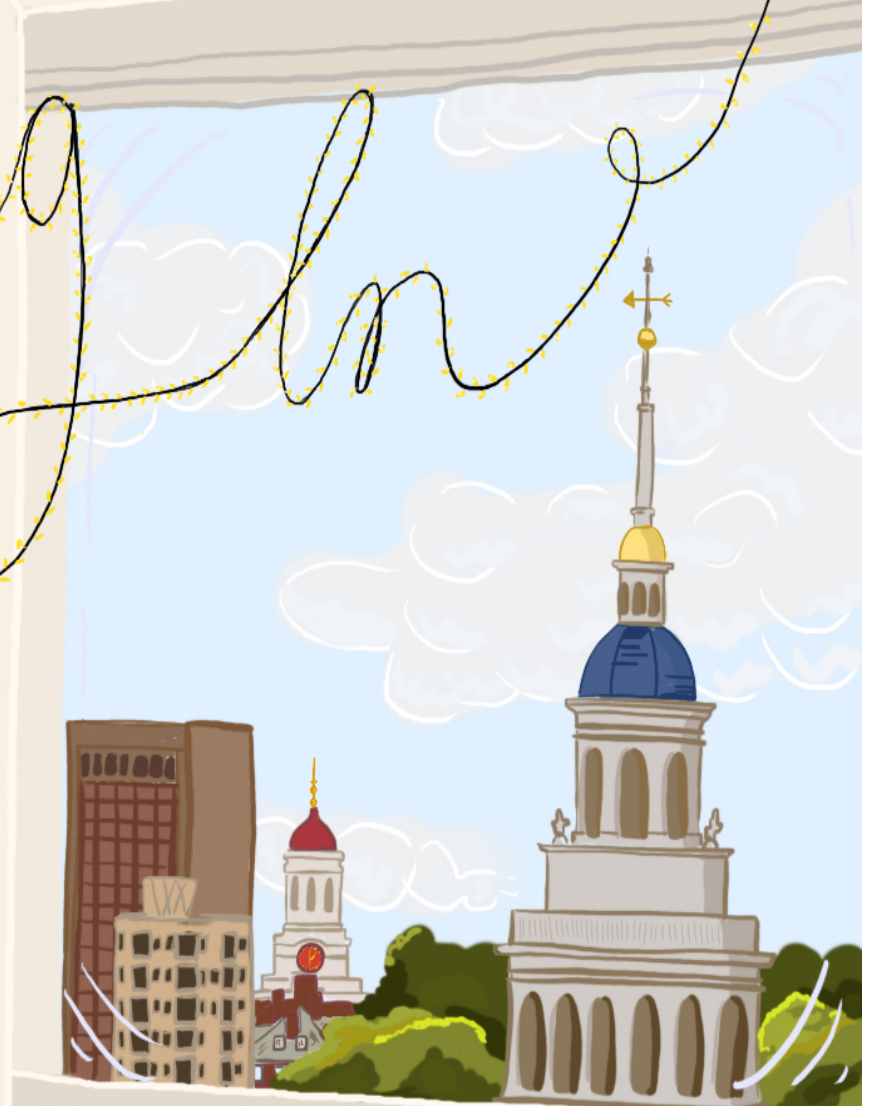


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THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



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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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We belong to no one but ourselves.

NEWS

A Pre-O is the Way to Go

Harvard freshmen speak on their positive experiences participating in one of Harvard's six pre-orientation programs.

BY SARA KUMAR '27

As the Class of 2028 anticipated their first week at Harvard, a portion of particularly eager first-years arrived on campus seven days early to participate in one of six pre-orientation programs, more commonly dubbed “pre-o’s.” From backpacking through Vermont to singing “Party in the USA” with fellow international peers, the First-Year Arts Program (FAP), First-Year Retreat and Experience (FYRE), First-Year Urban Program (FUP), First-Year International Program (FIP), Leadership Institute for the First-Year Experience (LIFE), and First-Year Outdoor Program (FOP) offer the opportunity to ease incoming first-years into the Harvard College experience while getting to know new peers in close-knit environments.

For those who find the arts to be their true calling, FAP is a perfect chance to learn about drama, music, production, theater, film, dance, creative writing, and more. After deciding he wanted to enroll in a pre-o, FAP participant Arthur Câmara '28 explained his reasoning behind selecting FAP specifically. Immediately drawn to this multidisciplinary, artistic opportunity, he stated, “I love arts. I’m a musician, so it was nice to not only get involved with music but also try some other arts.”

Wanting to maximize the participant experience, the FAP hours were incredibly busy. First-years started their days with a variety of keynotes before transitioning to workshops and master classes. However, as Câmara expressed, “It all paid off.” Beyond the bonding moments that inevitably came with the hectic schedule, the FAP showcase, where students perform and display their art, is a testament to the week of hard work.

“It was nice just being pushed pretty far outside my comfort zone,” Câmara said, reflecting on the week. “They made us do arts we don’t normally do, and it was a chance to learn, to fail, to embarrass ourselves, and I think I’m ready to tackle Harvard now that I’ve gone through FAP.”

Designed to support and celebrate first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented first-year students, FYRE offers a different, yet equally rewarding experience through career services workshops, academic counseling, and peer-to-peer relationship building. Looking to get her feet wet before starting classes, Taylor Thorn '28 spoke on her decision to do FYRE in particular. “It was the most catered to what I was looking for, especially coming from a rural small town,” she expressed. “They gave a lot of good advice and really good panels.”

After listening to morning talks from Harvard alumni, current students, and community leaders, FYRE participants had time to bond with their given families of about ten students led by two leaders. Small group activities, mentorship activities, evening mixers, and more fostered strong connections between each cohort. “I met some of the people who I’d say are my close friends now. And I think we are gonna continue to be friends for the rest of my four years here,” Thorn said.

Much like those who participated in FAP, Thorn also recommends FYRE to any incoming students looking for a close-knit, on-campus community.

Exemplifying Harvard’s commitment to service within Cambridge and the larger urban environment of Boston, FUP orients all incoming first-years with public service issues in the

surrounding areas, ultimately providing participants the space to learn about social responsibility. Believing in change through action, FUP first-years participate in daily construction or volunteer work before bringing groups together for community activist speaker sessions, off-campus food outings, or even something as simple as late-night music jam sessions.

Looking to not only dive into advocacy at Harvard but also to “make friends before coming to campus,” Shane Komeiji '28 voiced his reasons for choosing FUP. He articulated, “I’ve always been interested in service, so I think it was rather natural for me to choose FUP.” Neha Mukhara '28 agreed, stating that she chose FUP because she wanted to “learn about service in the Boston area and then meet a ton of new people.”

Similar to FAP, FUP’s morning panels coupled with service days in the city inevitably contributed to long hours. Nonetheless, Mukhara expressed her love for the long worksite days and especially her work with young students at a Boston-area school. “The group that I was in went to a school... We got to spend time with the kids who attend the school, so that was really fun,” Mukhara explained.

From the inspiring panels to the hands-on service, Mukhara found FUP a transformative experience and would “100 percent” recommend the program to any incoming first-years.

Committed to orienting incoming students with life on campus and in Boston more generally, international students participating in FIP had nothing but positive things to say about this tremendous program. Partnering with the Harvard International Office and Office of International Education, FIP focuses on providing incoming international first-years with the tools and knowledge they need to navigate the next four years in a new country.

FIPer Mathis Kalash '28 relayed her concerns about starting her first year at Harvard. “I expected it would be overwhelming when 1800 people come together.” However, upon hearing about FIP, she found seemingly the perfect solution. “It’s nice to have time to adjust, especially for me, to life in the U.S. before everyone comes on campus.”

Starting their daily schedules between 8 and 9 a.m., FIP students had the chance to learn about how to create a bank account, address their American VISAs, and learn about other aspects of life in the United States before transitioning to community gatherings like karaoke night or the FIP talent shows.

Much like Kalash, Joao Lucas Oliveira Silva '28 was grateful for the opportunity to learn from the rich, diverse cultures and environments harnessed by FIP and found the week-long program to be “the best experience ever.”

Approaching its first year at Harvard and looking to reflect and grow in what it means to be a leader, LIFE is another workshop-based program. Hosting talks with politicians, local business owners, and older students as well as events at spaces such as the Center for Career Success, LIFE works to orient first-years with the tools they need to succeed both academically

and professionally. Small group discussions on what it means to be a change-maker on campus and in adult life apply following these workshops.

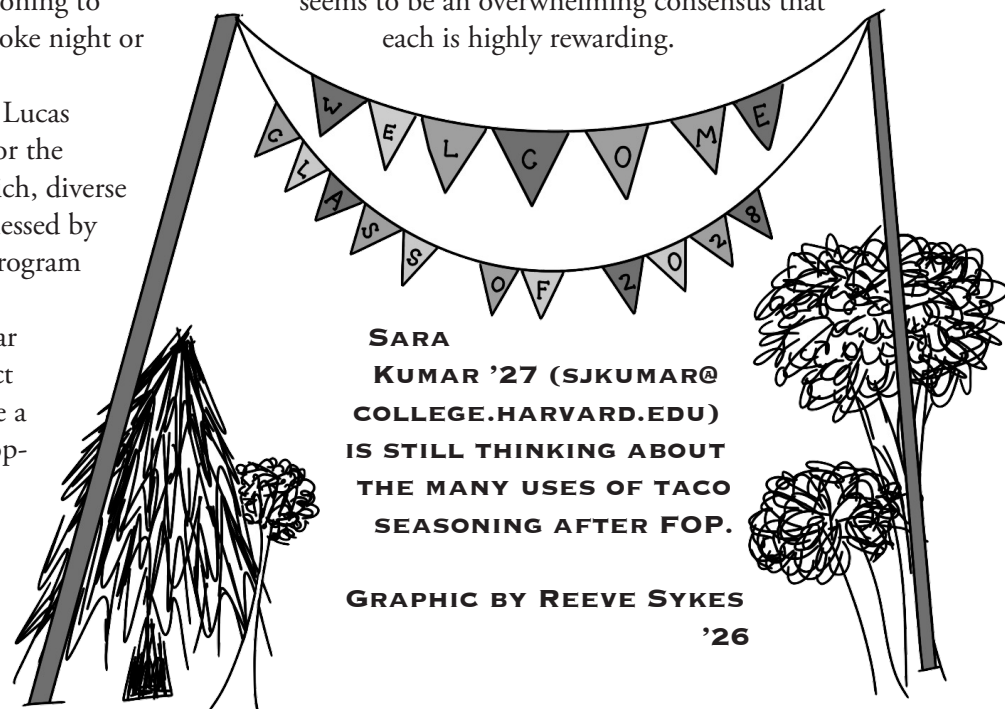
Attracted to the opportunity to learn more about being a change-maker before officially starting his journey at Harvard, Nafisa Zaman '28 said that her LIFE community was filled with “people [she] never would have thought [she]’d be friends with normally, so it was really cool to get to know them in such a personal setting.” And equally as enthusiastic as Silva, when questioned about whether she would recommend LIFE for all incoming first-years, Zaman stated, “Oh absolutely. Absolutely.”

Last but not least, those looking to participate in one of the most unpredictable yet incredibly rewarding pre-orientation programs arrived on campus a few days earlier than their other pre-orientation peers for FOP. Given the choice between a backpacking, site-based, and a switch (canoeing and backpacking) trip, all FOP'er first-years came out of their week-long trip with a strong first-year community and a deeper understanding of the wilderness.

Though coming into FOP already a lover of the outdoors, switch trip participant Aya Schwartz '28 explained, “I thought I could bond with people on a deeper level if I was pushed to challenge myself.” Similarly drawn to the outdoors, Anisha Joshi '28 applied for FOP searching for a strong community built through mutual struggles and team-building before starting her first year at Harvard. “I also wanted to be pushed before I even got to Harvard and to also have a community before actually starting orientation. And I thought FOP would be a great orientation program for me because I do love the outdoors and hiking.”

No experience is necessary to join the FOP community, and according to Ellie Lee '28, a site-based FOP participant, there’s no reason not to. “[FOP] was a great transition to college,” Lee explained. She truly feels as though “everyone should do FOP... It was such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Whether it’s getting outside your comfort zone in the wilderness or simply just benefitting from the early move-in, there truly is a pre-orientation program for everyone. Ultimately, regardless of one’s initial familiarity with campus, considering around two-thirds of all incoming first-years choose to participate in any one of these six programs, there seems to be an overwhelming consensus that each is highly rewarding.



Crimson Creators

Meet the Harvard students making a name for themselves online.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 AND RANIA JONES '27

In our current digital and cultural age, Harvard students are making their mark not only in academics but also online, cultivating followings across various social media platforms. From YouTube vlogs to TikToks, Harvard content creators have leveraged their unique Harvard experiences to inspire and connect with audiences within the college and worldwide.

Helen Piltner '25



Helen Piltner '25 was inspired by the college acceptance and reaction videos she would watch on YouTube, sparking her desire to one day post her own. Her “College Decisions Reaction” video went viral, amassing 1.9 million views on a YouTube channel that now has over 50 thousand subscribers. “I wanted to mess around with some vlogs,” she explained, discussing her decision to continue content creation once arriving at Harvard since her reaction video received the attention it did. “I also wanted to get into showing the parts of Harvard College life that other creators had not done so far.”

Piltner decided to include her friends in her vlogs, posting day-in-the-life videos, gameday vlogs, and move-in updates. “Freshmen started coming up to me and said that I was the reason they decided to come to Harvard. That was really inspiring, and that’s why I continue to do it to this day.”

It took time for Piltner to get used to filming, but with time, the impact of her videos made the process easier for her. “I was so awkward on camera at first. Asking my friends and random people to be in my videos is very nerve-wracking,” Piltner said. “But, I think it’s nice knowing that I started these types of vlogs at Harvard, and it’s inspired others to maybe do the same wherever they go to school.”

“The impact has been really good for what my intended target audience is. A lot of those people happen to be people who end up coming to Harvard, which is really nice,” she explained. “I’ll have a few people come up to me just once in a while, especially during Visitas and move-in periods and they’ll be like, ‘Hey, are you Helen?’ Or, ‘Hey, are you that YouTuber? I’ve watched all your videos in high school. I really liked seeing what Harvard is like,’ and that’s why they said they decided to come.”

In addition to seeing the impact her videos had on her audience, Piltner has also experienced changes in her own

life, learning important life lessons while running her channel. “It’s been nice to look back on the memories with my previous videos, and I’ve seen how I’ve changed myself over time,” she said. “Thankfully, my friends are really supportive of it. Because of YouTube, I started to become financially independent of my parents in college, which is really great. It’s taught me building strategy in terms of business, owning a YouTube channel, financial skills, and more social skills.”

Piltner’s advice to future Harvard content creators is to make sure they know the reason why they are pursuing the venture. “If it’s for clout or just for money, that will get you nowhere. You really have to think about the underlying mission of why you’re doing this.”

Elio Kennedy-Yoon '25



Elio Kennedy-Yoon '25’s Internet fame came accidentally. A singer and former producer for Harvard’s jazz acappella group the Din & Tonics, Kennedy-Yoon’s video covering “Copacabana” on the group’s TikTok page launched him into the spotlight, amassing over 20 million views and 2.5 million likes.

Before the viral video, his social media usage was average, posting the “obligatory” Instagram semester dump. On TikTok, Kennedy-Yoon posted a “video journal” for himself and his 50 friends following his gender affirmation journey. This diary documented surgical before and afters, including the moment he got his bandages off and saw his transformed chest for the first time. Two weeks after his procedure, he went viral: “I think people love to see a gender-ambiguous, slightly racially ambiguous, person who has the Harvard label. Also, I think the tux does wonders.”

“This is for the Dins,” he felt, focusing on the positive attention the group received as a whole from the viral video. For instance, upon arriving in Asia for their performance tour after recovering from his chest reconstruction, Kennedy-Yoon felt the public energy towards their performance rise exponentially. “The crowds were insane. The people were very kind and very nice, but I was like, ‘Holy shit! The people really want to see the Dins!’

Collegiate jazz, are you serious?”

The Din & Tonics currently have 158.9k followers on TikTok and 74.3k followers on Instagram, making them the most-followed acappella group at Harvard. Their international tour was well-received, with packed shows throughout their travels. “People screamed. They knew our names, and people gave us gifts. It was insane,” Kennedy-Yoon described. “We had to sneak out the back when we were leaving, and people ran after us and surrounded our bus and were knocking on the windows asking for pictures.”

Yet, despite this newfound fame and the positive attention he received from it, Kennedy-Yoon also felt the negative effects of social media, with people making “horribly” transphobic comments on his page and criticizing his pro-Palestinian stance. He admitted, “I got a lot of negative comments weaponizing my queerness as a reason why I shouldn’t be against genocide. It was really jarring and disturbing for the first few weeks to see how much people hate trans people and [speak toward] trans and queer people with such vehemence.”

“Despite viewing myself as an apolitical figure, people will view me as inherently politicized because of my identity, and I wondered if I should or should not lean into that,” Kennedy-Yoon elaborated.

After weeks of “reeling from death threats,” Kennedy-Yoon decided to not care as much about the comments he was receiving. “Some things still bother me. I hate when people try and use the biology argument to try and be transphobic.” However, considering his knowledge of the subject as a biology concentrator, Kennedy-Yoon ultimately learned that these comments are inaccurate and thus “not worth the time of day.”

The opportunities the virality has presented for a potential future career in theater have made a huge difference in Kennedy-Yoon’s life. “People are reaching out and asking to do things, represent me, or for a photo shoot. I’m going to Korea in October because TikTok Korea wants me to and they’re flying me out, which is insane... I text [a family group chat] every time I’m recognized or asked for a picture because I still think it’s crazy. I don’t ever want to think this is normal.”

Kennedy-Yoon hopes that his followers that identify as trans or queer can look up to and relate to his journey. “I’ve had to be up front with transphobia and my identity. After I blew up, I was like, ‘Maybe because I’m so publicly perceived, I should stop posting about my journey.’ But I ultimately settled on the decision that people should see this and see a queer person who has had options for gender affirming care, and that I sing, and all of the things that I like,” he said. “If I can make one more person feel comfortable with their identity or in their body, it will have been worth it. It’s all worth it if I can just do that for one trans kid somewhere.”

Olivia Zhang '27



Olivia Zhang '27 started creating content a month before starting her first year at Harvard. Zhang always had a keen interest in social media given her social media background, including running 75 accounts for different companies and nonprofits. She credits this for her ability to understand social media marketing, algorithms, and self-promotion.

Zhang is the founder and executive director of the largest youth-led nonprofit organization helping kids with cancer, Cancer Kids First. After creating her non-profit, Zhang hoped to build a platform to encourage other young people to get involved with service. She saw her acceptance into Harvard and other top institutions as a way to break into the content creation scene. "I started out on YouTube first, posting my college decision reaction video, and then I told everybody to follow my TikTok in the comments, and then I posted my Harvard decision reaction video [on TikTok], and then that went viral, and then I just built my brand around nonprofits and my life at Harvard."

Cancer Kids First works towards normalizing the hospital environment and providing a loving community for pediatric cancer patients and their families. Zhang uses her platform to give nonprofit-related advice and posts about her daily life at Harvard, "whether it's a day-in-the-life or get ready with [her], and then also advice on college applications."

This summer, Zhang's TikTok profile, @livviazhang, reached a following of 100k. She explained how she frequently forgets the gravity of just how many people 100k actually is: "Getting to meet people or go out on the street and have people recognize me is a really cool feeling [knowing] that people from random places and of diverse backgrounds are watching my videos. I would say overall, 90 percent have been very positive comments, and people are really nice about it and supportive."

While appreciating her immense amount of positive, fan-based support, she couldn't help but acknowledge the lingering presence of judgment toward her content in her daily life. "I guess some people will judge me based off of the videos that they see, and so they might talk about it... When I meet people, sometimes they will tell me, 'Oh, based on first impressions, I thought you were gonna be a certain way, but you're different in real life.'"

Zhang believes there's a culture at Harvard that encourages students to not become content creators. She described how the "connotation of influencers at Harvard is not good." To dismantle this prevailing image, Zhang urges those interested in content creation at Harvard to "diversify and show all parts of life." Her platform boasts a variety of content from daily routines and gym workouts, to partying and socializing, to academic, professional, and college-related content. Zhang attributes her success online to her authenticity in her personality and advises others to "letting people see all sides of yourself, rather than only sticking to Harvard's content." Zhang's content emphasizes the importance of balance for current students and aspiring leaders.

Elise Pham '26



Elise Pham '26 started her content creation off with lifestyle vlogs, showcasing what she was doing on a day-to-day basis at Harvard. However, with time, she realized that this content was not exactly what she was interested in sharing. "I came to realize that this wasn't fulfilling to me because it didn't align with my values. Service is one of my top values... If I'm going to have such a big platform, [I thought], 'How can I use it in a way that will actually help people?'"

Pham found her niche in posting about college admissions and academics, leading her to create her business, Ultimate Ivy League Guide, offering students exclusive access to her mentorship and resources during their admissions cycles. "I grew up as a child of a single immigrant father. I didn't necessarily have a lot of resources and mentorship regarding the college application process, and in my high school, over half of the students were so economically disadvantaged, and so navigating the college admissions process was extremely difficult for me," Pham explained, discussing her decision to start the Guide. "These elite institutions like Harvard have the responsibility to cultivate the next generation of leaders, but how can we help students from lower income families to also reach their fullest potential? That's why I started posting a lot of college admission videos and I provide a lot of free guides and courses."

The Ultimate Ivy League Guide has grown to amass 64.9k followers and 1.2 million likes on TikTok, and her Instagram page has over 477k followers. Pham's personal TikTok has a large following of over 153k followers as well. However, originally, her intentions were not to become the Harvard content creator she is today. "I wanted a personal diary that I could look back on, and I honestly am very grateful that I did do that. Whenever I look back on my freshman year vlogs, I remind myself where I was at that time and how much I have changed since then."

Pham has found difficulty in balancing running her business while being a student. "I spend a lot more time on my business than I do with school. I work during the summers between 60 to 80 hours a week, and then during the school year I work between 30 to 40 hours per week." Because of this, Pham decided the next best decision for her was to take a full gap semester to continue growing her company.

"I'm focused on empowering the next generation of leaders and really building a program that will help millions of students. My purpose is to really help students, especially younger high school students who don't have resources to navigate the college application process."

Pham's advice is similar to Piltner's for those considering content creation: know why you are doing it. "The reason why [most people] create

content is because they want clout. I think initially I got caught up in that, especially whenever videos go viral, but that's not what I was trying to go for... I post and try to grow my content platforms as an opportunity to help more students."

Tarah Giles '25



Tarah Giles '25 initially got into content creation in hopes of finding a way to creatively document her time at Harvard. Most of her content, Giles explained, are YouTube videos that serve as a time capsule of day-to-day life during her time at Harvard. She also focuses on "events going on at the College that [she feels] like you wouldn't necessarily have insight into unless you were attending the College." Giles noted her "Housing Day" video to be one of her biggest hits.

When reflecting on the impact that content creation has had on her life, Giles noted that she tends to be a very reserved person, but has appreciated the ways in which her online presence has been "a good way to build a community." Giles has also found that the creative outlet has taught her about editing, visual effects, and different media. "[Through] the process of figuring out video capturing and film, I think I've learned a lot of transferable skills."

Giles draws inspiration from the kind of content she engaged with before attending Harvard. "When I was coming to Harvard, I watched videos like this all the time, but I was so thankful to kind of get that insider perspective, and it really helped me make my decision."

Providing a similar perspective through her own content has been important to Giles. She hopes that, whether her viewers are "someone who wants to potentially come here, or someone completely different in their 30s or older," they can gain a sense of what Harvard culture looks like.

To Giles, perspective is one of the most important attributes of content creation. "I think what's really unique about the content creators is from each person, you'll see a very different perspective, because we all have our own little flair and the way that we like to present things and film."

Whether through personal diaries, educational advice, or social activism, students like Piltner, Kennedy-Yoon, Zhang, Pham, and Giles are reshaping perceptions of content creation within our community and beyond.

LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26 (LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WATCHED KENNEDY-YOON GET STOPPED FOR A PHOTO AFTER THEIR INTERVIEW. RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A FREQUENT VIEWER OF @LIVVIAZHANG. PHOTOS COURTESY OF INTERVIEWEES

FORUM

A Bandaid on a Bullet Hole

Rethinking voting for the “lesser evil” in American elections.

BY JONAH KARAFIOL '26

Every August, my family spends a week at the Jersey Shore, down the southernmost tip of Cape May. Politics tend to work their way into our conversations, and even the smallest differences in our views play out in full force. This year, with the presidential election right around the corner, we spent hours speculating Kamala Harris’s running mate and debating her campaign strategies. But when my brother announced that he would not be voting in the presidential election this November, his announcement hung in the air—a marked shift from our usual spirited discussions.

I should note that we live in Chicago, Illinois—a Democratic stronghold that hasn’t had a Republican mayor since William Hale Thompson in 1931. The city has held Illinois blue since 1992, and in 2020, President Biden beat out Trump by 17 points. My brother’s vote would be purely symbolic, another drop of water in an already overflowing bucket.

And yet, when we broke the silence, it was with immediate criticisms. He was throwing away a right that millions of Americans have died protecting, or so my family said. How could my brother, a community organizer who has spent countless hours picketing and protesting across Chicago, refuse to cast his vote? How could he reject the most direct avenue for political change he has available to him?

At the Democratic National Convention this past August, numerous high-profile Republicans— Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, Olivia Troye, and Stephanie Grisham, to name a few—endorsed Harris over Trump, denouncing their own party’s candidate. In giving Republicans a platform at the convention, Democrats are attempting to garner support from moderates by convincing them that Harris is the “lesser of two evils”—echoing the message from the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. It failed in 2016, but in 2020, this appeal to morality worked, and voters backed President Biden in hopes of a better America.

Despite the hopes that propelled Biden into office, the realities of his presidency have left many disillusioned, and his

promises have been slow

to materialize. The Biden administration is on track to match Trump’s deportation numbers, with some figures suggesting he will surpass Trump’s total. He has failed to fulfill his 2020 campaign promise to codify *Roe v. Wade*. His tenure saw the most single-year school shootings since Columbine in 1999, and his military spending and defense budget is up almost 20 percent since 2019. And he has continued to bankroll Israel in its war on Gaza, providing billions of dollars to fund the Palestinian genocide.

These policies are simply incompatible with being a “lesser evil.” The use of this phrase suggests that we should accept President Biden and Harris’s proposals because the alternative might be worse—because Trump, or some other candidate, could enact policies even more reprehensible. By accepting this strategy, we render our voices moot and relinquish our power to fight for change. Politicians can go one step further than their empty promises of an improved America—they can run on a platform of “not as bad” and win elections because of it.

This “lesser evil” precedent is dangerous because it incentivizes politicians to fight at the margins instead of for radical change. Consider the climate crisis. Instead of advocating for sweeping measures, like drastically increased investment in renewable energy research and development or implementing a Green New Deal, politicians seeking to win support from the climate-concerned will only have to slightly undercut their opponent’s targeted emissions. They may propose modest improvements to existing environmental regulations rather than confronting the fossil fuel industry head-on or investing heavily in green infrastructure. Most importantly, they do not have to commit to and accomplish real change. In other words, they can promise to put a slightly bigger bandaid on a gaping bullet hole, and they can get away with it.

Since Chicago and Illinois will continue to vote blue for the foreseeable future, my brother’s vote in this election is insignificant. Voting for Harris would do nothing but drive up the party’s numbers and signal further support for Harris, Walz, and

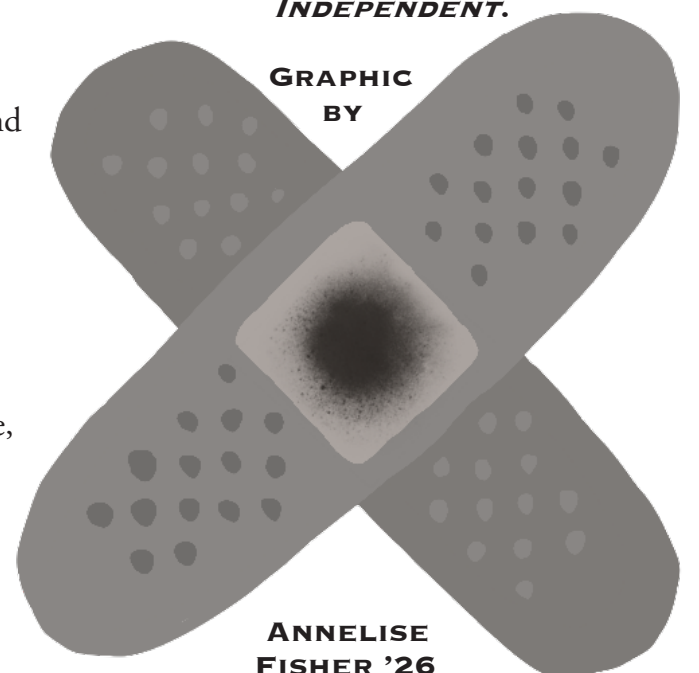
the Democratic Party. His decision to abstain from voting is a statement—that he is dissatisfied with the options presented to him, and that he refuses to lend his endorsement to a system that has repeatedly failed to deliver on its promise of being a “lesser evil.” We use our votes to voice our opinions, and by not voting, he is voicing his.

In swing states that Democrats are desperately trying to win, many feel differently about the idea of not voting. In these states, votes matter—last election, President Biden won Georgia and Arizona by less than 12,000 votes. And yet, in these states, a vote for Harris would signal the same—that President Biden and Harris’s actions in office are permissible, and that Harris and Walz should be allowed to continue them, as long as they are the lesser evil. The Democratic Party would have no incentive to change.

Come November, I will still cast a vote I know is insignificant. I am not calling on any voters—in blue states or elsewhere—to refrain from voting. Still, amidst the calls for undecided voters to back the “lesser evil,” we should consider the long-term consequences of settling for candidates whose actions are incompatible with our morals. By allowing this argument to win us over, we reward leaders for being less damaging than the alternative rather than truly effective. My brother, along with the millions of Americans dissatisfied with the options before them, are not throwing away their one chance to voice their opinion—they are doing the opposite, expressing the need for candidates that cater to their constituents.

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GRAPHIC
BY



**ANNELISE
FISHER '26**

Stay Well, '28!

Tips from two new sophomores.

BY MEENA BEHRINGER '27 AND EMMIE PALFREY '27

Dear Class of 2028,
Welcome to Harvard! This will be quite an exciting year. Take it from two girls who just experienced it—in the end, you will look back and think, woah. But amidst brand-new friendships, rigorous coursework, varying degrees of nightlife, and intense seasonal changes, it can be challenging to find time to take care of yourself. Harvard students are busy like no other. So, we reflected and researched small wellness habits to make the transition to college healthier and happier for you.

Sleep. We know you've heard it enough from your parents, your doctors, and probably your professors. But we're echoing them for a reason; they're right. Getting 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep, as recommended for college students by Cornell Health, is as essential as diet and exercise to your overall health, mood, and performance. It may seem like a good idea to regularly forego sleep in favor of studying, but research has shown that students who sleep for nine or more hours per night have significantly higher average GPAs than those who get less than six hours. Sleeping also naturally relieves the stress we accumulate throughout the day. So, for the sake of your physical, mental, and academic well-being, don't let yourself stay up too late.

Walk. Of course you'll walk between your classes, dorm, and Annenberg. But we advise taking intentional walks, either as study breaks, during phone calls, or as a way to catch up with friends. Not only will you get to know campus better—it can't hurt to check out all the upperclassmen Houses—but walking also has some serious benefits, including mood improvement, stress management, and a stronger immune system (which we all need during cold and flu season in communal living spaces).

Make Your Bed. A simple chore we're all guilty of ignoring. When you make your bed in the morning, you begin your day with a sense of accomplishment—you've

completed a task, and in doing so, set a productive and positive tone for the rest of your day. Making your bed seems small, but it can promote other productive behaviors and instill good habits.

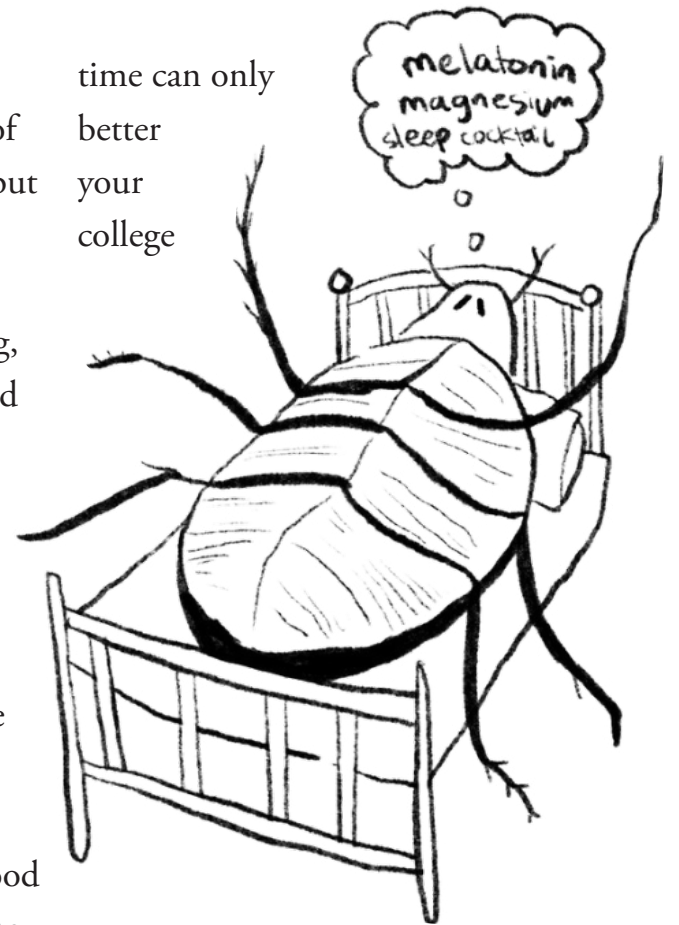
Additionally, a made-bed offers a calming, organized environment to your room. And if you're still skeptical, take it from Naval Admiral William McRaven, who popularized this concept in his famous 2014 Commencement Speech at UT Austin and subsequently wrote "Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life...And Maybe the World."

Berg. Don't skip out on Annenberg, or food in general, no matter how busy you get. As simple as it sounds, making sure to eat a balanced diet and all three meals goes a long way. Eating well ensures you have proper energy, thereby making you more productive and less stressed. Breakfast is particularly important, even if it means a bit of an earlier wakeup. Studies have shown breakfast improves your concentration abilities, particularly memory skills, and has numerous health benefits, including diminishing the risk of heart disease and improving weight management. And cherish having one beautiful dining hall for your entire class while you can.

Find Your Spot. Beyond the main libraries, Harvard's beautiful campus is home to countless tucked-away study spots that are just as peaceful and productive, especially when you really need to lock in. Finding your spot, so to speak, can also be a source of comfort as you settle into your new home. In fact, having a designated space can mentally make you more focused and settled. The Law School Library, Barker Center, and Smith Center second floor are some of our favorites.

Slow Down. We know how easy it is to get swept away in the chaotic frenzy of academics, activities, extracurricular clubs, and events on campus—and, perhaps, even easier to succumb to such pressures. But truthfully, prioritizing yourself and your

time can only
better
your
college



experience. While it can definitely feel exciting in the moment to throw yourself into a million things, don't overcommit yourself or overfill your calendar—taking moments for yourself is the ultimate wellness habit. It's more than okay to say no to going out or taking on a new commitment. Take a break whenever you need; college life is meant to be enjoyed!

Whether you do all of these things or just one, the more important takeaway is that your time in college is yours. Yes, you're meant to challenge yourself in class, meet new friends, and enjoy all the opportunities Harvard has to offer, but you don't need to compromise your well-being in order to get the fullest college experience. In fact, taking some time for yourself will only enhance your time here. Enjoy your freshman year, and stay well!

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'27 (EPALFREY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.
EDU) ENJOY WALKS ALONG THE
RIVER AND GOING TO BED BEFORE
11:00.

GRAPHIC BY DAVID LI '25





The Fun Scale of FOP

Why being wet, tired, and muddy on a 4,000 foot mountain can enrich your life.

BY ELLIE TUNNELL '27

It was approaching dusk on Aug. 22. On the Zeacliff Trail in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, daylight slipped away as my FOP Trip 19 trudged deeper into the canopy of Hardwoods and Conifers with wobbling rocks and slippery roots threatening to trip us at every step. Songs about “Da Moose” and “The Princess Pat” inflated the fragile balloon of group morale to distract from the rapidly dropping temperature and cold wind slapping across our faces. The prediction of “15 more minutes” turned into hours crawling by; in the thick, dark night, the campsite started to feel like a mirage.

Finally, the troop reached a set of stairs that led us to a ranger’s hut. Taking this ascent on all fours with backpacks like lead-filled anchors, FOPer Conor Cowan '28 shared the sentiment of most from the first night: “The most memorable part was the final set of stairs. It felt like crawling up from the pits of hell.”

The First Year Outdoor Program (FOP), established in 1979, is Harvard’s oldest and largest pre-orientation program, with more than 20% of incoming first-year class participants and 80 upperclassman leaders. From site-based trips to wilderness backpacking, FOP programming aims to serve as a transformative week for incoming first-years to let loose and prepare for the whirlwind of the first year of college. As my FOPer Harry McGovern '28 stated, “If life is nothing without stories, then FOP has given me a lifetime.”

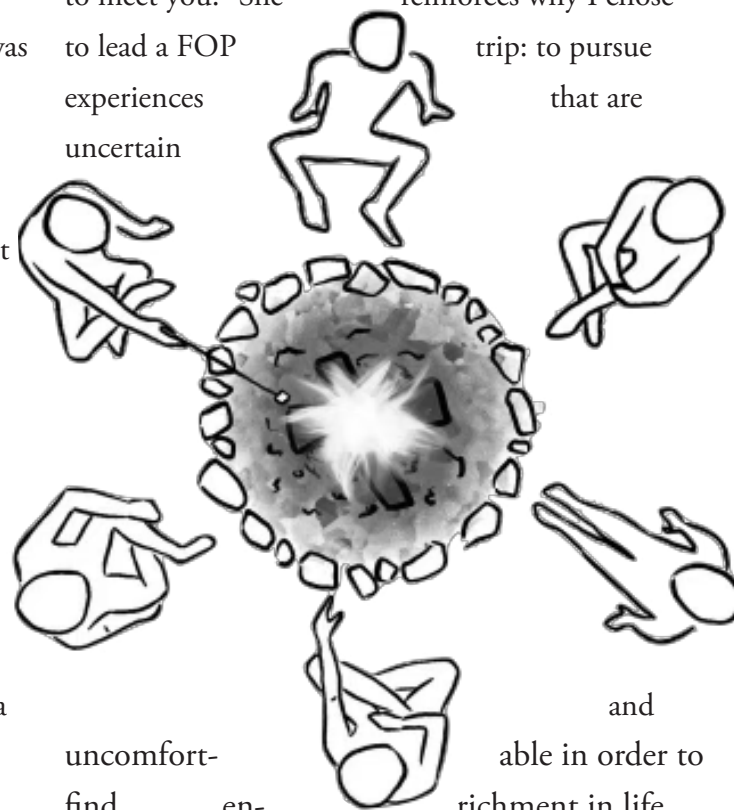
Before the FOP trip, my co-leader and I sat down to “Trip Vision.” Settled in the comfort of our seats and warmed by the institutional LED lights above us, it was easy to envision a perfect trip. We laid out our goals on paper: “Have fun outside in nature,” “Build confidence in physical and emotional capacities through stretching outside of your comfort zone,” and “Help the pre-frosh transition to freshman year through making connections.”

The Steering Committee, the student board directors of FOP, asked the leaders a week before the trip went out, “Why are you here?” Why did I put 200 hours into learning how to hang bear bags, have a 5-star Poop, sleep on a rock in a soaking wet sleeping bag, and shout “CHOW” before every meal?

There is something appealing about risk and pushing your body past its threshold of comfort.

adventurers call Type 2 fun. Cowan defined Type 2 fun as “the kind where you are miserable in the moment, but upon completion, you reflect fondly on the experience.”

There is no hard science behind it, but hardcore outdoor adventurers classify their lives by the “fun scale” instead of a textbook or bible. Everybody likes fun. And fun, like anything, can be nuanced—not all fun is created equal. Belinda Kirk, a British explorer and author of *Adventure Revolution: The Life-Changing Power of Choosing Challenge*, made a career out of being cold, wet, and muddy, and calling it fun. In an interview with Much Better Adventures, she explores how, “When you leave your comfort zone, and you do something that is challenging and difficult, you don’t step back into your comfort zone afterwards—it expands to meet you.” She reinforces why I chose to lead a FOP trip: to pursue experiences that are uncertain and



uncomfortable in order to find enrichment in life.

Type 1 fun is enjoyable while it’s happening. Think apple-picking in the fall with your friends or watching *Gossip Girl* over wine with your blockmates. Type 3 fun? Well, it’s not actually fun. Mountaineers describe it as “harrowing,” like getting lost in the wilderness or trying to swim across the Atlantic. It’s when the risk outweighs the reward and you have to pray it will never happen again.

The Fall Outdoors Program is in the sweet spot of Type 2 fun. It challenges you without putting you in real danger—it’s uncomfortable in the ways that make you feel alive. “Life exists on the top of a mountain, slapping you in the face with a gust of wind and kicking you to the ground so that you may yield to the beauty of the world in front of you. Never in my life have I felt more alive; never in

my life have I felt more fulfilled,” said McGovern, who lives by the fun scale.

For Zoe Macaluso '28, a FOPer and experienced camp counselor, the biggest takeaway from the Type 2 fun on the FOP trip was that “you can do hard things.” Compared to the negligible problems of everyday life, she found that “even if an obstacle seems really daunting, at least it’s not climbing up a huge hill at 11:30 at night with someone having hypothermia right behind me.”

No matter how miserable the experience was at the moment, both Cowan and Macaluso would do it again because of the connections they made. As a testament to the lasting bonds we built, our FOP spent our first night back on campus sharing “Fuzzy Cheesecake” by the Charles River and Macaluso celebrated her birthday with the seven new friends she made in the first week of school.

Let’s revisit the question we asked ourselves before heading into the wild. “Why are we really here?” Macaluso reflected. “I would do the exact same experience over again three times. I would hike up an 8,000 foot peak. I would do it all. Every challenge, every step, even the hardest ones.”

I might have led FOP on a whim, but I found my reason after five days of 4,000 foot mountains riddled with injuries and evacuations. I pushed myself to the edge physically and mentally and got through it with a healthy helping of humor, spectacular views, and brilliant relationships with my co-leader and my FOPers.

I encourage you to pursue more Type 2 fun, whether it be through leading a FOP trip or elsewhere, to find positive moments amid discomfort. I promise you will remember it for years to come.

**ELLIE TUNNELL '27
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HARVARD.EDU) HAD ALMOST
TOO MUCH TYPE 2 FUN ON FOP.**

**GRAPHIC BY RILEY
CULLINAN '27**

ARTS

A Refreshing Romeo & Juliet at the ART

A fresh yet classic rendition of Shakespeare's tale of forbidden love goes up in the Loeb Drama Center.

BY ANDREW SPIELMANN '25

Shakespeare's famous tale of love and tragedy has been read, studied, and performed by millions over the course of the last four centuries. It has become a household name, recognized as one of the most culturally significant pieces of literature of all time. So, when a director wants to put up a new production, it is pretty difficult to make it fresh.

That was the challenge for Diane Paulus, the Terrie and Bradley Bloom Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.), who is directing a month-long run of *Romeo and Juliet* at the A.R.T. On opening night, Thursday, Sept. 5., Paulus certainly put on an impactful show. She kept to a relatively stripped-down, faithful production of the classic play, imbued with energy from the acting and simple beauty from the design. *Up Here* actress Emilia Suárez starred as Juliet alongside *Outer Banks* star Rudy Pankow as Romeo—both gave powerful performances, demonstrating their characters' individual soulfulness while creating an extremely moving romance.

The play is set in Verona, Italy, where two prominent families, the Montagues and the Capulets, are engaged in an ongoing feud. When Romeo, a Montague, and Juliet, a Capulet, meet at a party, they fall deeply in love. Ultimately, their love leads to tragedy after they attempt to secretly resist the forces keeping them apart.

The show contained conflicting cultural indicators, ultimately not grounding itself in a certain place or time: it had an abstract set, generally modern costumes, the classic knife fights, and an ambiguous religion in which actor Terrence Mann's Friar Laurence was more botanist than priest. While some productions will transplant the story into a setting that directly spotlights the Capulets and Montagues' division, this one allowed Shakespeare's language and the characters' love to take center stage.

From the beginning of the show, the actors set a tone of playfulness, mocking one another in the opening thumb-biting sequence. This playfulness, especially showcased by Mercutio and Benvolio, Romeo's friends, was a strong point of the production. Clay Singer was delightfully funny as Mercutio, lifting the language with physical comedy, but ultimately proving sincere in his emotional final scene. Brandon Dial was equally strong as the more gallant Benvolio, while also leaning into the comedic moments. In general, the comedy in the text was highlighted throughout the show with larger-than-life gestures, particularly for the more coarse jokes.

On the other hand, the violence was also intense from the first scene, indicating that this rivalry is brutal, primal, and unforgiving. On the

Capulet side, Alex Ross was commanding and frightening as Tybalt. He was an important part of the impressive stage fighting, ultimately facing off with Mercutio and with Romeo—these fights, moving between real time and slow-motion, were realistic and convincing. Movement director and choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui did an excellent job at using that fighting, among other moments of movement and dance, to generate serious tension.

Rudy Pankow's Romeo is a more poetic soul, contrasting with the humor of his friends. Pankow gave a classic embodiment of Romeo as a naive, hopeless romantic. He used his physicality to depict a Romeo constantly torn apart by his own feelings but unable to escape his position. Emilia Suárez was stunning as Juliet, portraying an equally emotional yet more constrained soul, who does not have the freedom to move about as Romeo does. Her Juliet was nevertheless confident and assertive, unafraid to use her voice to establish herself against her family. Both undergo growth throughout the show, gaining maturity as well as genuine hope that seemed so far away at the beginning. Their chemistry was the most beautiful part of their performances. They each came alive when together, such that the viewer could not help but smile—making their ending all the more heart wrenching.

The set was predominantly just a large wooden block that stood around 20 feet high, 10 feet wide, and 4 feet deep. It was initially moved around the stage to indicate spaces and rooms, in the absence of a more elaborate set. With a section removed in the center, the block also served as Juliet's balcony and provided a general raised, playful space to climb on. The structure, by scenic designer Amy Rubin, proved genius as it was used dynamically in each scene, to the point where it felt like a character of its own. For example, in the party scene, it divided the space and rotated as Romeo and Juliet struggled to find their way to each other, with Tybalt hot on Romeo's tail.

Lighting was expertly done by designer Jen Schriever. With this minimal set, most spaces were defined by the lights, clearly and easily moving us inside, outside, and between day and night. The show also lacked transitional blackouts, which created a wonderful, uninterrupted flow. The set and lights were paired with a moving musical score by Alexandre Dai and sound design by Daniel Castaing Lundberg. One interesting use of light and sound kicked off before the actors entered carrying large glowing white

orbs. The technical elements made the entire scene feel like a magical, drunken, chaotic dream, culminating in the lovers finding each other in a moment of solace.

At the end of the show, after the families find the lovers dead and the final words have been spoken, the actors suddenly began constructing a full garden in the space, complete with grass raked out over the stage and flowers growing from the block where Juliet lay. It created a gorgeous final image, perhaps signifying regrowth and harmony in Verona after the tragedy. While the moment felt slightly forced and drawn out after the powerful speech by Friar Laurence had ended, it was perhaps needed to end the show on a positive tone, refocusing on the love rather than the division.

Five Harvard students were able to participate in internship roles with the A.R.T., contributing materially to the production. Bernardo Sequeira '26 and Michael Torto '25 are acting as understudies for Abraham, Peter, and Sampson. Dree Pallimore '25 is interning in directing, Liz Resner '25 in stage management, and Teddy Tsui-Rosen '25 in sound/stage management. It is exciting to see this example of ongoing collaboration between the A.R.T. and Harvard undergraduates.

Overall, the A.R.T.'s *Romeo and Juliet* is a beautiful, evocative production and an example of Shakespeare's verse being rightfully honored in the modern theater. The show runs until Oct. 6 at the Loeb Drama Center.

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GRAPHIC BY DHATI OOMMEN '26

Half-Lit

A review of indie band Cigarettes After Sex's X's arena tour at TD Garden.

BY KAYLA REIFEL '26

Angst, ardor, and a lot of haze filled Boston's TD Garden last Wednesday. On Sept. 4, the world tour of dream pop band Cigarettes After Sex made a stop at the iconic venue. By 8 p.m., concertgoers clad mostly in black made their way into the arena to fill the nearly 20,000-seat venue.

The show needed no opening act. At exactly 9 p.m., the lights dimmed and the first muddled chords of X's, the titular song of both the arena tour and the band's latest album, rang out into the stadium's large open air. A dim spotlight lit up the face of Greg Gonzales, the lead singer and founder of the band. Even dimmer spotlights revealed the silhouettes of bassist Randy Miller and drummer Jacob Tomsky off to either side of Gonzales.

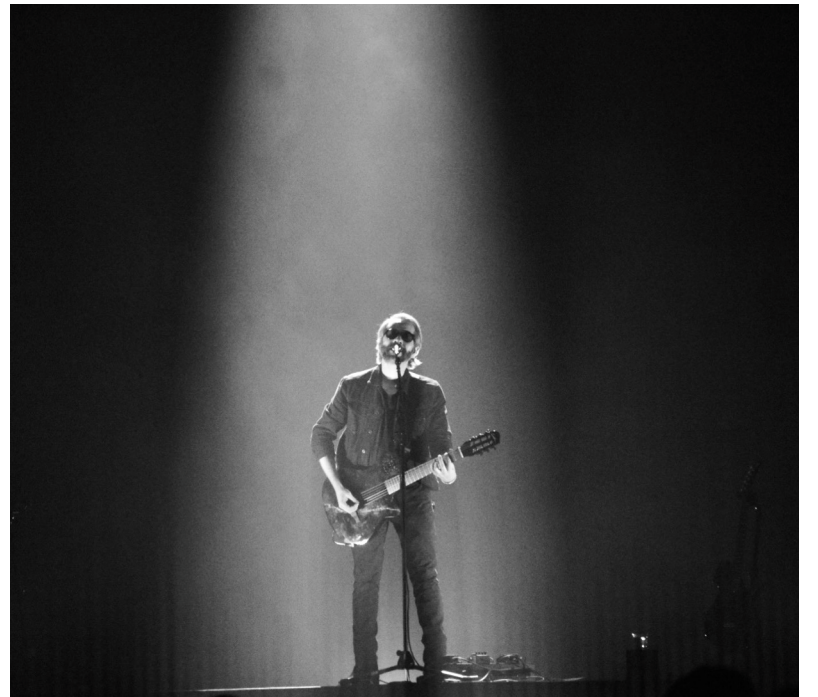
As Gonzales began singing the sleepy, low lyrics of X's, both the lighting and position of every band member remained stagnant. Despite slight variations in lighting, movement, and projections, the concert continued this way—multiple songs blended into one long time warp of a sensual, sad lullaby. While many songs sounded quite

familiar—the band's most popular songs, like *Apocalypse*, stood out with a little more energy and emotion from the audience.

The concert was entirely black and white—in lighting, tonality, the band's attire, and photography policy—matching Cigarettes After Sex's iconic black and white album cover art. The only occasional color came from the warm glow of Gonzales' face when hit with a brighter white light. The excessive black and white of the production design, albeit faithful to the band's branding, somehow seemed to also drain any hint of color from the music itself. This transported the listener to a familiar setting, perhaps reminiscent of where they first heard Cigarettes After Sex—laying in their dark bedroom or sitting in their car with fogged-up windows, parked in some sketchy corner of suburbia.

Cigarettes After Sex's music and brand reeks of the agony of adolescence. A raunchy, rebellious allure exists in the band name alone, and their songs provide melancholic, amorous lyricism to match. The limited range and similar composition of their music intensifies this dreamlike quality. The show did a decent job of expressing this melancholy, but this did not save the show from a major issue—there was a significant incongruity between Cigarettes After Sex's intimate music and the large, airy venue of TD Garden.

The discordance between the languorous sound and the vastness of a stadium venue was not just distracting, but it also undermined the music's impact. Haze effects dissipated halfway up the stadium. Large expanses of floor and peripherally lit stadium entrances pulled focus from the band. The monochrome projections behind the band, ranging from burning flowers to snowstorms, felt too slow and too dim, failing to draw the audience's attention to the stage.



Moreover, the band did not seem to make much of an effort to assert itself. Miller and Tomsky remained in such muted light for almost the entire show that they seemed to be only silhouettes, just barely-there dreamlike figures. Perhaps in an effort to maintain a semblance of intimacy, the band purposefully made themselves invisible, forgetting they were playing in a space so large. Next time, Cigarettes After Sex should pick a venue where the smoke will fill the room. Without it hanging thick in the air, their performance felt thin.

Despite these major issues, the strength of Gonzales' vocals and the audience's joyful energy made the concert enjoyable. Cigarettes After Sex's monotony did not detract from their impressive lyricism and vocals. They did do a decent job at creating a remarkably transcendent and atmospheric experience. Overall, the concert was still a calming, entertaining visual and auditory event.

As I walked out of the venue, I heard a maybe eighteen-year-old on the sidewalk cough out some cigarette smoke, saying something to the effect of: "We're smoking a cigarette after Cigarettes After Sex!" with a particular euphoria that can only come from the thrill of teenage rebellion. I hope that their cigarette did not struggle to stay lit quite as much as the concert that came before it did.

KAYLA REIFEL '26 (KAYLAREIFEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE ARTS EDITOR OF THE INDEPENDENT. PHOTOS FROM KAYLA REIFEL '26



Crimson Jam: The Standout Event for First-Years So Far?

How this year's Crimson Jam was able to provide a uniquely fun experience for first-years.

BY LUCIE STEFANONI '27

Generally peaceful, Harvard Yard last Friday became a night filled with commotion, laughter, and music as students of all grades gathered for the annual Crimson Jam. Hosted by the Harvard College Events Board (CEB) each September, this year's event featured headliner Daya. Because it's hosted in the Yard, the event draws a substantial number of first-years from their nearby dorms, bubbling in both excitement to meet new faces and the opportunity to attend a free concert in their backyard.

For the upperclassmen outside of the Yard, Sidechat posts about Daya performing stirred up some anticipation. It was a big feat for Harvard to pull Daya—many students in attendance were excited to hear her nostalgic 2010s hits, most notably “Hideaway.”

This year, there were three student-band openers—Vinyl Club, Boom Boom Sauce, and Midnight Curfew—before popstar Daya. Crimson Jam's appeal to first-years more than other grades goes beyond its convenient location near the Yard at the prime time of September (sorry first-years in Hurlbut, Pennypacker, Greenough, and Apley). The excitement of Crimson Jam reinforces the fact that the Yard is a unifying place for first-years, who can meet each other in an organic way.

Daya performed hits

including “Sit Still Look Pretty” and “Don't Let Me

Down.” Although several of her other songs were unrecognized by students, it did not weigh on the atmosphere, as the crowd continued to jump up and down and attempt to learn the unfamiliar lyrics throughout her set.

Caroline Fouts '28 explained how her close proximity to the concert made the event accessible for her to attend. “I got ready with my friends in my dorm in Matthews, so it was really convenient being able to see and hear when she was going to get on stage.” Knowing a few upperclassmen already through athletics, Fouts said she could tell that the audience was mostly her grade. “It did feel like a lot of freshmen, which was also nice knowing that we're all going to Crimson Jam together for the first time,” she said.

The fast-paced and energetic environment of the concert made it difficult for Fouts to talk to people, but this did not stop her from feeling a connection with her peers. “It was definitely hard to actually talk to people. But, I think being able to share the same vibes brought people a lot closer together.”

Keenan Zeidan '28 shared the same positive sentiments as Fouts. While “Hideaway” was the main draw for him and his friends, the atmosphere of the concert, where he watched from inside the tightly-packed mosh pit, contributed to his fond memories of the night of joining strangers and dancing.

Zeidan's one complaint about the night was the fact that the concert pretty much shut down right after Daya performed her last song. Daya performed for one hour, starting at 8 p.m., but the Yard started clearing out around 9 p.m., to Zeidan's dismay. “Everyone was vibing, but just like that, it stopped super early,” he said. He and his friends hoped to linger in the Yard afterwards and talk to other first-years and even some upperclassmen. “We thought it would end at 11 p.m.”

Zeidan did, however, appreciate arriving to Crimson Jam earlier to talk to

first-years when it was less crowded and to listen to the opening artists. This was a highlight of the evening, as the opening bands consisted entirely of Harvard students.

Jack Meyer '25, who performed in all three acts, shared his experience performing in events on campus organized by CEB. In explaining how one of his bands, Midnight Curfew, was selected to perform, he said, “Midnight Curfew auditioned for Battle of the Bands for Yardfest and didn't win, but the CEB liked us... We got to play at a lacrosse game in the spring for a CEB event, and play at some of their parties, and then we got Crimson Jam.”

With his experience in playing for numerous bands at big events, Meyer explained the process of catering the music his bands performed to match the upbeat pop genre of Daya: “We always, depending on the band I'm in, try to pick a mixture of songs we all like and have fun performing, as well as songs that we think will get the people going and be a fun time to listen to and dance to.” He also mentioned that it's critical to feed off of the audience. “If it's too much of one or the other, it won't be enjoyable to us or it won't be enjoyable for the audience.”

Although Daya's performance was not the length of a typical concert experience, there is always so much more to Crimson Jam than sitting back and enjoying a show. The time set before the performance gave a personal vibe to the event, as Meyer described the opening bands as helping to prolong social events for first-years before the actual concert took over. The catered food in the Yard was another encouraging feat to draw first-years and upperclassmen to mingle amidst the upbeat music from the openers. Despite the usual concert-going experience at large stadiums with today's top artists, Crimson Jam provides students with a special opportunity to experience a concert with our college friends in our current or former “backyard.”

LUCIE STEFANONI '27
(LUCIESTEFANONI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) FAR PREFERRED DAYA'S “HIDEAWAY” TO NICKY YOURE'S “SUNROOF” PERFORMANCE FROM LAST YEAR.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



SPORTS

Strava, Set, Go

How Harvard crew's camaraderie inspired the fitness app Strava.

BY CLARA LAKE '27

With a tap on a watch, an activity precisely recorded, and an instant upload, any athlete can receive immediate validation: the kudos begin rolling in. On the popular fitness app, Strava, each kudo is another burst of encouragement from friends and followers, in lieu of likes.

Co-founders Mark Gainey '90 and Michael Horvath '88 aimed to create a positive place where users could share workouts with a team-like community. And for the past 15 years, Strava has remained just that—a place free of “vitriol” and other negativity that plagues many social media platforms. “Strava was really born out of that necessity of, ‘Can we create a situation where, by supporting one another, we can stay active?’” said Gainey. In the unique social network, users share physical activities with their followers, who can interact by giving kudos and leaving comments. Athletes can analyze workouts by viewing maps, speed, and other data.

The necessity of Strava's team-like network started long before the app's launch in 2009, and before any user taps “Record” on the screen or presses “Go” on a watch. It dates back to transformative bonds created in Newell Boathouse.

“There's just nothing better than being on a college sports team,” exclaimed Gainey in an interview with the *Independent*. He came to Harvard as a recruited track and cross-country runner. Sophomore year, he discovered crew and began rowing for coach Charley Butt, who will enter his 40th season with Harvard this year. “In all deference to the amazing academic programs that are Harvard, my life lessons came from that boathouse,” he said.

Gainey fondly recalled the “camaraderie and the esprit de corps and sometimes the trash talking...even just the daily grind.”

Throughout his years on the crew team, his committed lifestyle helped other facets of his life, too. “My grades were at their best when we were in the thick of racing season,” he said. “Somehow, when I was most focused on the sports, everything else kind of fell into place.”

The only problem Gainey had with the crew program at Harvard was that his time rowing for the Crimson had to come to an end. “We graduated and poof, the whole thing disappeared,” he said. The creation of Strava's virtual community was due

to its founders' journey to restore the motivational environment they left behind years before.

After graduating cum laude with a degree in General Studies, having studied fine arts, Gainey moved to California and began working for an investment firm in 1991. “They love to hire athletes,” he said. He was told that he would enjoy the competitiveness of the job because it would remind him of his days on the crew team. Compared to the crew team, this job “was not the kind of compelling, competitive, thing that got me up in the morning and made me tick,” said Gainey.

By 1995, Gainey and Horvath, who had met on the crew team at Harvard, had developed a business plan similar to what Strava has become today. Their idea was to use the internet to create a “virtual locker room” to bring together the friends who had dispersed after graduation. A place “where we could share our workouts, our competitions, and our races and keep supporting each other,” according to Gainey. “That's what we learned, that having teammates was so critical.”

In 1995, however, syncing sports watches to computers was not mainstream, nor was the concept of social media. “We had to let the Internet mature.” In 2008, Gainey and Horvath revisited their original idea. The “persistence and patience” the co-founders demonstrated in developing Strava was similar to what they learned as rowers at Harvard.

“For all the glories that people hear about start-ups, frankly, they're a grind...and it's kind of like being an

athlete.

You just have to learn how to go through those dark days,” Gainey said.

Although Gainey's team experience and hard-learned lessons came from his varsity crew roots, Strava was originally designed for cyclists. “We

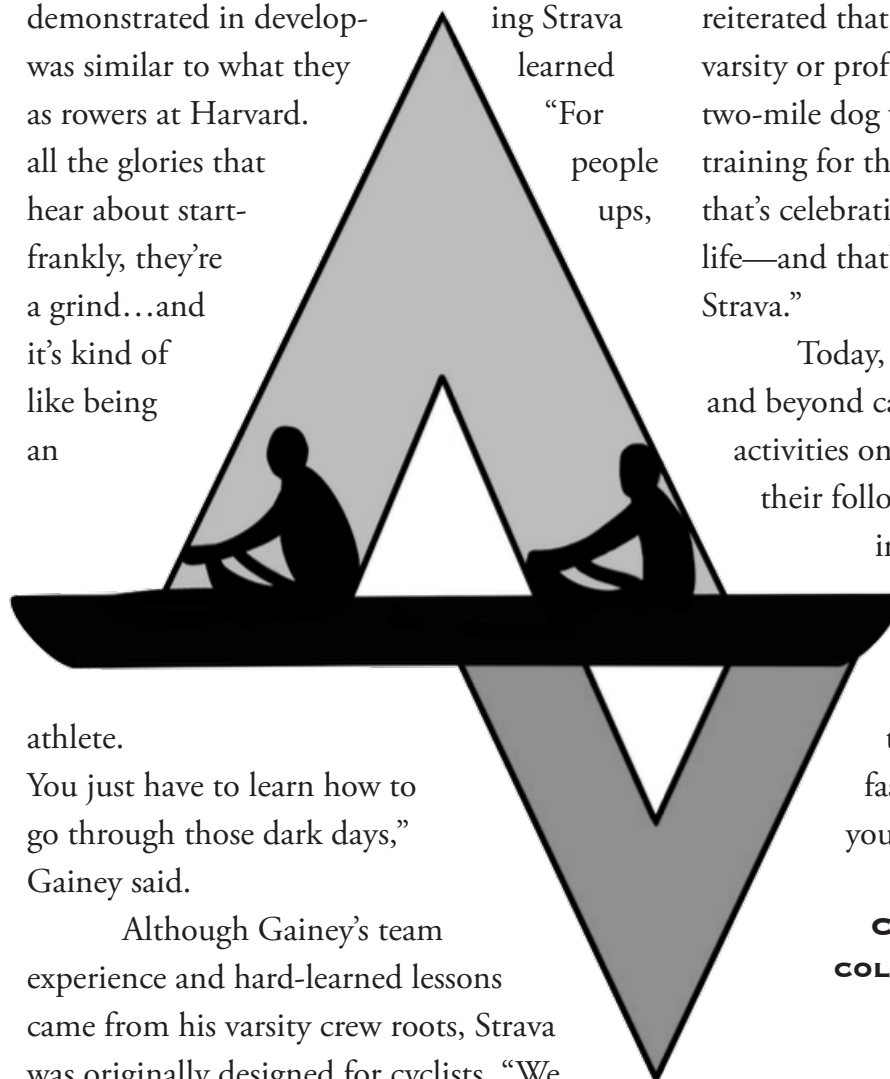
used to target something called a M.A.M.I.L... middle-aged man in lycra,” he joked. “They had Garmin devices on their handlebars. They were obsessed by data.” For an app like Strava, where users log and share this information, the “M.A.M.I.L” was the perfect target market. Now, Strava can be used to track and share nearly 50 different types of activities. As of Jan. 2024, Strava had over 120 million users in more than 190 countries, adding around two million athletes each month. “It's a global community,” said Gainey.

While Strava has become millions of peoples' go-to place to support others and engage with workout statistics, its co-founder kept a paper and pencil logbook while training in college, though this was hard to maintain. “There was no storing [data], there was no putting it up on a website,” Gainey explained. “There was no website, there was no internet.” But, he remembers that his coach, Butt, “was always ahead of the curve and using technology.” Now, largely thanks to Gainey and Horvath's time on Harvard Crew, there is Strava for the rest of us to use.

Of the platform's many users, there are “amazing pros that you can follow and be inspired by,” according to Gainey. These professional athletes, he said, include Olympic gold medal cyclist Kristen Faulkner '16, who also rowed lightweight at Harvard. Gainey reiterated that Strava is not just an app for varsity or professional athletes. Users can share two-mile dog walks or their statistics during training for their first 5k. “That's great because that's celebrating what it is to live an active life—and that's the vast majority of folks on Strava.”

Today, athletes and students at Harvard and beyond can instantly share their activities on Strava and receive kudos from their followers seconds later. However, it's important to appreciate the real-life bonds while they are still close to us. “Enjoy these next few years that you've got on the team,” Gainey said. “It goes fast, but you will be amazed at what you carry forward.”

CLARA LAKE '27 (CLARALAKE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS HAD HER BEST SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTIONS ON STRAVA. GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA RASCOFF '27



Indy Sportsbook: Winning in the WNBA

A preview of the final few weeks in the WNBA.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26 AND SANTI KELLY '26

By almost every statistic imaginable, the WNBA is in the middle of its most historic season to date. The WNBA, founded in 1996 by NBA Commissioner David Stern, has had trouble becoming popular in mainstream sports in the United States and has yet to turn a profit over the course of any of its seasons. However, led by the popular new faces of Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese, the WNBA has seen a surge in popularity across the country.

Before the season started, the WNBA Draft recorded 2.44 million viewers, which is roughly four times higher than the previous record of 600,000. Fans were more eager to watch Clark and Reese get drafted than in 2004 after Diana Taurasi's 3-peat with UConn. To put this number into context, the WNBA Draft recorded more viewers than the 2023 NHL (600,000) Draft and 2023 MLB (744,000) Draft combined. On top of that, the WNBA opened with the highest attendance in 26 years and had the most-watched start of the season across every network. Halfway through the season, the WNBA All-Star game garnered 3.4 million viewers, making it the third most-watched women's basketball game in history.

Considering this recent rise in popularity, we at the Indy Sportsbook think that a review of the WNBA is especially pertinent. While the league

is not reaching the viewership of the NBA or NFL yet, it has greatly boosted women's sports. With the playoffs right around the corner, the Sportsbook is coming at you with bets for the major awards for the 2024 season: MVP, Rookie of the Year (ROTY), and Finals winner.

We could easily gloss over the WNBA MVP race, but it's only fitting to give kudos to A'Ja Wilson, who currently sits at -3500 odds to win the award. There isn't really any value in this bet; it has pretty much already been decided upon due to Wilson's



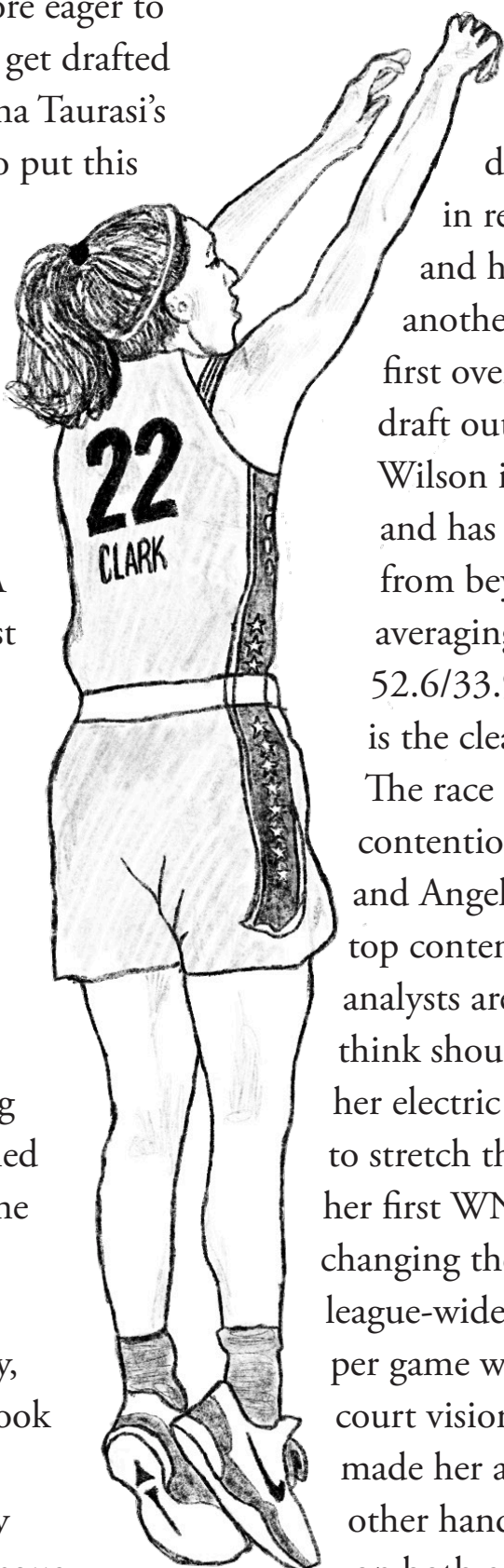
incredible play. Wilson has had one of the most dominant performances in recent WNBA history and has stepped it up another level all season. The first overall pick in the 2018 draft out of South Carolina, Wilson is a force in the paint and has added a decent shot from beyond the arch. She is averaging 27.5/12.4/2.4 on 52.6/33.9/86 (as of Sept. 6) and is the clear-cut favorite.

The race for ROTY is a bit more contentious, with Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese emerging as the top contenders. Both fans and analysts are split on who they think should win. Clark, with her electric shooting and ability to stretch the floor, has dazzled in her first WNBA season, seemingly changing the pace of the game league-wide. Averaging 21.6 points per game with 6.2 assists, Clark's court vision and deep range have made her an instant star. On the other hand, Reese has been a beast on both ends of the floor, pulling

down rebounds at an astonishing rate and more than holding her own in the defensive interior. Reese is averaging 17.9 points and 10.5 rebounds per game, giving her the edge in versatility; however, she has just injured her wrist and will miss the rest of the season. Ultimately, due to Clark's team success and strong second half of the season, she has emerged as the strong favorite and sits at -2000 odds.

The WNBA Finals are shaping up to be a thrilling matchup, with the Las Vegas Aces and New York Liberty at the top of the league. The Aces, led by A'Ja Wilson, are dominant on both ends, with Chelsea Gray and Kelsey Plum adding to one of the league's most balanced offenses. The Liberty, led by Sabrina Ionescu and Breanna Stewart, poses a serious challenge with Ionescu's playmaking and Stewart's two-way dominance. While the Aces are slight favorites due to their firepower and experience, the Liberty's depth makes it a close call. We favor the Aces to take it home at +325 odds, simply because the line is a little more attractive.

As the season is just about to wrap up, we at the Indy Sportsbook think it has probably been the most exciting in WNBA history. Exciting rookies, competitive teams at the top, and the league's growing popularity have set the stage for what should be the best playoffs in the league's history.



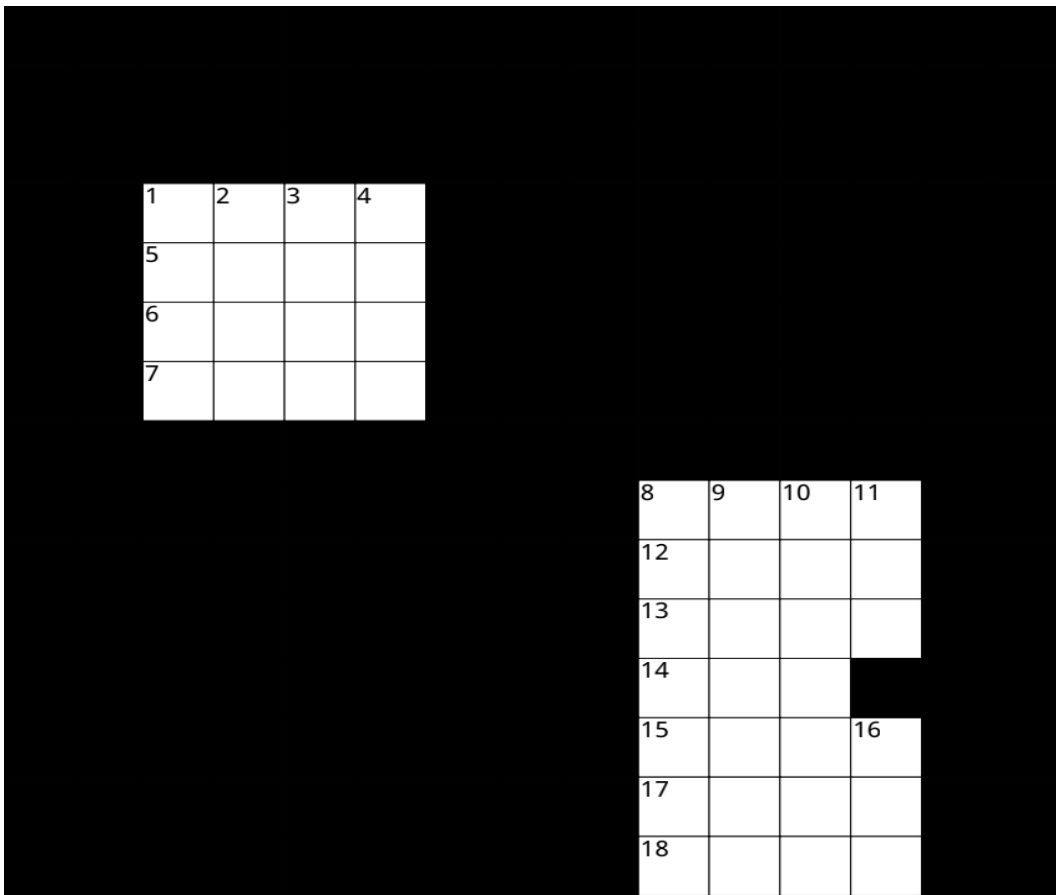
LUKE WAGNER '26
(LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.ED) AND **SANTI KELLY '26** (SKELLY@COLLEGE.HARVARD.ED) BELIEVE THAT THE WNBA WILL CONTINUE TO GAIN POPULARITY AND BECOME A MAJOR SPORT IN THE YEARS TO COME.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '26

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

Familiar

BY HAN NGUYEN '27



ACROSS

- 1 Jam performer
- 5 Grammys rival on ABC since '73
- 6 Drop feathers
- 7 FOP, for example
- 8 Stylish
- 12 "The Bachelor" presentation
- 13 "Am ___ late?"
- 14 Fenway venue
- 15 Toboggan
- 17 Sharer's word
- 18 Egg holder

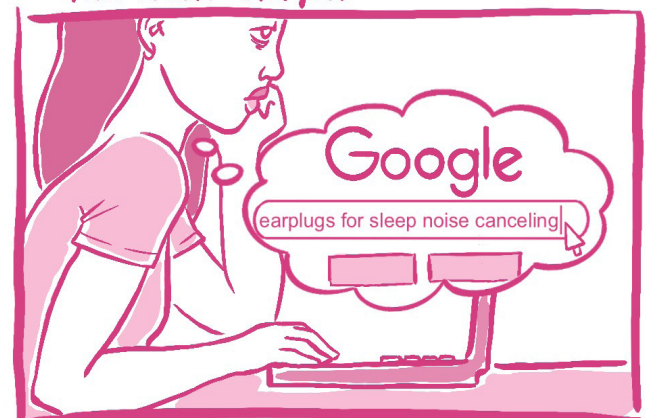
DOWN

- 1 Slightly soggy
- 2 Latin love
- 3 Safety school
- 4 Regarding
- 8 School color
- 9 Melted adhesive
- 10 Atomic rearrangements
- 11 Zuckerberg title
- 16 "Spring forward"
letters

The Pink Strip



The next day...



Riley Cullinan

09.12.24

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