a pivotal executive office. "The concept of having the first Black woman President, the first woman president—it's such a historic moment. I think a lot of people really wanted to be a part of that," Smith commented, explaining how this context influenced the DNC, from the speaker lineup to the attendees themselves.

This pride in the potential history-making race and at the convention itself created noteworthy energy, even outside of true blue Democrats. In his speech, Former U.S. House Representative and Republican Adam Kinzinger said, "But I've learned something about the Democratic Party, and I want to let my fellow Republicans in on the secret: The Democrats are as patriotic as us." Smith said that quote "really encapsulates what it seems like the theme was throughout the convention. It really seemed like they were trying to reclaim patriotism."

On the final night, the convention handed out American flags to all of the participants. Smith recounted, “I had never been around that many American flags and not felt unsafe.” She continued to explain that she instead “felt camaraderie—it felt as if in that moment, everyone in that arena was after the same things and fighting for the same things. I also felt hope again, that sense of unity between Americans, despite political parties or political ideals.”

Smith added that when talking to fellow attendees, the same sentiments appeared. “That was the first time that they felt proud of America in a long time.”

These patriotic attitudes are significant because patriotism has more recently been associated with the Republican Party, rather than the Democratic Party, and because of the DNC’s diverse array of attendees.

Tatum said, “It was the most diverse space I think I’ve seen, and with that many people, it was so powerful to see that, and to see the Democratic Party has actually tried and succeeded at reaching various groups of people... I saw a campaign that was trying to be focused on the collection rather than in unification, rather than in division, as it pertained to people who may not share similar beliefs.”

Tova Kaplan ’26 worked for the Democratic National Convention as an Office of Party Affairs and Delegate Selection Intern this spring and

political consultant this summer. She described the DNC’s approach and her experience at the convention. “I’m just very pleased with the tone that the campaign has taken, this embrace of hope and joy. And like, love for your country, the rebranding of patriotism from blind nationalism that doesn’t really resonate with a lot of young people to something deeper, where you’re working to improve your country.”

The Harvard students who attended discussed the event in emotional terms, sharing how speakers evoked newfound patriotism and hope for the Democratic ticket.

Smith shared, “It honestly felt less like a Democratic National Convention [and more like] a convention of people who care about the well-being of other people. Yes, there was political rhetoric, but I think more than anything, the convention played a lot on people’s emotions.”

Kaplan shared her take on these emotional appeals and the politics of joy. “Maybe the fever of anger and grievance politics

may be breaking, and we can kind of

rebrand and re-embrace a form of politics that appeals to something a little bit deeper and more genuine in people.”

As Tatum talked about his DNC experience, he shared, “It was interesting to hear different perspectives, different age groups, different generations, different ethnicities, races, genders, people who had different life experiences, which I feel really helped contribute to a very powerful conversation.”

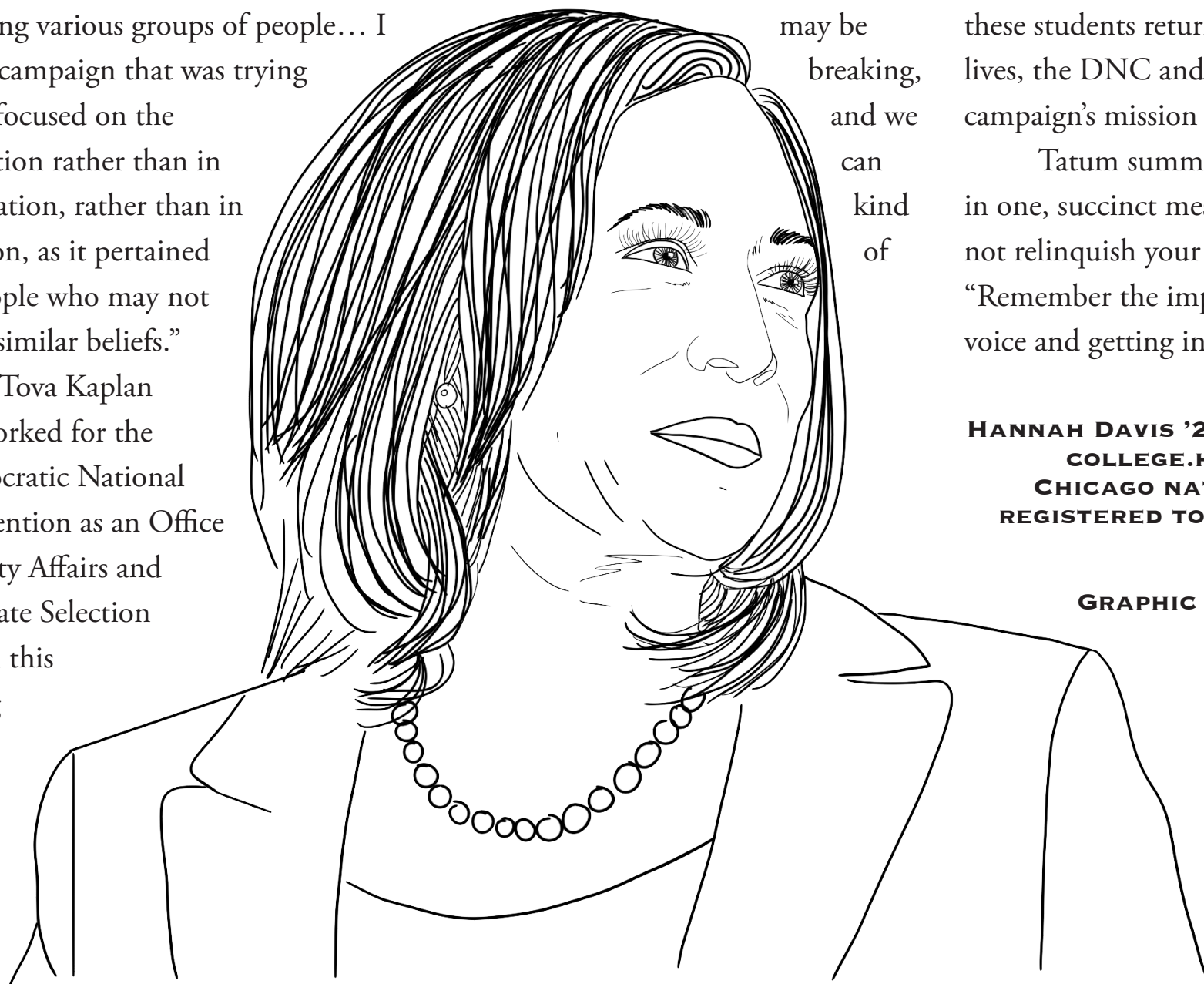
While the DNC illustrated the hope and momentum of the campaign, Kaplan explained that the DNC’s work is far from done. “I don’t want to be naively optimistic, but I definitely feel more enthusiastic than I have in a while, while working here...people at the DNC are just some of the most passionate, intelligent people that you know. They really take the weight of the country on their shoulders a lot of the time.”

The DNC put the Democratic Party and Harris in the national spotlight, receiving an array of positive press. Yet, as the general public and these students return to their normal lives, the DNC and the Harris campaign’s mission is just beginning.

Tatum summed up his experience in one, succinct message. “Vote. Do not relinquish your power,” he said. “Remember the importance of your voice and getting involved.”

**HANNAH DAVIS ’25 (HANNAHDAVIS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A CHICAGO NATIVE AND ALREADY REGISTERED TO VOTE IN THE 2024 ELECTION.**

**GRAPHIC BY GABI PONIZ ’26**





# FORUM

## Atom and Eve

Using faked self importance to combat mansplainers in physics.

BY ELIZA KIMBALL '25

“The more you know, the less your ego is. The less you know, the greater your ego,” said Albert Einstein. While I would never dare go against anything said by the god of all physics, I must admit, as a woman in this field, there are times I have found faking self importance as the only way to survive points of weakness.

In my first year as an aspiring physicist, the occasional mansplainer would reinforce the symptoms of my imposter syndrome that I was desperate to hide. I searched for a survival strategy that the older women in the field seemed to have mastered.

In the refined cohort of upper-level physics courses, the few remaining women—seasoned by their earlier academic hurdles—display an apparent boldness. On the first day of these classes, I have seen these women ask more questions than the strikingly large majority of men. Whether this is a genuine confidence or a learned ability remains unclear. I survived by pretending I belonged—until I truly did.

This phenomenon may stem from necessity rather than an innate capacity, but its practice is a testament to a genuine truth: by projecting confidence, these women have transformed this performance into an act of resilience and assertiveness that, at least on the exterior, exceeds that of our male classmates.

This summer, three female undergraduates and I went to the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) on the border of France and Switzerland to conduct particle physics research. Without prior education in particle physics, the four of us attempted to complete a crash course during the first three days of work.

At the local Charlie Chaplin-themed bar in our small town, Saint Genis Pouilly, we spewed out what we had learned and mastered as physics concentrators to make sense of the deluge of information from the past few days. The Uncertainty Principle, Wave-Particle Duality, Special Relativity, and Lenz's Law were mentioned and separated by several moments of silence as we sat in contemplation (or cluelessness).

Eventually, after hours of reviewing and preparing for our summer ahead, the soon-to-be-physicist to my right blurted out a question we all had been thinking: “Are we going to talk about the fact that CERN is primarily men?”

I am constantly asked by older adults how I manage to sustain as a woman in STEM, so much so that I have my response on command. I often naively argue I should be considered a *person*

in STEM. The opportunity to directly discuss this experience with other female physicists is rare. I could not help but ask, “Is that good or bad?”

Once again, we hit a mutual silence as we pondered the problem at hand.

I immediately flashed back to my first few late nights in the Physics Library where I sat adjacent to a table of men working on the same Physics 15A problem set as me. If I ever dared to ask them a question, they would likely either entirely disregard me or act like my need for help represented some inferiority. If they did take pity on me to explain a concept they surely did not entirely understand, it was rarely without mansplaining.

While I should not challenge Einstein, I believe it takes a certain level of displayed confidence and assurance to get past patronization. Like unseasoned women in this field, I found a facade of fortitude helped to get through before endurance formed and challenged a man's preconceived expectations of my abilities. Somewhere in the transition from feigned to genuine confidence, I learned how to combat a mansplainer.

Between mouthfuls of Swiss cheese, the fellow Harvard women at CERN and I concluded the male-to-female ratio primarily creates a lonely and toxic environment for women. However, we are all attracted to the challenge it presents and assert that we now have the strength to handle it. We owe it to the future of our gender to keep swimming amongst the sea of men as our female professors have emulated before us.

Most of these survival instincts manifest in the Jefferson Laboratory, hours past a time I would ever dare look at a clock. On the fourth floor of the building, unnoticed by most, sits the Physics Library, a grandiose room carefully designed to inflict the spiral of the humility and knowledge Einstein recommends for his successors.

Aspiring physicists sprinkle through the room, most likely stuck somewhere between one and twelve hours into each problem set question. Partially solved proofs are presented on movable whiteboards throughout the space, ending where the last line was intuitive enough to not be written or where the student found a disheartening dead end.

Harvard's Physics Department has carefully chosen to have most (if not all) physics problems sets due on Thursday morning, naturally turning our library on Wednesdays into a collaboration hub of both survival and friendship-making, which us concentrators know as Physics Night. The administrators try to corral the spirits through the

occasional evening visits from Professor Howard Georgi's pair of corgis and a fresh supply of sweet treats.

Despite a few serial mansplainers who have antagonized men in STEM fields, the majority of the physics community does give me respect as a default. The men subconsciously or consciously acknowledge the strength it takes to prosper in this environment, and the women have some unspoken alliance.

The Physics Department continues to support and encourage women in this field. The Women in Physics organization offers a community of undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral women a place to connect through mentoring and events. These resources and support systems have greatly compensated for the 2 a.m. onset of imposter syndrome I endured many Wednesday nights.

Just as it can be isolating to seek help in a male-dominated subject matter, it is somewhat lonely to study a field that does not fend well as a casual dinner party conversation. My pre-med friends can attest to the glow in my eyes when I had the stage to help them understand electromagnetism, my favorite physics concepts thus far. This glow came from a desire to share my spoken language with those outside of the Jefferson community.

I am convinced it is this language that sparks love between so many physicists. What is more romantic than having secret communication that spans both love of each other and love of the subject?

I have developed a theory: many physics concentrators are dating each other. This is probably due to the endless Wednesday evenings where men and women alike pour their hearts and brains into completing problem sets before the morning deadline. Perhaps, it is out of mutual respect for us women who have remained amongst a sea of men and the men who humbly listened to our questions on the first day of class.

**ELIZA KIMBALL '25 (ELIZAKIMBALL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT AND WROTE THIS ARTICLE IN THE CONTROL ROOM FOR CERN'S ATLAS DETECTOR.**

# Summer Culture: From brat to Demure

brat and demure as case studies for parsing the difference between cultural movements and TikTok trends.

BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27

It's no news that the trend cycle moves fast. Yet the whiplash somehow never fails to surprise me, as the internet somehow moved on from being "brat" to being "demure," and left me behind. As I kept scrolling, the word demure was everywhere—undeniably the new hottest trend that everyone seemingly *had* to be a part of.

Although these two trending adjectives seem similar enough, the cultural acceptance of these opposing summer philosophies has been wildly different. Why can one be commercially embraced while the other reads as cringey?

I aim to analyze their origins and executions to examine how they differ. brat is a product of popular culture and therefore can be more widely embraced, whereas demure exists solely as a social media trend. These key differences can be broken down into three main points: their origins, format, and saturation.



**brat summer: chaotic, fun, messy**

Up until last week, it was all about having a "brat" summer. The term rose to popularity as the title of Charli XCX's latest album. According to Charli XCX's Instagram post, the "brat" album is about "me, my flaws, my fuck ups, my ego all rolled into one." Having a "brat summer" is "accepting your imperfections while embracing the chaos," argues Associate Lifestyle Reporter Sophie Caldwell.

Charli XCX's album skyrocketed in popularity and expanded beyond music to become a part of pop culture through its distinct branding of bright green and a simple font, branding which has since been utilized and parodied by countless brands.

brat summer thrived as a social media phenomenon due to its distinct branding and easily embraceable summer philosophy. It sparked a viral dance to one of the songs in the album, and creators across the world were making videos about their own brat summers and embracing the mindset.

The impact of brat summer went beyond social media to the political world after Charli XCX tweeted "kamala IS brat" in an apparent endorsement of Kamala Harris. The Harris campaign embraced the branding and has continuously and intentionally brought youth to the campaign by leaning into memes and internet references. Examples include Harris' famed and often remixed coconut line, Walz being deemed a "midwest princess" by the internet (a reference to popular singer Chappell Roan), and the KamalaHQ page using trending TikTok sounds and taking part in popular social media trends.

brat summer went beyond Kamala Harris; it was the internet phenomenon of the summer. It's not new for a song or brand to dominate a summer; for example, last summer was undeniably defined by Barbie (and has been deemed "the summer of Barbie"). "Barbiecore" dominated fashion, the soundtrack consumed the radio, and Barbie-related trends and content thrived on social media. The same can be said for brat this summer: companies are launching advertisements in the same style to play off of its popularity and seem "in," the internet is obsessed with having a "brat" summer, and the "Apple" dance is unavoidable.

The "trend" of being demure, mindful, and cutesy came from creator @joolieannie, or Jools, on TikTok. The initial viral video has now accumulated over 42 million views and consists of Jools describing how she does her makeup for work: "very demure, very mindful." The audio from that original video has been used in over 90k new videos, and Jools and other creators have made a plethora of additional videos showing how they approach different aspects of their lives in demure ways.

Unlike "brat," which was praised by internet users and utilized immensely by the Harris campaign and corporate entities, many on the internet are begging those same entities not to take over demure in the same way or reacting negatively to its use.

**Demure and brat are both adjectives that have been used to describe an aesthetic. Why can one be embraced and celebrated while the other is cringey?**

The biggest difference is the origins of the trends. The reality is, "brat" was a commercial brand created by a marketing team to publicize Charli XCX's latest album. brat comes with an album cover, color, font, and pre-defined vibe. This makes it significantly easier to reference without being overt,

such as the Harris campaign using the lime green color and distinct font on their Kamala HQ page without actually directly referencing it. Though it has since become an internet phenomenon as well, "brat" is a commercial enterprise that began outside the internet. It exists beyond the social media world.

Compare this to the "demure" trend, which was popularized by Jools, a TikTok creator and real person, not a brand. Demure began as a TikTok trend and rapidly skyrocketed in popularity. It's generally understood that the faster a trend rises to popularity, the faster it crashes, and demure became popular almost overnight.

I should note that although it does not have commercial origins, Jools has remained the face and voice of the trend and has been able to commercialize "demure" to profit from it personally. Other brands that have tried to hop on the trend have been labeled as "cringe" or accused of ruining the trend for the TikTok users who had been enjoying it.

The difference between demure and brat is that demure does not exist outside of TikTok, and there is no real way to commercialize this trend beyond the TikTok space (and even more so, it would be cringey to do so). This is what I have labeled as "format"; though both brat and demure are embraceable aesthetics, brat is an entire brand, whereas demure is just a trend.

The last key difference between the two is how quickly they have permeated society and in how strong of a saturation. The hallmark of a social media trend growing so fast that it becomes tiresome is certainly the case for demure.

Demure has so far failed to become a true aesthetic and is still only a trend. It has not become the next "clean girl" aesthetic or "minimalism"—trends which blew up in the past year on TikTok. "Demure" will likely come and go as quickly as trending audios of summers past (looking at you, "my money don't jiggle" and "it's corn") because it references an aesthetic, yet is not an aesthetic itself.

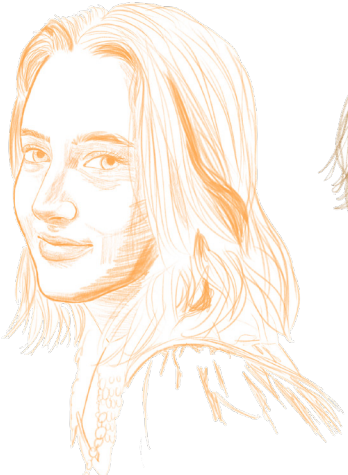
So, has demure completely eclipsed brat summer? I don't think so. While at first glance, they seem like two sides of the same trendy coin of the summer, I think that they are different enough to coexist. brat exists outside of the social media context; demure doesn't (yet). And I don't think it will.

**SOPHIA RASCOFF '27  
(SRASCOFF@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) SPENDS TOO MUCH TIME  
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FORUM | 7**



# MEET THE MASTHEAD

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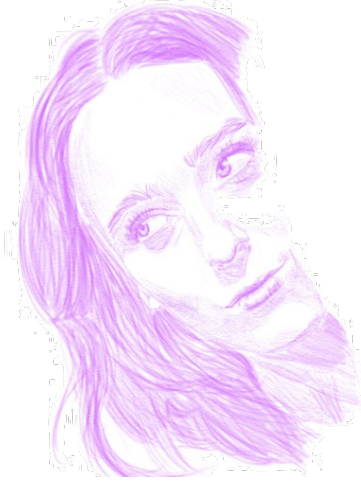
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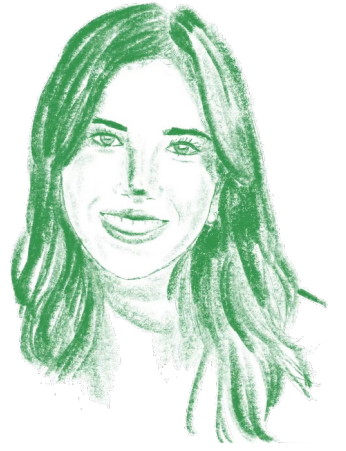
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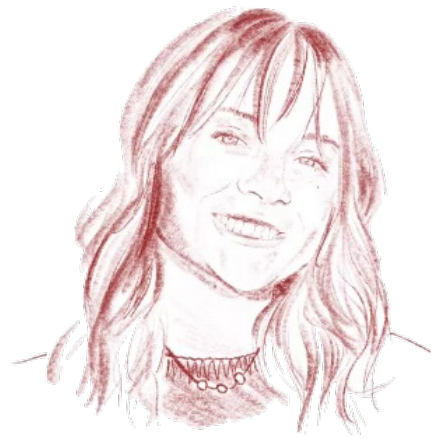
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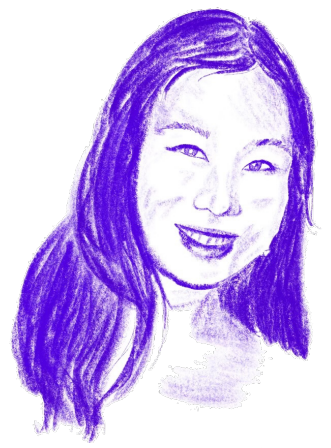
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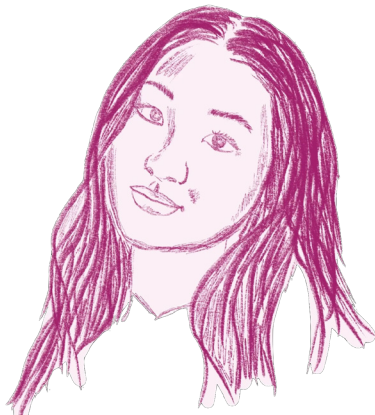


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# Summer Horror Recap

A guide to the several spooky films that came out this summer.

BY ARI DESAI '27

There's nothing quite like watching a horror movie in theaters. Even if it's the tenth entry in a worn-out franchise or a film filled with lazy jumpscars, there's a special communal feeling associated with sitting in a dark room alongside a bunch of strangers, united by the goal of getting scared. Fortunately, this summer saw a number of big horror releases, from Nicolas Cage's serial killer movie *Longlegs* to M. Night Shyamalan's latest, *Trap*. Here are some of the best and worst horror and thriller flicks from the last few months, a perfect time to watch before Halloween if you missed them.

In May, the buzzy Sundance Film Festival horror drama *I Saw the TV Glow* was released in theaters by A24. It follows a late-night TV show that begins to distort reality. While many loved the disorienting slow burn, I found it to be exceedingly tedious. The film is visually inventive with hardly a dull shot to be found, but outside of a few standout sequences, the rest of it fell flat. It effectively builds an atmosphere of uncomfortable, surreal dread, but the ultimate payoff to the snail's pace at which it chugs along feels underwhelming. Even though I found it to be too slow, *I Saw the TV Glow* is still worth a watch—it's one of the more visually and thematically provocative movies I've seen this year.

July saw two major horror releases with *MaXXXine* and *Longlegs*. *MaXXXine* is the third entry in Ti West's *X* trilogy, which includes 2022's double release of *X* and its prequel *Pearl*. Each film in the trilogy is in the style of a different subgenre of horror: *X* was a pulpy homage to grindhouse slashers like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Pearl* offered a twisted take on Old Hollywood Technicolor films and melodramas, and *MaXXXine* is a pastiche of Los Angeles-set noir thrillers from the 80s. Unfortunately, unlike its predecessors, *MaXXXine*'s stylized exterior is fairly shallow, with a borderline nonsensical plot and bizarre character choices. As fun as some of the table dressing is, there isn't much substance to the film, creating ultimately a letdown of a thriller.

*Longlegs*, on the other hand, certainly delivered on some of the promises of its viral marketing campaign. Neon, its distributor, was clever in how they built the mystery and hype around the film and Nicolas Cage's performance as the titular serial killer—none of the promotional materials for the film showed his face prior to its release, teasing what was supposedly one of the scariest movies to come out in years. Ultimately, *Longlegs* fell slightly short of these colossal expectations

but nevertheless was a disturbing and atmospheric watch. Nicolas Cage delivers a truly unhinged performance, with the makeup and costuming making him appear almost unrecognizable. The film's visual language always guides you to search the frame for something lurking around and complements the occult elements of the narrative perfectly. I'm mixed on how some of the film's twists are telegraphed, but *Longlegs* is definitely worth checking out.

Early August featured two more thrillers that I was less fond of, M. Night Shyamalan's *Trap*, which stars Josh Hartnett, and Tilman Singer's *Cuckoo*, which stars Hunter Schafer. *Trap* is the newest from divisive writer and director Shyamalan, usually known for his trademark hit-or-miss plot twists. It takes on a more outright comedic tone than his earlier films, leaning into the campy uncanniness of Hartnett's performance as a notorious serial killer attending a concert with his daughter. Shyamalan's daughter and R&B singer Saleka plays the pop star whose concert is being attended by Hartnett's character. While her singing is perfectly competent, the same does not fare for her acting, which takes on a larger role as the film goes on. It invites you to laugh both at it and with it, but it really pushes the bounds of how ridiculous it can get in the second half. Mileage will vary, but I found *Trap* to be far too silly to take seriously as a thriller, and sometimes too self-serious to buy into as a comedy. *Cuckoo*, on the other hand, felt like a mishmash of various horror tropes, and aside from a frightening villain, lacks any likable characters or a compelling mystery at its core. Schafer, known for her role as Jules on *Euphoria*, proves more than capable of leading a horror movie and is one of the highlights of the film, along with Dan Stevens doing a fantastically hammy German accent. But outside of their performances, the film doesn't have much new to offer that you can't find elsewhere in the horror genre.

The summer closed out with two new thrillers—*Blink Twice*, Zoë Kravitz's directorial debut starring her fiancé Channing Tatum, and *Strange Darling*, directed by JT Mollner and starring Willa Fitzgerald in a unique twist on the final girl trope. *Blink Twice* was a fairly buzzy release, with a topical premise where a “canceled” tech CEO invites a group of guests to his private island. The film is well-directed, especially considering it marks Kravitz's first foray behind the camera. She has a lot of fun exploring the film's lush setting which gradually becomes more disorienting and sinister. However, the film is lacking in its provocative and messy screenplay that goes more or less where you think it will. The first half spends

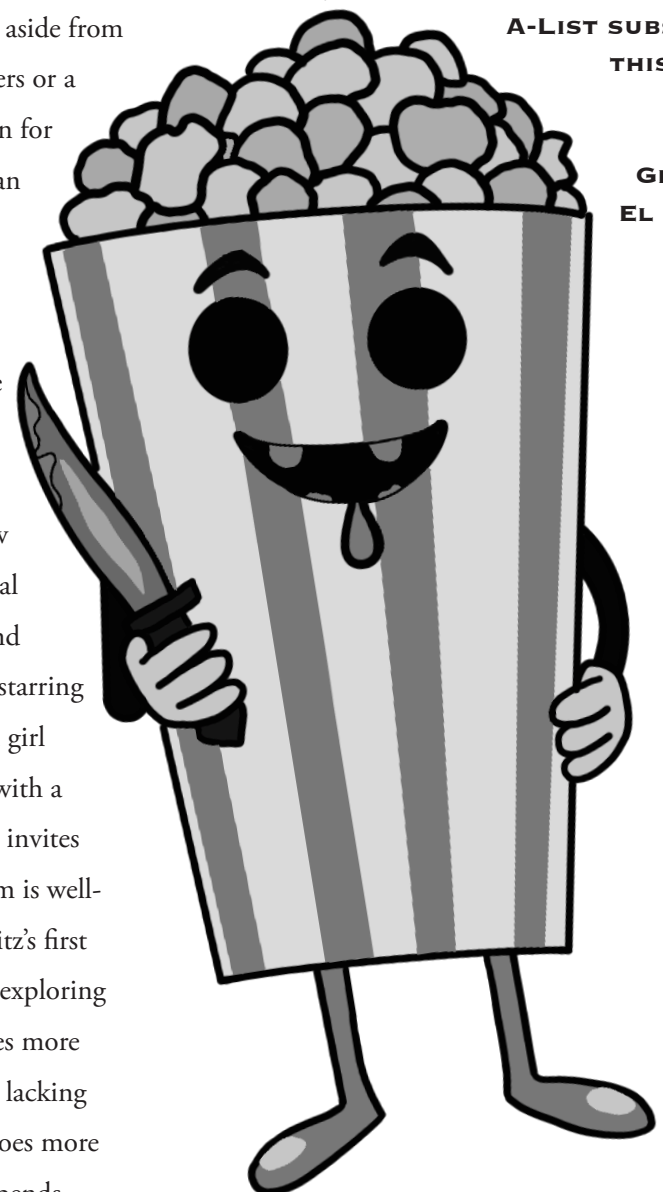
too much time reveling in the setting and spinning the wheels of the plot, but it finds its footing in the second half, where it turns into a more straightforward thriller. By the end of the film, I couldn't help but feel like it somewhat squandered what was otherwise a very solid premise—especially with its outlandish final twist that left a bad taste in my mouth.

*Strange Darling* might be my most enthusiastic recommendation of all of the films mentioned; go in knowing as little as possible about this twisty, gorgeously shot thriller. The set pieces are unflinching, gruesome, and well-directed, constantly keeping you on the edge of your seat. It relishes in the beautiful 35mm images on screen, making it some of the best cinematography I've seen all year. In the best possible way, I truly had no idea where the plot was going throughout the film.

There were a few other notable horror flicks I didn't get a chance to see, including the prequel *A Quiet Place: Day One*, *Alien: Romulus*, and *The Watchers* (the directorial debut of Shyamalan's other daughter, Ishana) yet this should not discourage you from checking these films out, too. So as the leaves start to fall and Halloween season begins, if you're looking for a horror movie to throw on, there is no shortage of options from this summer, even if they're not all created equal.

ARI DESAI '27 (ADESAI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) MADE THE MOST OF HIS AMC A-LIST SUBSCRIPTION THIS SUMMER.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26





# What's on at the HRDC?

A preview of the fall 2024 Harvard theater season.

BY ANDREW SPIELMANN '25

Receiving the Harvard theater season announcement at the end of each semester is an extremely exciting moment for the theater community and theater-goers alike. We are all dying to know what productions have been in the works. These are the shows we will join, audition for, play music for, and eventually enjoy in the theater—for the students involved, these shows may define their semester.

At the end of each semester, students gather teams for plays, musicals, and dance productions, and put together applications for space in the following semester's season. The Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club (HRDC) Board interviews these teams, deliberates, and allocates residencies to select shows before announcing the schedule to the theater community. The fall 2024 season was announced at the end of the spring semester (although updated more recently), presenting a promising array of shows in the Agassiz Theater, the Loeb Experimental Theater (the Ex), the Loeb Proscenium, and beyond. Let's dive into what to expect!

The upcoming season is musical-heavy, which is typical for Harvard theater. All four shows in the Agassiz Theater will be musicals, one of which is student-written: *Spurned: A Wild West Tale of Love, Revenge, and Assless Chaps*. *Spurned*'s book and lyrics are by Olivia Data '26, and it is composed by Preston Bushnell '26. The title and description suggest a raucously good, classically wild-western time. Preceding *Spurned* will be *The Human Comedy*, a 1983 musical by William Dumasq and Galt MacDermot, staged as part of a developmental residency in September, among other events and workshops hosted by the creative team. It has multiple professionals involved, including director Sammi Cannold EDM '16, who frequently directs at the American Repertory Theater, housed in the Loeb Drama Center.

Rounding out the semester at the Agassiz are *Aida* and *Pippin*, two more well-known musicals. These promise a lot of fun. The former, by Elton John and Tim Rice, is a rock musical that reimagines the story of an Ethiopian princess who falls in love with an Egyptian soldier. The latter, written by Stephen Schwartz, follows a young prince's journey to find meaning in life. *Pippin* derives its characters from historical figures of the early Middle Ages, creating a vibrant, memorable musical that is a patchwork of medieval and modern elements. While the Agassiz is a classic theater space, its size unfortunately limits these fairly established musicals to a smaller scale than the Loeb Proscenium. The extent to which the talented teams adapt the show to the space will certainly make or break these productions.

*Anastasia* will be in residency at the Loeb Proscenium from Oct. 14 to Nov. 10. *Anastasia* is a 2016 musical by Terrence McNally, Lynn Ahrens, and Stephen Flaherty, based on the 1997 animated film of the same name. As the only musical or play this fall on the Proscenium, Harvard's premier 550+ person theater venue that also hosts the American Repertory Theater, this is certainly a season headliner. The technically and narratively complex production will be a massive undertaking for director Katie Runions '25 and the large, experienced production team alongside her. Although divergent from its film source, the musical should

prove a quite different, more family-friendly respite from the likes of *Spring Awakening*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, and *Heathers*, the last few musicals on the Proscenium.

There is also a strong lineup of straight (non-musical) plays in the Loeb Ex, Harvard's black box theater. *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett is its only non-student-written play this fall. The one-actor show will be challenging both production-wise and content-wise; it is difficult to create an engaging production around a singular actor, and Beckett's content is typically philosophically provocative and perhaps obscure for some viewers. It will be interesting to see how well the thought-provoking material will be attended and understood by a Harvard audience.

The other plays in the Ex continue the HRDC's strong tradition of producing original student-written shows. *The Penningtons*, by Rave Andrews '25, is advertised as a dark comedy and an "absurd, one-of-a-kind, Wes-Anderson-meets-Succession experience" with "Gucci, ferrets, and existential dread." All ambitious and intriguing descriptions, making this one to look out for. *Jest the Way You Are*, by Mack Webb '25 and Jack Griffin '25, promises pure comedy in early December, although sprinkled with the profound—it seems the protagonists are disgraced court jesters who set out to find a brand new art form. This whimsical adventure sounds like it will certainly be one to follow closely—although we will have to wait until finals to see it completed.

The annual *Black Playwrights Festival*, presented by BlackCAST, is back for another edition in late October. Previous editions have featured multiple short-play readings written, directed, and produced by Black students, in addition to playwright talks and events—featured plays have even gone on to stage full productions later on, as was the case with last year's. This year's edition will surely reveal some great new material once again.

It is a pleasant surprise to see three dance shows in the Loeb this season as well. *anthology: a contemporary modern dance experience* is presented by the Harvard-Radcliffe Modern Dance Company (HRMDC) and will go up in the Loeb Ex after the *Black Playwrights Festival*. HRMDC is the oldest dance organization at Harvard and has put up several unique, evocative performances in the Loeb Ex in recent semesters. The marriage of HRMDC's inventive choreography and the intimate space of the Loeb Ex creates a unique harmony, making *anthology* sure to be a must-see for anyone interested in dance or movement.

Following *anthology* will be a dance version of Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. Sponsored by the Hyperion Shakespeare Company, which typically puts on regular Shakespeare plays, this is an exciting new type of production for Harvard theater. Director and choreographer Adrienne Chan '25 and choreographer Jimena Luque '25 will tell a story that we all know and love through movement. It will blend theater and dance unlike other shows and will conduct casting through HRDC Common Casting rather than an existing dance company.

*Dawn*, presented by the Harvard Ballet Company, will follow *Anastasia* on the Loeb Proscenium. The

Harvard Ballet Company is a premier undergraduate dance troupe in the Boston area that has put on many successful and well-attended productions on the Proscenium in the past. *Dawn* will surely continue this tradition, bringing excellent ballet to Harvard's campus.

There are, occasionally, shows put up outside of the traditional spaces on campus—these are put together by student teams who, independently of the HRDC, find their own space and team. On Nov. 17, one such play, *SPEED BUMPS*, written by Matthew Cole '24 and directed by Ava Palotta '25, will go up in the Hasty Pudding Institute. It will be great to see how they use this historic but underutilized space.

Beyond these shows, there are also plenty of performances by dance groups, improv troupes, and more—the only shows listed are those with an HRDC residency or those auditioning through Common Casting. There is ample opportunity here for a splendid season of student theater for the viewers, performers, and crews. In terms of auditions, some of the more drama-inclined, non-musical actors may miss out, but there are exciting opportunities for most. Common Casting preliminary auditions take place until Friday, Sept. 6, so get out there and get involved. Overall, the current outlook bodes well for the near future of Harvard theater, which will undoubtedly only continue to grow and thrive.

## Full Residency Schedule:

### Agassiz Theater

*The Human Comedy* (developmental residency) – Sept. 15 to Sept. 21

*Spurned: A Wild West Tale of Love, Revenge, and Assless Chaps* – Oct. 14 to Oct. 27

*Aida* – Nov. 4 to Nov. 17

*Pippin* – Nov. 18 to Dec. 8

### Loeb Ex

*Krapp's Last Tape* – Sept. 30 to Oct. 6

*The Penningtons* – Oct. 7 to Oct. 20

*Black Playwright's Festival* – Oct. 21 to Oct. 27

*anthology: a contemporary dance experience* – Oct. 28 to Nov. 3

*Romeo & Juliet* – Nov. 4 to Nov. 17

*Jest the Way You Are* – Nov. 18 to Dec. 8

### Loeb Proscenium

*Anastasia* – Oct. 14 to Nov. 10

*Dawn* – Nov. 11 to Nov. 24

Site-Specific: Hasty Pudding Institute, Third Floor Stage

*SPEED BUMPS* – Nov. 17

**ANDREW SPIELMANN '25  
(ANDREWSPIELMANN@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) IS THE EDITOR-IN-  
CHIEF OF THE INDEPENDENT AND A  
LONG-TIME THEATER LOVER.**



# SPORTS

## How To Become A Harvard Superfan

Fall sports games you don't want to miss.

BY KATE OLIVER '26

**B**etween the start of class, comping clubs, and being back with friends, fall is certainly an exciting time at Harvard.

As everyone arrives back on campus, there is a select group of students who have already been hard at work since as early as Aug. 8: fall athletes. After strong pre-seasons, several fall teams are poised to make runs for Ivy League and even national titles. While everyone is looking forward to Harvard-Yale returning to Cambridge this year, several competitions are coming up that promise to pack just as much excitement. Use free student admission to your benefit and check out the games below!

**Women's Soccer:** Few sports teams on campus boast Olympians as part of their current roster, women's soccer is one of them. Jade Rose '25 competed for the Canadian squad and helped anchor their defense. Rose played in all matches before the squad was eliminated from the tournament at the hands of Germany. The rest of Harvard's squad includes standouts like Josie Hasbo '25, who competed in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup for Denmark. Women's soccer is coming off an Ivy League tournament championship and a trip to the NCAA second round last season. They only have five home games this season, so be sure to head out to Jordan Field on Sept. 8 at 1:00 p.m. for their Pride Game against Pepperdine. Don't miss your chance to see one of the best teams in the country right here in Cambridge.

**Women's Rugby:** The defending 15s and 7s national champions will welcome Dartmouth back to Mignone Field this year for a rematch of last year's 15s NIRA Championship. If you haven't seen the LG Channel's episode of "The Rivalries," this competitive matchup dates back to their first varsity matchup in 2015. Rugby's roster is filled with athletes who have represented their countries across all age groups, including Lennox London '26 for USA. Lennox currently holds the program record for number of tries in a season. Their game against Dartmouth is also their alumni game, so pack the stands on Oct. 12 at 2:00 p.m. to show your support!

**Field Hockey:** In a rematch of last year's Ivy League Championship Game, Harvard field hockey will be hosting the Princeton Tigers on Oct. 19 at 12:00 p.m. This is the first time since 2021 that field hockey has played at home against Princeton; the

two programs hold all Ivy League Championship titles since 1993. The Crimson are starting the year nationally ranked eighth and were first in the Ivy League preseason poll, putting them in prime position to clinch back-to-back regular season and tournament Ivy League Championships. Their Princeton game is also the 50th-year celebration of Harvard field hockey, giving you the perfect opportunity to get rowdy and celebrate the seasoned success of women in sports.

**Women's Volleyball:** Following the Harvard Invitational this upcoming weekend, women's volleyball will open their Ivy League play with Dartmouth on Sept. 27 at 7:00 p.m. The squad is coming off its most successful season under head coach Jennifer Weiss, having qualified for their first-ever Ivy League tournament last year. They are looking to return to the Ivy League tournament and go for their first Ivy League tournament championship. Don't let the countless MAC stairs deter you, climb up to the fourth floor and show your support!

**Men and Women's Cross Country:** The Harvard-Yale cross country meet returns to campus this year as an early test for both the men's and women's teams. The women's squad are three-time defending Ivy League Heptagonal Cross Country champions, and Harvard-Yale provides an early opportunity to earn points towards a national new bid. Strong returning athletes, including Ella Gilson '25 and Penelope Salmon '26, look to lead the Crimson to a successful season. On the men's side, reigning NCAA Division I Champion and Paris 2024 Olympian Graham Blanks '25 returns to defend his title, officially starting his campaign at the Harvard-Yale meet. Don't miss the chance to see all these athletes and others back in action in Cambridge on Sept. 6.

**Men's Soccer:** Men's soccer starts their season after finishing second in Ivy League standings in the 2023 season.

Their three All-Ivy selections from 2023 remain on the roster as the team looks to continue the trend of moving up the conference ranking. They will open home Ivy League play for the season on Oct. 5 at 1:00 p.m. against the University of Pennsylvania. This is one of only six home games for men's soccer this season, which started with a draw against Holy Cross last Saturday. So, mark your calendar and show up to put the crowd size from this past weekend to shame.

**Men's Water Polo:** In a rematch of the 2023 NWPC Championship, the men's water polo team will host Princeton on Nov. 9 at 5:00 p.m. This will be the second game of the season against the Tigers, but the first one hosted in Blodgett Pool. The Crimson return a talented squad, including James Rozolis-Hill '26, who currently holds the program's single-season goal record. For students who have never watched water polo, don't miss out on the chance to see this growing rivalry.

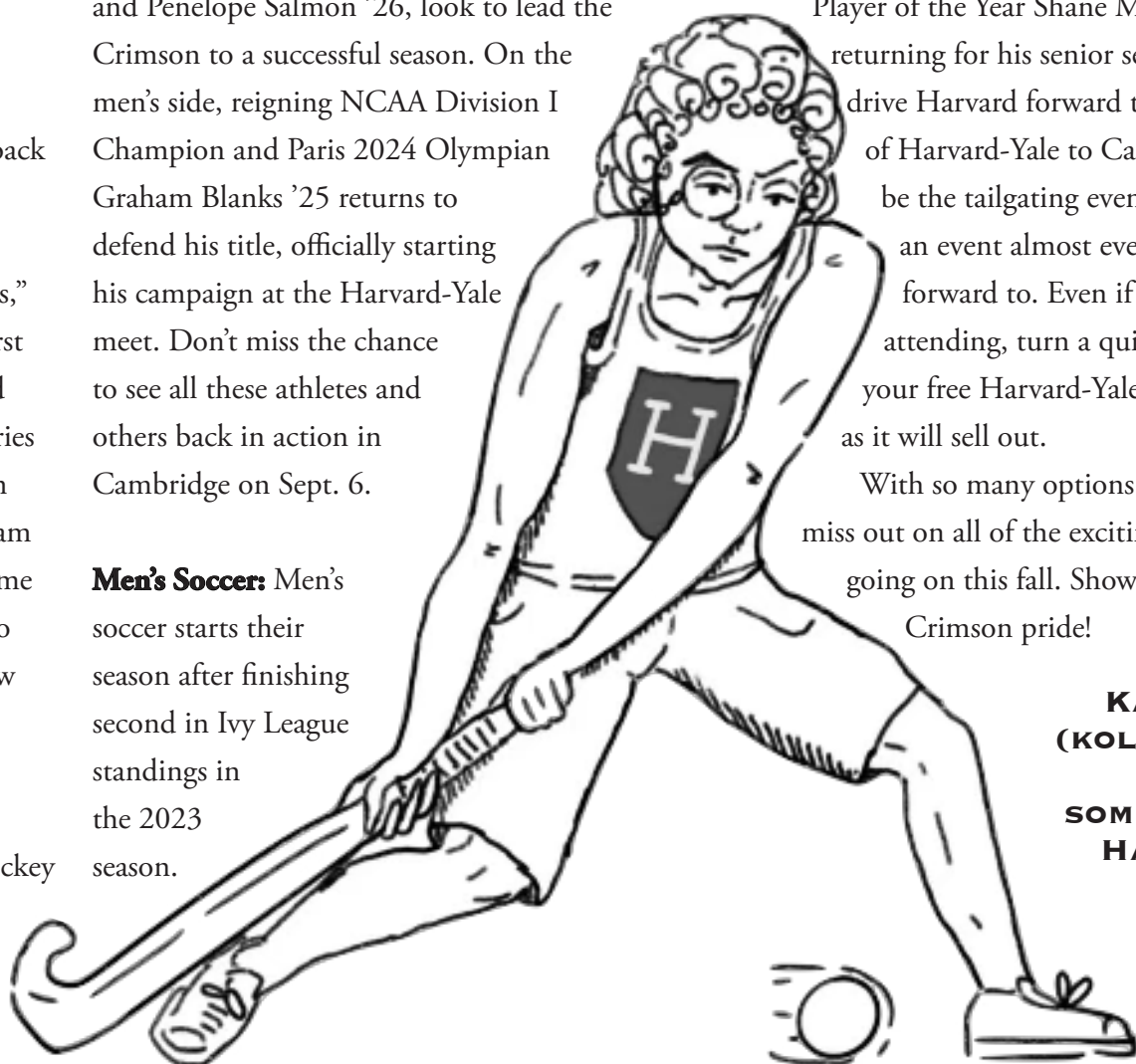
**Football:** No fall can't-miss sporting list would be complete without Harvard-Yale, returning to Cambridge on Nov. 23. Entering the season ranked second behind Yale in the Ivy League preseason poll, the Crimson are set on winning The Game and ending Yale's two-year win streak. This is also the first year for Head Coach Andrew Aurich to prove himself, stepping in to fill the shoes of Tim Murphy, who retired this past year after 30 seasons with the program. Ivy League Preseason Offensive Player of the Year Shane McLaughlin '25 will be

returning for his senior season and looking to drive Harvard forward to victory. The return of Harvard-Yale to Cambridge promises to be the tailgating event of the season and an event almost every student can look forward to. Even if you don't play on attending, turn a quick profit by selling your free Harvard-Yale ticket to eager fans, as it will sell out.

With so many options to choose from, don't miss out on all of the exciting sporting events going on this fall. Show up and show your Crimson pride!

**KATE OLIVER '26**  
(KOLIVER@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU)  
SOMETIMES WISHES  
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THE SEC (THE  
CONFERENCE).

**GRAPHIC BY**  
**DAVID LI '25**



# Kristen Faulkner: From Portfolios to the Peloton

How Kristen Faulkner '16, two-time Olympic Gold medalist, left her conventional Harvard graduate career to pursue professional cycling.

BY BREAGH BRIDGE '27

**K**risten Faulkner '16 won two gold medals in Road and Track Cycling at the 2024 Paris Olympics, contributing to Harvard's 13 total medals at this year's games. She is an impressive athlete with stage wins at the Giro d'Italia, the Vuelta D'Espagne, and a PanAm Championship gold medal—already decorating her athletic resume before this Olympics. What makes Faulkner's story unique and inspiring is that she has not been on the road to cycling glory since her days in Cambridge: Faulkner was on the Women's Varsity Lightweight Rowing team at Harvard and had never cycled until 2017.

Upon graduating in 2016, like many Harvard student-athletes, Faulkner walked away from competitive sports and gravitated toward a familiar route of working in venture capital. According to the annual senior survey done by *The Harvard Crimson*, of the graduating Class of 2024, 16% of them will pursue finance, and of this cohort, 64% of them will be doing this in New York. Similarly, in Faulkner's graduation year, over 17% indicated they would be working in finance. Understandably, Harvard alumni are drawn to the fast-paced lifestyle of a finance career in the city and the above-average compensation that comes with it.

In an interview with the *Independent*, Faulkner said that in 2016, venture capital was not as highly regarded as it is today, but she decided to pursue it anyway. She thought, "I probably need some work experience so I could go be a software engineer for a few years...or I could go work in venture capital where I would learn what makes a good business." She landed a job at Bessemer Venture Partners in New York City and later moved to Silicon Valley to work at Threshold Ventures. During her time at Harvard, she concentrated in Computer Science and interned at Bridgewater.

As a young kid growing up in the small town of Homer, Alaska, Faulkner learned the value of hard work at her parents' hotel and restaurant and wanted to grow up to make a name for herself. All these values curated her Olympic dream from a young age. Having been a rower at Harvard and competed in varsity running, swimming, and rowing in high school at Andover Academy, Faulkner has always known how to push her limits in endurance sports. She even won a silver medal for Team USA at the U23 World Championships for rowing while at Harvard.

After graduating, Faulkner walked away from rowing. "I knew I would do some sort of type A, post-college sport," she said, but it was not always her plan to become a cyclist. Faulkner did not give up on her Olympic dreams post-grad. "I just really had this dream to go to the Olympics one day. I had thought about going for rowing but the timing of it didn't work out... When I moved to New York, I wasn't ready to let the Olympic dream go. I wanted to stay fit, I thought maybe after two years I would go back and train for rowing. I knew that

my sports career wasn't over."

While working in New York, she found herself missing a team sport and looking for an athletic outlet. In 2017, she joined a beginner cycling clinic in Central Park. She later signed up for a race and ultimately found her passion for cycling. In 2018, Faulkner moved to Silicon Valley for a new job opportunity, which also gave her access to better cycling. In 2020, she did a race block in Europe while working remotely. "This was the hardest month and a half of my life... It was like the hardest week in my life as a student-athlete at Harvard, doubled. I had to go through that experience to realize it wasn't possible to do both at the same time, but I also had to go through that to realize I had a chance at making it at cycling because up until then, I had no results in Europe." Soon after this, Faulkner left her job in Silicon Valley to become a full-time professional cyclist.

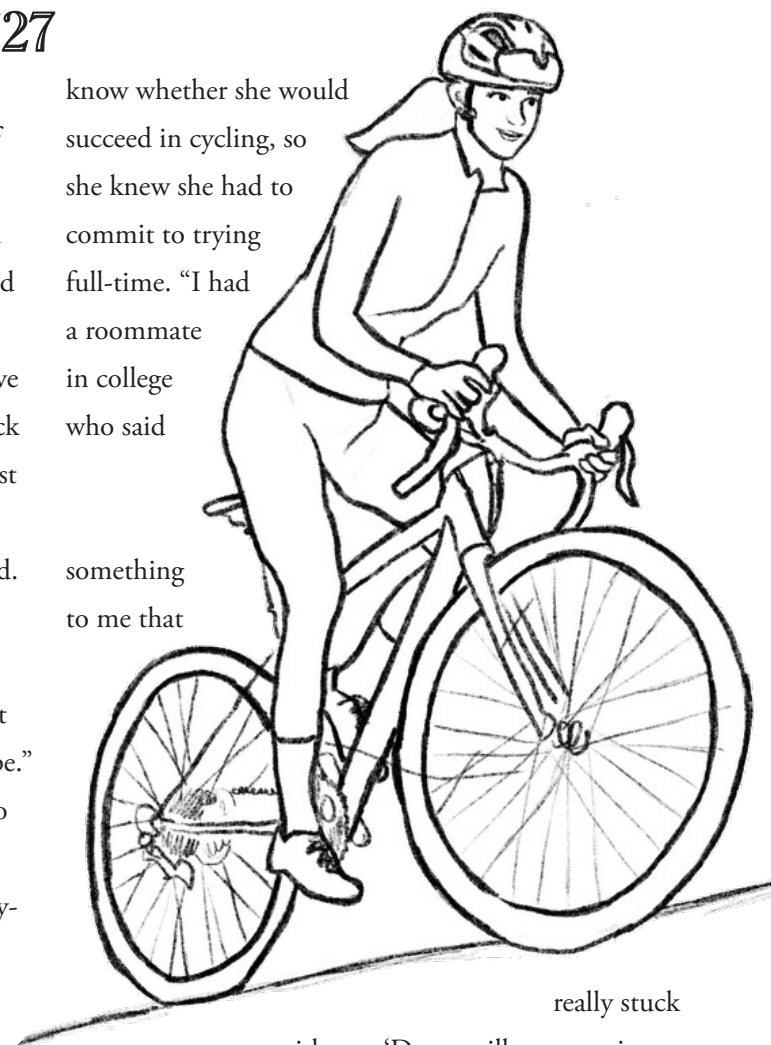
Faulkner is currently a rider for Team EF-Oatly-Cannondale, the only American-owned and operated team in pro cycling. She lives in Girona, Spain, where the training and equipment facility for Team EF-Oatly-Cannondale is. She trains year-round for the professional cycling circuit, where all the races are in Europe. To North Americans, cycling is a niche sport; however, the 2023 Tour de France Femmes garnered a live audience of about 2.9 million on each of the seven days of stage racing. In comparison, the 2023 WNBA finals had an estimated 800,000 spectators.

However, the financial barriers to becoming a professional athlete in any sport still existed for Faulkner. "It was really scary, to be honest, I have always been really frugal with my money. I was always saving because I had this idea in my head that if I wanted to be a professional athlete then I was going to have to save as much money as possible." Many Harvard students and graduates get caught up in the rat race of becoming the most successful on paper, but Faulkner was comfortable with the thought of being financially stable. "I didn't feel like I needed to be rich. I had to support myself financially; my parents weren't going to support me financially to go be a cyclist."

Harvard is not known for having many graduates who become professional athletes. Academics are, understandably, the priority at this institution, even for student-athletes, which leads to graduates' vocational outcomes being relatively conventional. Faulkner had to have immense trust in herself to make the jump to being a full-time athlete, as she knew she would perhaps spend a few years struggling to make ends meet. "It was really hard to leave a lucrative six-figure job to make—I think my first year I got a seven thousand dollar stipend from my team. It wasn't even a salary," she said.

"I can be great at either one of these but I can't be great at both at the same time," Faulkner realized. "I decided I had to make a choice, and I decided venture capital would always be there, but the sports and the Olympic journey would not." Another mental hurdle in Faulkner's path was the fact that it was impossible to

know whether she would succeed in cycling, so she knew she had to commit to trying full-time. "I had a roommate in college who said something to me that



really stuck with me. 'Doors will open up in the areas that you pursue.' If you're talented and hard-working, doors will open up for you, you just have to pursue that thing."

"It's really funny because I think there's a public image that Harvard kids are arrogant, but I really don't think that's true. I think when you're surrounded by other people who are so talented you start to feel a little insecure about yourself and question, 'Can I actually be successful as an athlete?' 'Can I actually be successful as a musician or writer?'" The path to Olympic gold could be as simple as trusting yourself, dreaming big, and putting in a lot of hard work. "I want to tell Harvard kids to have more confidence."

Finding success as a college graduate is often defined by how much money you make right out of school, leaving dreams behind in the pursuit of becoming financially successful. "I think Harvard kids underestimate themselves, to be honest," said Faulkner. Her story exemplifies the idea that however niche an avenue may be, if you work hard and commit yourself to it, you can find success. Faulkner's story is inspirational, demonstrating how the utmost success can be found by breaking the mold of what Harvard graduates do with their degree, and how there is no one way to Olympic Glory.

You can follow Faulkner's journey on her Instagram, @arcticfaulks, or her website <https://www.kristenfaulkner.com/>.

**BREAGH BRIDGE '27  
(BREAGHBRIDGE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) DID NOT DO VERY WELL IN HER TOUR DE FRANCE FANTASY LEAGUE.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27**



# Sports Spotlight: Lauren Scruggs

Going for gold in all aspects of life.

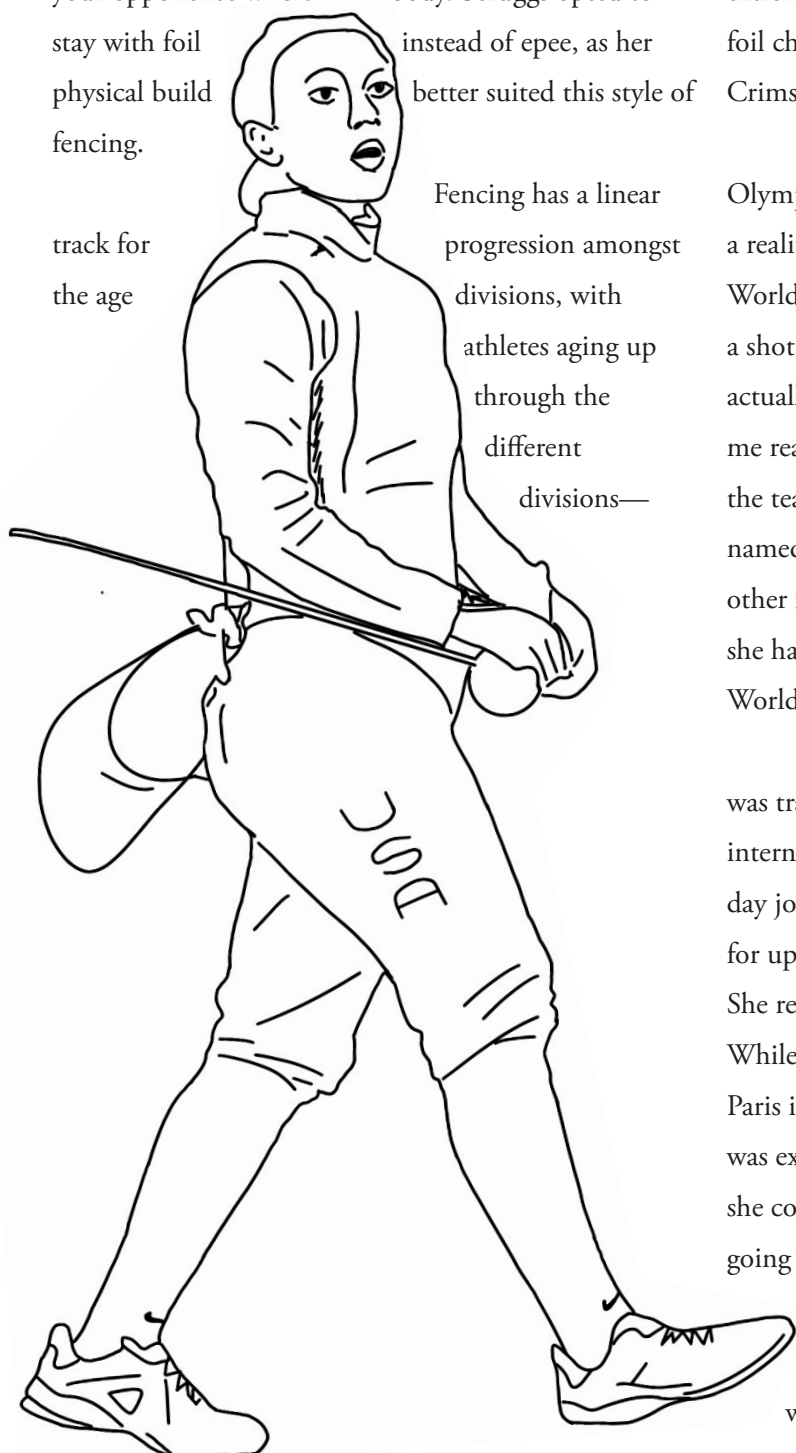
BY KATE OLIVER '26

Olympic gold medalist Lauren Scruggs '25 would not have been a fencer had it not been for her older brother. His obsession with *Star Wars* led their mother to sign him up for a local fencing club in Brooklyn when Scruggs was eight. Despite an initial desire to quit, her brother stuck with the sport and ultimately dragged Scruggs along so their mother would have both children involved in the same activity. Scruggs developed a love for the sport immediately that would spark the beginning of her Olympic journey. As she said to the *Independent*, "I just liked [fencing] immediately...and liked the competitive nature of it."

Unlike many other fencers, Scruggs did not pick her own style of fencing—rather, she once again followed in the footsteps of her brother. As she put it, "a lot of my early beginnings in fencing... just happened. My brother did foil, so I did foil, and the club we went to was only foil." Foil fencing involves poking with a target area of the upper torso and the back—during each bout, athletes compete in three three-minute rounds for the first to 15 touches. Epee utilizes a similar poking style, but the target area is your opponent's whole body. Scruggs opted to stay with foil instead of epee, as her physical build better suited this style of fencing.

track for the age

Fencing has a linear progression amongst divisions, with athletes aging up through the different divisions—



Scruggs naturally rose through the age groups. She started representing the United States when she began juniors (under 21s) and traveled internationally for competitions. Scruggs also considered fencing for Jamaica at one point in her career. "My family's from Jamaica, so I thought about representing them, but I'm just very American, so I decided to stay with U.S. fencing."

When deciding where she would compete collegiately, Scruggs was caught between Columbia and Harvard. Her older brother had fenced at Columbia in the same city where the two grew up; on the other hand, Harvard's coach Daria Schneider had developed a strong relationship with Scruggs. Schneider herself was a five-time member of the U.S. fencing national team and a two-time medalist at world championships after a successful collegiate career at Columbia. In making her final decision, Scruggs stated, "I wanted to leave New York. I wanted to be in more of a college [setting]" compared to a more "spread out" Columbia. She valued that Cambridge offered the perfect blend of urban life and college campus.

Her three seasons at Harvard have been extremely successful; Scruggs was the NCAA Women's foil champion in 2023 and contributed to the Crimson's team NCAA title in 2024.

Scruggs had always dreamed of becoming an Olympian, but the first time Paris started to become a reality was after she was selected for her first Seniors World Team. "Until then, I didn't really think I had a shot. Obviously, I was always pretty close, but to actually qualify for the Olympic-style team really made me realize I could make the Olympics this year." When the teams were announced in April 2024, Scruggs was named to the U.S. women's epee team along with two other former Ivy League athletes. Prior to the selection, she had won nine individual medals at the Junior World Championships.

Before leaving for the Olympics, Scruggs was training five times a week on top of balancing an internship in New York City. After wrapping up her day job, she would walk a few blocks down to fence for up to four hours of practice before returning home. She repeated this cycle until she departed for Paris. While she had to miss several weeks to compete in Paris in addition to other training weekends, her firm was extremely supportive of her athletic endeavors. As she commented, "It's not every day you have an intern going to the Olympics, so everyone was just super excited." Scruggs will be returning to this firm full-time after successfully navigating this unique work-life balance situation.

Scruggs arrived at the Olympic Village with

the 592 U.S. Olympians with enough time to prepare for her upcoming bouts. Scruggs stated, "It was a little overwhelming because the village is just filled with all these different athletes from around the world, and obviously they all want to do well." To escape the chaos of the village, Scruggs took full advantage of the Team USA High Performance Training Center for all of her pre-competition practices.

For the individual tournament, Scruggs had the mindset of "trying to fence to the best of my ability" with a plan to "go out there and put [up] a fight every bout." She successfully executed her plan as she defeated fencers from Singapore, Canada, and Italy going into the finals. Scruggs's successful individual campaign led her to compete against her teammate Lee Kiefer for the gold medal. There were no hard feelings at the end of the bout, which saw Scruggs claim her first Olympic silver medal. "We're more so excited that we're doing that at the finals, which has never happened before."

The focus for both quickly shifted to the team foil tournament, where Scruggs earned her first Olympic gold medal in helping the U.S. defeat China, Canada, and Italy. The team entered the tournament as the second seed and was coming off a fourth-place finish at the 2023 World Championships; this was the first-ever team gold medal for the U.S. in the women's foil. Scruggs herself clinched the victory through her position as the anchor leg.

Scruggs has returned to campus this fall since coming off of her extremely successful summer. In her own words, "The Olympics are fun, but it's mostly stressful. So, I'm actually really happy to go back to school and be with all my communities." For her, this is not stepping down from one stage in her life to another, but rather an opportunity to enjoy spending time with friends and living the true college experience. Scruggs is grateful to be returning to the routine of Harvard life and is looking forward to once again representing the Crimson.

**KATE OLIVER '26 (KOLIVER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WATCHED THE OLYMPICS DURING HER SUMMER INTERNSHIP.**

**GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26**



# Indy Sportsbook: NFL 2024-2025 Season Preview

Longshots and locks for the upcoming year.

BY JONAH KARAFIOL '26

As the 2024 NFL season approaches, savvy bettors should look to futures for a chance to make an easy profit. We at the Indy Sportsbook have taken it upon ourselves to provide our readers with our favorite bets entering the 2024 NFL season. With a mix of high-risk, high-reward bets and safer player props, bettors of all bankrolls and risk tolerances will find the bet right for them.

First, player props. My favorite line right now is Patrick Mahomes over 33.5 passing touchdowns at -125 odds. Mahomes has hit this mark in three of his last four seasons, and while his 2023 season was his worst since 2019, the Chiefs offense just lacked the weapons to get the job done. Travis Kelce's age was apparent, not to mention the abysmal core of Rashee Rice, Justin Watson, and Marquez Valdez-Scantling. With Kadarius Toney gone, and the additions of Hollywood Brown and Xavier Worthy, this line is simply too good to pass up.

Another solid pick in the quarterback prop market is Caleb Williams under 23.5 passing touchdowns. Williams had 72 touchdowns in his two years at USC, and the Bears have a solid receiver room in D.J. Moore, Keenan Allen, and Rome Odunze. However, the Bears have had historically terrible quarterback performance: no quarterback in Bears history has ever thrown for 30 touchdowns in a single season. Justin Fields failed to break 20 touchdowns during his last two seasons in Chicago with similar weapons. Additionally, only five quarterbacks have ever passed for 24 touchdowns as a rookie: three of those five quarterbacks were Justin Herbert, Russell Wilson, and Peyton Manning. We at the Indy Sportsbook just do not see Williams hitting this mark, especially in Chicago.

While the Bears may struggle this season in the NFC North, we've been eyeing their rival, the Packers, to win the division at +210 odds. The Detroit Lions are currently the slight favorites at +150,

but the Indy Sportsbook thinks there's much more value in the Packers' line, and we think they should be the favorites. They took down Detroit at Ford Field on Thanksgiving last season, and in the weeks following had one of the most explosive offenses in the league, ranking third in EPA. Their defense was lackluster, but the addition of Boston College's Jeff Hafley at the helm is promising. Before Boston College, Jeff Hafley led a formidable Ohio State defense that ranked second in total defense during his tenure, and he led the Eagles to a bowl win against #17/24 SMU last fall. We only see Jordan Love improving in the coming years, and think the Packers are primed to win the NFC North.

Jeff Hafley's move to Green Bay is promising, but my favorite coaching change of the offseason was Mike Macdonald's move to Seattle. It's hard to believe that Pete Carroll, the same coach behind the legendary Legion of Boom, found his Seahawks finishing 28th in DVOA—which measures a team's defensive performance adjusting for opponent strength—and last in EPA—a metric tracking the expected value in points per play—on third downs. DVOA and EPA Macdonald's scheme was immensely successful in Baltimore, and we at the *Indy Sportsbook* expect the Seahawks to see similar results after adopting it. Moreover, the Ravens swept the NFC North in 2023, including Kyle Shanahan's 49ers. Shanahan's shifts have been giving defenses headaches around the league, but Macdonald's scheme held the 49ers to just 19 points. Macdonald to win COTY at +1000 odds has great value—if he can fix the Seahawks' defensive woes, the award is his to take.

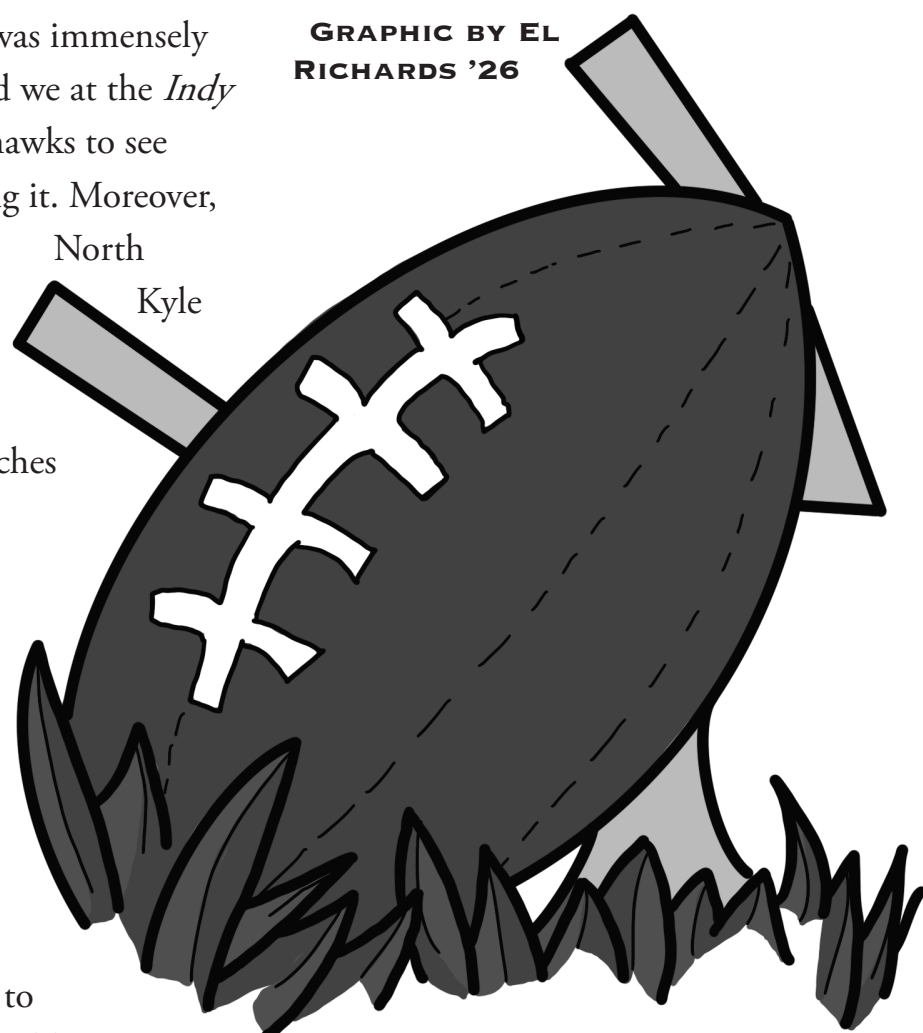
For a safer bet this season, consider the Eagles to win the NFC East at +125 odds.

Jalen Hurts was an MVP frontrunner for the majority of the season, but Philadelphia's late-season slide cost him the trophy and the Eagles the division. Had the Eagles not lost five of their last six games, they would have beaten out the first-place Cowboys handily. It has been 20 years since a team won back-to-back NFC East titles, and with the addition of Saquon Barkley and Jahan Dotson, the Eagles easily have the best roster in their division. Rookies Quinyon Mitchell and Cooper Dejean will bring much-needed help to their secondary, and Vic Fangio has led great defenses in years prior—take a look at his 2018 season with the Bears. You can expect the Eagles to take home the NFC East, and you should not worry about it being close, either.

This NFL season promises to be one of the most intriguing in recent memory, with new stars rising, seasoned veterans seeking redemption, and strategic coaching moves that could redefine team success. Best of luck should you tail our picks, and stay tuned for more bets throughout the season.

**JONAH KARAFIOL '26**  
([JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:JONAHKARAFIOL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)) IS THE NEWS EDITOR OF THE *INDEPENDENT* AND A DIEHARD DOLPHINS FAN.

GRAPHIC BY EL  
RICHARDS '26

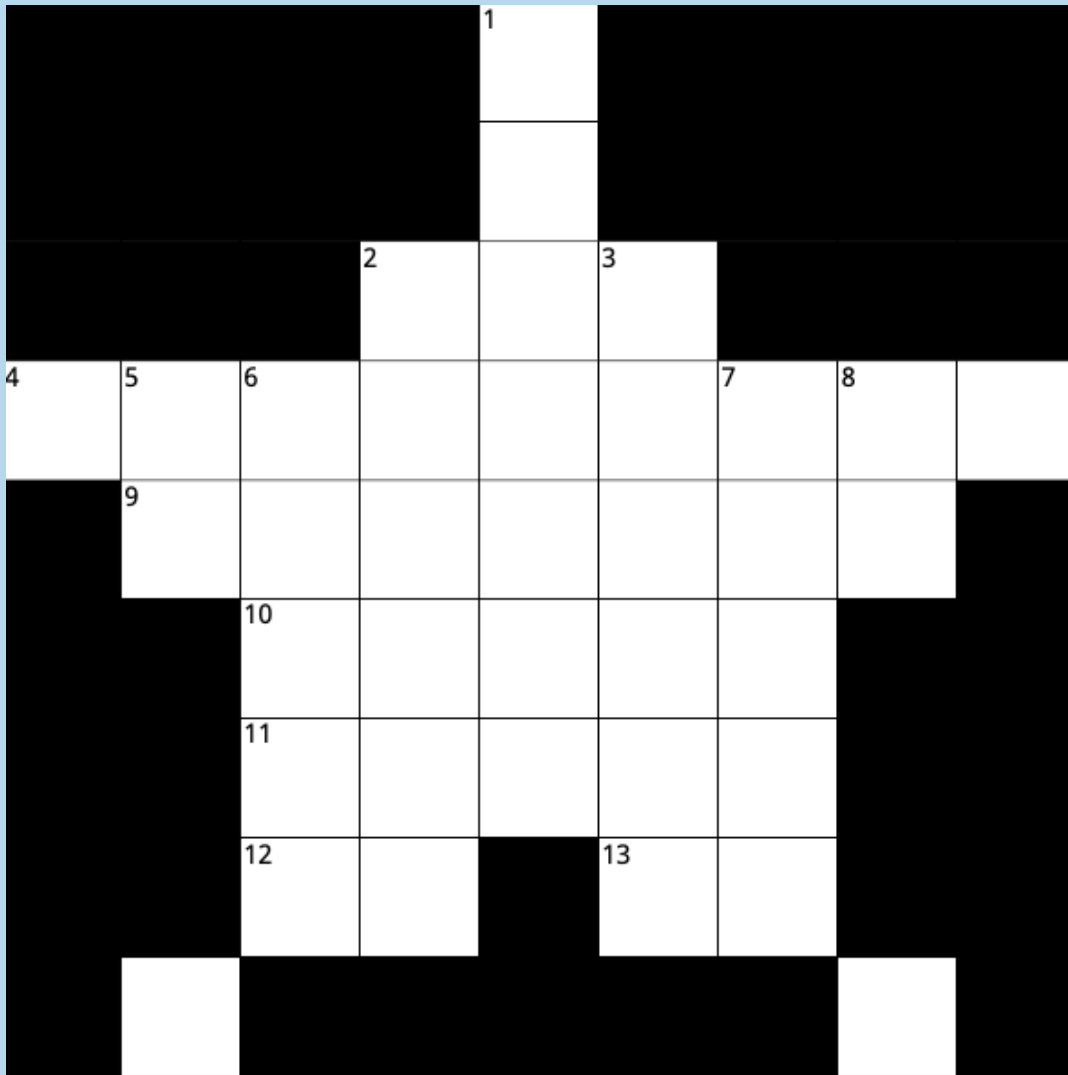




OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES BELONG ONLY TO THE WRITER AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VALUES OF THE *INDEPENDENT*.

# Indy Days

BY HAN NGUYEN '27



## ACROSS

- 2. Sunbather's goal
- 4. Relating to a joint
- 9. Legislator's nays
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ in STEM
- 11. Fill with joy
- 12. Lithium
- 13. Plural ending

## DOWN

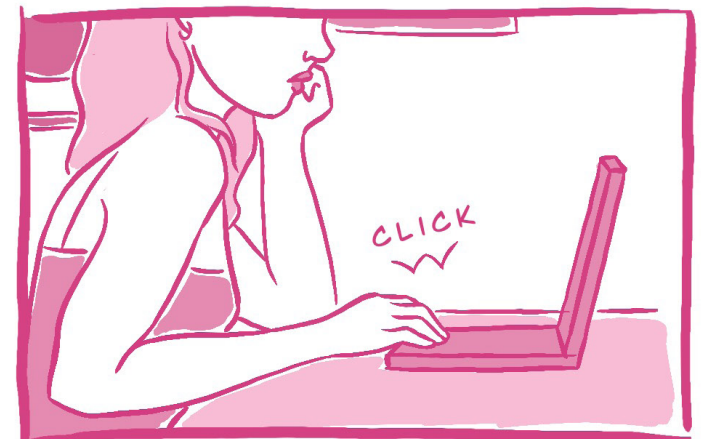
- 1. More than asleep
- 2. Copenhagen's \_\_\_\_\_ Gardens
- 3. Nod involuntarily
- 5. Caretaker
- 6. Beach accessory
- 7. Certain consonants
- 8. An "A" in "AKA"

# The Pink Strip



How would you describe yourself?

- very messy
- somewhat messy
- somewhat neat
- very neat



GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27

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