

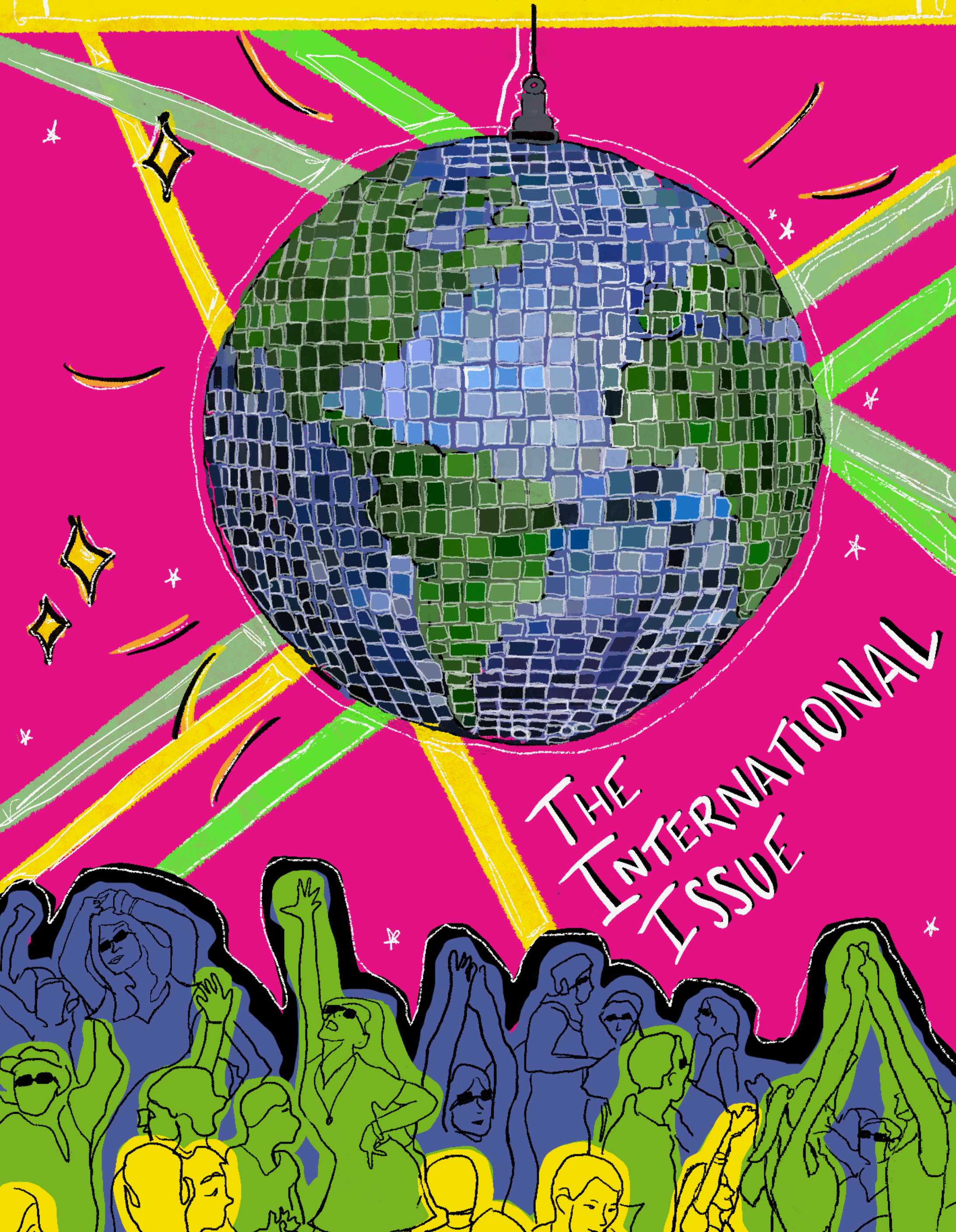
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INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



THE
INTERNATIONAL
ISSUE

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About the *Independent*

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newspaper, 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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NEWS

A NATO Nightmare?

Harvard students and faculty weigh in on President Trump's apprehensive attitude towards NATO.

BY ISHAAN TEWARI '28

“You got to pay. You got to pay your bills.”

No, these are not just the lyrics to Destiny Child's hit single, “Bills, Bills, Bills.” This blunt statement was made in January 2025 by President Donald Trump as he expressed his frustration with the United States's outsized role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—one of the world's most influential international alliances of the past century.

Composed of 32 member states across Europe and North America, NATO is the largest peacetime military alliance in the world. The foundation of NATO is Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. And, because the United States is undoubtedly NATO's strongest military power, its membership is crucial to the strength of the alliance.

Article 5 has only been invoked one time in NATO's history as a response to the September 11 attacks against the United States. Besides this, NATO's collective defense pact has successfully deterred aggression from adversaries for decades, preventing Article 5 from being used in the first place.

The pledge that the world's strongest military will infallibly defend its allies has kept security threats—most notably, from Russia—at bay for decades. However, President Trump's recent skepticism towards America's heavy involvement in NATO has etched cracks into this promise.

When asked by a NATO member if he would protect them even if they did not increase defense spending, Trump recounted replying that he would not. “In fact, I would encourage [Russia] to do whatever the hell they want,” Trump said.

The rationale for his statement is clear: the United States defense budget comprises over half the entire alliance's military expenditure. Washington also funds a whopping 15.8% of NATO's yearly overall expenses—tying Germany for the most of any member state.

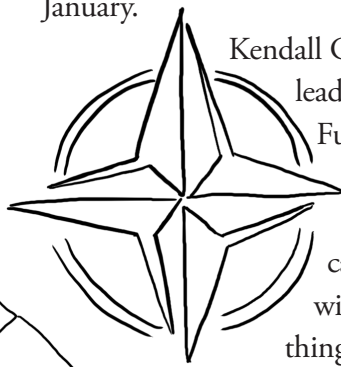
However, the issue of unequal spending is not the root cause of tensions between the United States and the rest of NATO. Previous presidents have long raised concerns about fiscal inequities, such as President Obama, who warned NATO members that the United States “cannot do it alone” in 2014. The difference is in Trump's rhetoric, which has raised questions about American commitment to NATO.

Professor Christoph Mikulaschek of Harvard's Department of Government explained that spending levels will continue to be a hot-button issue in NATO. “A key topic on the agenda of the upcoming NATO summit will be the question [of] whether the alliance needs to update its current

guideline to commit 2% of their national GDP to defense spending,” Mikulaschek said. “The U.S. advocates a much higher target, and European NATO members are divided. NATO will likely raise its target, but by how much is TBD.”

While NATO has set a goal for all its member states to spend 2% of their GDP on defense, eight members still fall short: Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. Now, Trump is pushing for a massive increase to 5%, a level of military allocation some analysts say is politically and economically unfeasible for many member states. For reference, the United States currently budgets 3.38% of its real GDP to defense—meaning Washington would need to boost military spending by almost 50% to meet Trump's target.

However, Trump's frustrations may not just be that America's allies are not paying enough. They could stem from his “America First” narrative—his belief that America has bent over backward to help other countries when it should be preserving resources for itself. “I'm not sure we should be spending anything, but we should certainly be helping [member states]... We're protecting them. They're not protecting us,” Trump told reporters in January.



Kendall Carll '26, a former team lead at the NATO Innovation Fund, suggests there might be more to Trump's reasoning: “Trump's thesis of the case for his relationship with NATO is based on two things,” Carll said. “One is that the European theater is now less important to American national security interests than it was in years before... This is definitely not an inaccurate assumption of the state of the world—it's something that a lot of scholars and analysts tend to agree on. The difference is the way Trump is suggesting to go about it.”

Whatever the rationale, Trump's confrontational rhetoric towards NATO is nothing new. At a 2018 rally in West Virginia, Trump recounted an interaction with the president of a NATO member state. “Yes, I will leave if you don't pay our bills!” he said. *The New York Times* also reported that Trump privately stated his desire to withdraw from NATO “several times” during his first term.

However, Harvard students and faculty interviewed by the *Independent* all agreed that full-scale American withdrawal from NATO is unlikely.

Carll believes that Trump's first term may be a clue that his aggressive statements may not materialize into a full-scale withdrawal. “To the extent Trump actually believes that pulling out of NATO would be a good thing, I think we would have seen that exact rhetoric in [his] second administration,” he said. “He didn't hesitate to say it in the first one, so we shouldn't expect him to hesitate to say it now if he

believes it.”

“I think the way to understand Trump's threats on the U.S. leaving NATO [is] more as a bargaining tool. This is what he thinks is part of the art of the deal, to threaten [allies] with the worst... and hope that spurs them into increased defense spending,” Carll continued.

Although Professor Steven Chaudoin of Harvard's Department of Government agrees that withdrawal is not likely, he is still uncertain. “There are fewer and fewer voices that Trump listens to who view Russia as a threat,” he stated. “I would still think that full withdrawal is unlikely because Europeans can make promises to increase spending that would placate Trump.”

But even if the United States remains a member of NATO, Trump's actions will not be met without a response. Dr. Michael Miner, a program manager and lecturer at the Harvard Kennedy School, believes that NATO's European members will have to engage in discourse soon. “There will be a spirited debate on what the future of European security looks like with the U.S. playing a lesser role than the past,” he said.

“Issues on the horizon include the question [of] whether the number of U.S. troops in Europe will go down, whether and which NATO members will offer security guarantees to Ukraine... and closer cooperation among European countries on defense planning and procurement,” Mikulaschek added.

On the other hand, Trump's inflammatory comments may undermine cohesion within NATO. Chaudoin said that Trump's frustration with American involvement in NATO would “absolutely make the norm of Article Five—mutual defense—weaker.”

The Trump administration's foreign policy “has deeply offended and hurt the Europeans in ways that might not be easily reconcilable, and has shown to the world that [the concept of] the Western world united in the defense of Western values, basic notions of sovereignty and international norms, has been significantly weakened,” Carll said. “It could provide incentives for some of America and Europe's adversaries to try to test that relationship, to pull Europe away from the United States and the United States away from Europe in a way that makes both weaker and more vulnerable.”

Either way, Trump's rhetoric will likely elicit a change in NATO's operation. “There are opportunities for serious progress[,] but also the prospect of causing irreparable harm depending on how events [play out] in Ukraine and Eastern Europe,” Miner said. “Time will tell.”

ISHAAN TEWARI '28 (ITEWARI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS INTERESTED IN THE INTERSECTION OF FOREIGN POLICY AND BEYONCÉ.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27

“A System of Nepotism”

Uncovering racist exclusion in Harvard’s history.

BY KALVIN FRANK ’28

Richard T. Greener ’1870—the first Black student to graduate from Harvard College. George L. Ruffin ’1869—the first Black student to graduate from Harvard Law School. However, Clemont Morgan was the first Black student to graduate from *both* Harvard College in 1890 and Harvard Law School in 1893. After graduating, Morgan helped found the NAACP and became the first Black member of the Cambridge Council.

132 years later, his great nephew Dr. James Spencer and researcher Leslie Brunetta uncovered an injustice from his tenure at Harvard. While researching for the Cambridge Black History Project, the pair uncovered a research paper detailing how Morgan was denied the right to speak at his Harvard College commencement simply due to the color of his skin. After recently publishing an article on the topic in “Cambridge Day,” Dr. Spencer and Brunetta joined the *Harvard Independent* to elaborate more on the impacts of the University’s decision, Morgan’s legacy, and how Harvard should retribute today.

In 1890, as Harvard prepared for the commencement ceremony, 44 applicants applied for one of six speakers slots at the event. A panel of professors evaluated each applicant and ranked W.E.B. Du Bois as the best speaker. They also selected Morgan, by a slim majority. However, after significant pushback from panel member Professor Francis G. Peabody, who worried about having two Black speakers, the panel reversed the decision. After internal deliberation, the finalized list was published, with Morgan’s name conveniently left off.

“They told him that he was not one of the six [commencement speakers], when, in fact, he had earned his rights,” Dr. Spencer argued. “What a wasted opportunity to put America, to put Harvard, to put our culture, on the right track—to take us away from the division we’re still feeling today,” he said.

Dr. Spencer believes Morgan and Du Bois jointly speaking could have set a powerful precedent. “All of these people who came down the [graduation] line at Harvard wouldn’t have been able to say, ‘Well, we’ve never seen Black intelligence rise to the top.’” he said.

“There was just very prevalent belief among the white population—most of the white population—

that no matter what Black people actually demonstrated, they were not intellectually up to white people,” Brunetta added, alluding to how many individuals at the time were embarrassed to acknowledge Black prowess—this denied speech a clear instance of such fears.

However, more importantly, Brunetta and Dr. Spencer argued that the University was facetious about the selection of the commencement speakers. “They lied. They lied to my uncle,” said Dr. Spencer.

“They lied to everyone else because they said, ‘Here are the six.’ Du Bois is one of them, but there should have been Du Bois and Morgan in that group. And they basically



pitted them against each other. I mean, unknowingly, the two of them had no idea this was going on,” concurred Brunetta.

According to Brunetta, Morgan’s situation was not a unique event. There have been multiple instances of Harvard hindering away Black Excellence. For instance, Professor Josiah Parsons Cooke’s Black research assistant, Francis Prince Clary, was written out of Harvard history. Despite helping to discover “a systematic approach to understanding matter,” Harvard mislabeled him. “[Harvard said] he’s just a janitor, even though he’s the right hand man [to Cooke] and assisting in every chemistry demonstration for decades,” said Brunetta.

As part of their work with CBHP and Cambridge Day, Brunetta and Dr. Spencer are working to uncover more of these stories. Finding these pieces of history is a critical process for Brunetta and Dr. Spencer that they referred to as “Unhiding.”

In addition to their mission to raise awareness about important historic Black

contributions at Harvard, Dr. Spencer also believes the University hasn’t done enough to compensate for their past injustices. “I’ve never seen remorse from Harvard,” he said. “I wish I believed in Harvard enough to think that they would do anything [to make up for their past]—you haven’t done much for African Americans.”

Beyond just making up for past mistakes, Dr. Spencer also commented on Harvard’s present discriminatory real estate practices, as the University has purchased much of the housing in Cambridge which includes formerly Black-owned apartment complexes. “Harvard pretty much bought up all the houses of the African American community. If you go walk down Memorial Drive, going towards Western Ave, and you see those buildings, a lot of those buildings used to be Black-owned,” Dr. Spencer continued.

As Black residents continue to be pushed out of the community, Dr. Spencer worries one day that Black people will no longer call Cambridge home. “We might not be here in 20, 30 years. And so I want the story to say, ‘Hey, you know what? We were once here, and we once contributed mightily to the city.’” This mission has fueled Dr. Spencer’s involvement in the CBHP, which aims to maintain Black history as an integral part of the Cambridge community’s development.

Dr. Spencer felt personally impacted by the decision to cut Morgan’s graduation speech, or as Dr. Spencer refers to him, “Uncle Clem.” To Dr. Spencer, the future of African American history at Harvard is important, and he believes the University should work harder to uplift the population they have continuously wronged.

“I think Harvard owes it to African Americans, based on, in part, what they did to my uncle, to bring in more African Americans,” Dr. Spencer commented.

KALVIN FRANK ’28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) RECOMMENDS ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE BLACK HISTORY OF HARVARD CONNECT WITH THE CAMBRIDGE BLACK HISTORY PROJECT.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LESLIE BRUNETTA

Bound 2 Hate

Harvard students' responses to Ye's recent tweets.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28

While some Harvard students never knew the “old Kanye,” they certainly do not condone the recent rhetoric of the “new Kanye.” In a three-day tirade, Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, posted a series of tweets targeting Jewish and Black communities, women, and other Hollywood public figures. As Ye headlined news outlets for making loaded statements like “I’m a Nazi,” his words also filled Harvard undergraduates’ social media feeds. Students quickly condemned Ye’s use of X, formerly known as Twitter, and discussed what his words meant in the context of free speech on social media platforms.

Brayden Lee '28 recalls initially enjoying listening to Ye in 2018 but turning away from his content following his feature on a podcast where he praised Nazis. “It was just really bad,” Lee said. “I thought it was really just to be provocative, but I don’t think that really matters at the end of the day, so I just decided to not listen to him.”

August Hachmeister '28 agreed with Lee’s sentiment, explaining that he frequently followed Ye’s music in the past but now has different opinions. “I just can’t say I’m a fan,” Hachmeister said. “Maybe at one point I [was], but nowadays, because the quality [of Ye’s music] has gone down, and because of the obvious—let’s not pretend, he’s really screwed up—I don’t consider myself a fan anymore.”

In addition to their general commentary, students were quick to reference Ye’s recent tweets, including “I love Hitler.” They additionally discussed his 2025 Super Bowl commercial to advertise his apparel brand Yeezy, which was exclusively selling t-shirts with the swastika on their fronts. “That’s just fucked up,” Hachmeister said.

While Ye’s rhetoric parallels that of neo-Nazis, Lee explained how even people who say similar things as him nonetheless do not like his character. “It’s just weird,” he said. “No one likes him right now, most people don’t like him as of now as a character.”

Some students thought Ye’s mental health was to blame for his actions. “I think that he’s mentally ill,” Lillie Tyrrell '28 shared. “It’s been pretty apparent through a lot of things that he said over the course of, I guess, the last decade.”

However, even in the wake of this controversy, Ye’s short ban from X led some students to question their views on free speech and social media. “Personally, I think that people should feel free to be idiots because we

have to realize who we consider right and who we consider wrong,” Hachmeister said.

“It’s hard, because I feel like the Internet should be an open space for everyone, even if they disagree, and I think the public shame that he gets is what kind of helps steer other people who might be even considering what he thinks away,” Lee added. “It kind of opens the doors to a conversation when you don’t agree with someone, you want to have that conversation instead of just forcing them out.”

“I honestly don’t know, because media suppression is also an issue—free speech and everything—but at the same time, when you have a celebrity that big with such a huge platform, honestly, he’s impressing upon young kids through rap music,” Tyrrell stated.

“It is harmful to have him on that kind of pedestal and give him a venue and a forum for him to just kind of spew a lot of antisemitic things.”

Students had more difficulty navigating their beliefs on Ye’s ban when Elon Musk was brought into the conversation. “To think that Elon only banned [Ye] because he posted porn, I think that really kind of shows his true cards, because Elon is very ban-happy if you speak against him. I personally think he’s a huge hypocrite,” Hachmeister said.

Lee similarly felt that Musk’s statements on X are “always going to be pushed in the algorithm, because he owns it, and that’s what he wants. I feel like he is pushing his ideals... I think Elon Musk has not done a good job, because he’s using [X] as a tool more than anything.”

After having her Harvard Political Review article “Trump’s Rhetoric Echoes Hitler” retweeted on X by Elon Musk, Alexandra Fierman '26 condemned the rhetoric of President Donald Trump, Musk, and Ye altogether. “I believe that Elon Musk should crack down on hate speech, of course, but he won’t,” Fierman said. “I believe that on all social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or X, whatever it’s called, and just any social media platform—nobody should be able to say things that target some minority groups, historically marginalized groups, because I

believe that’s threatening speech. So, yeah, I do believe that he should crack down on hate speech, but I don’t believe that he will.”

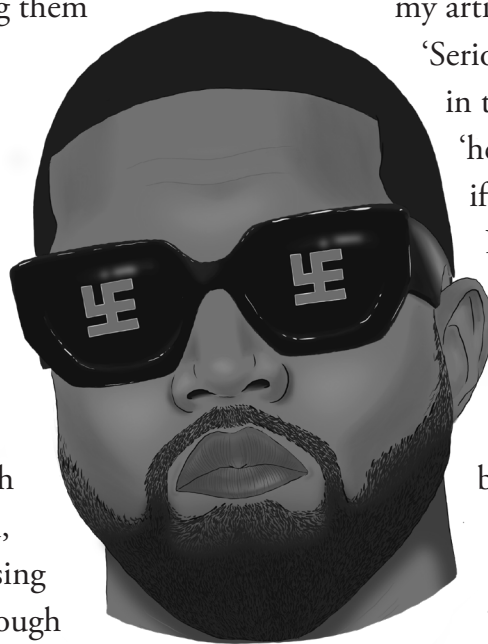
Fierman also mentioned Musk’s antisemitic rhetoric, discussing his recent controversy of making a hand motion that resembled the Nazi salute. “Of course, people are debating whether it was the Nazi salute or not,” she said. “And it’s quite clear what he did. And I find it suspicious when he reposted my article—his word above my article was ‘Seriously.’ And that day everybody, people in the mainstream media, were even saying, ‘he’s performing the Nazi salute.’ I wonder if he was just saying, ‘Seriously, I am a Nazi.’”

“The word ‘Seriously’ could be taken in one of two ways,” she continued. “So definitely that’s just speculation on my part, but I do believe that Elon Musk is an antisemitic individual based on performing the Nazi salute and based on his ties with Trump.”

Ultimately, each interview conducted by the *Independent* regarding Ye and Musk’s words and actions tied back to antisemitism’s growing presence in modern rhetoric. Fierman offered insight into these similarities in hate speech, particularly between Trump and Ye. “I believe that it ultimately causes the same repercussions because it’s coming from the same place. What happened to the Jewish people in Nazi Germany stems from a place of targeting people who do not fit into a mold of belonging or a mold for belonging in a nation,” Fierman said.

“Hitler also targeted the [Romani] and the disabled and homosexuals. So, disproportionately, it was Jewish people, but that targeting stemmed from a place of looking at a certain group as unworthy of belonging to a nation. So I do think that it has the same repercussions,” Fierman continued.

Fierman concluded that Trump and Ye’s rhetoric reflected a growing alienation of numerous minority groups. “When you have Kanye West explicitly targeting Jewish people, he’s making it clear that he doesn’t believe they belong,” she said. “And when Donald Trump targets immigrants and non-white people, he makes it clear that they don’t belong.”



**COURTNEY HINES '28
(COURTNEYHINES@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE
INDEPENDENT.**

GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28

From Berg to Bonding: Harvard Through The Eyes of International Students

A glimpse at some of the most surprising things international first-years learned about Harvard.

BY ANTONIA M. SALAME '28

Although 17% of the Harvard Class of 2028 was raised on classic New England clam chowder and a spattering of coastal towns, a similar number of current first-years had a drastically different upbringing. For most students starting their college education, they must learn to navigate life without parents, siblings, or other conventional childhood support systems. However, the 18% international student population of the Class of 2028 inevitably face unique challenges as they move to a new country or even across the ocean. As the middle of their second semester approaches, the *Independent* spoke with three international Harvard first-years to ask about their unique experiences over the past few months on campus and in America.

Giulia Viacava '28, a freshman from Monaco, referenced her worries from the beginning of the year: "Being an international student, I thought I was going to be left out... but actually, no."

"I also thought that it would be difficult to make friends but I've been integrating really well, and I'm really glad for that," she said. "Everyone is so friendly, even when you sit at Annenberg with people you don't know, you become friends within 10 minutes and I really like that," Viacava continued.

Apart from Viacava, all the other international students similarly noted how welcoming and receptive the Harvard community has been. Sasha Khalo '28, a first-year from Ukraine, described how the social culture she was raised in contrasts with her new American college experience. "In Ukraine, if someone doesn't like you, you will know," Khalo said. "We don't talk to people we don't like. Here, it's just a cultural thing, everyone is just friendly to everyone...that was such a cultural shock for me at first."

John Sogutlu '28, a first-year from Turkey, described a similar experience. "I really thought most of the people here were really going to be cutthroat or competitive," he stated. "Every single person I've met here [has been] so sweet, so nice, so helpful, so supportive."

Moreover, all three students expressed how impressive they felt their fellow students were. "Just eating lunch at Berg, I met three pilots, a published author, people who spoke in front of presidents.

It's just insane how talented all of [my] peers are," Khalo remarked.

In addition to reflecting on unexpected experiences with their peers, the students noted the College's academic differences compared to international secondary schools. "In Ukrainian high school, they never warn you about quizzes or anything," Khalo said.

Beyond the general academic setup, specific courses and departments presented unique challenges. "Math 1a humbled me... you will never see me in a math class again," Khalo added. Math is sometimes called the "universal language." However, after hearing Khalo echo a sentiment many Harvard students seem to share, the subject seems to also be a universally challenging one.

Viacava had a different experience, noting how the Harvard math department and the faculty overall feels accessible to her when she needs help or guidance. "I was used to never talking to my professors out of class," she said, alluding to her past experience with math classes in Monaco. "Here, I just send an email, and after 10 minutes, they answer me back."

In between classes, many first-years spend a lot of time in their designated dining hall: Annenberg—affectionately dubbed, "Berg." Yet, however beautiful the stained glass windows of Berg may be, the offerings are sometimes less well-received. "Sometimes we have good days, sometimes we have bad days," Khalo explained. But, regardless of her frequent disappointment with the dining hall,

she did reveal some of her favorite aspects of the culinary options. "I love the panini station. I devour them every day."

Viacava also shared dismay for Berg's infamously inconvenient hours. "The dining hall hours start at 4:30 p.m. for dinner and it ends at 7:30 p.m. That was a bit weird."

Beyond adjusting to new dining hall schedules, first-years are also exposed to an entirely new social scene. And while the Harvard culture is often foreign for all incoming students, international students might struggle even more with this unfamiliar territory.

The students did not seem to have high hopes for Harvard's party scene: "I didn't expect there to be a lot of social scene around campus," Sogutlu explained. However, contrary to his initial thoughts, he was pleasantly surprised, referencing the excitement available in Boston and surrounding colleges. "You can go and do whatever you want on the weekend," Sogutlu remarked.

Khalo was perhaps a little disappointed when she discovered the timing of Harvard's parties. "I did expect the party life in college to go until at least 3 a.m. But when parties get shut down at 12 a.m., it's kind of sad," she said. Thankfully, she gave some tips for anyone looking to maximize their fun on campus from her perspective as an international student. "The HOLA and International parties are better, so Americans pull up."

Ultimately, few newly graduated high school seniors really know what to expect as they thrust themselves into the vacuum that is American universities, teeming with unfamiliar faces. However, when this transition involves moving across borders and sometimes even oceans, it is undoubtedly more difficult. Nonetheless, these students are working to make the best of their first few months at Harvard and are optimistic about their future on campus. Moreover, they are eager to discover unique aspects of American culture that are unavailable in their home nations.

"I just love peanut butter, and I'm glad I got to discover it," Viacava stated.

**ANTONIA SALAME '28
(AMSALAME@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) ATE DINNER AT
5 P.M. YESTERDAY.**

GRAPHIC BY ANNA SHAO '28



FORUM

“Small Island, Big Family”

A profile on the Taiwanese Cultural Society.

BY AJAX FU '28

For Taiwanese Cultural Society members, Wednesday dinner means family. Even though the food is standard dining hall fare (with an occasional grass jelly dessert), the sense of community always leaves members wanting seconds. Such meals happen every week, when the small but close-knit TCS gathers in the Eliot private dining room to catch up on weekly woes and campus highlights. The power of TCS, however, extends beyond Wednesday nights, as the organization constantly provides a welcoming space for members to be themselves at Harvard. Through campus-wide events, regular study breaks, and more, TCS is dedicated to maintaining a consistently comforting community and promoting Taiwanese culture on campus.

While TCS is not as large as many of the other affinity groups on campus, its feeling of family is strong. “The Taiwanese community may not have the scale as some other cultural organizations on campus, but we like to pride ourselves as having one of the strongest and most close-knit bonds,” Shiloh Liu '26 said in an interview with the *Independent*. Liu is one of the current co-presidents of TCS, alongside Darcy Lin '27.

Lin joined as a first-year seeking such a family. “When I first came to Harvard, I was searching for mentorship and an Asian community,” she said. “I quickly discovered that TCS is a really special organization. People look out for you and are honest with you, which is incredibly helpful when navigating an unfamiliar college campus. It’s not board-centric—everyone pitches in.”

Mollie Cheng '26 also joined as a first-year. “I joined because I’m an international student and was looking for a warm community in college, and I stayed because I found exactly that,” she explained. “The weekly dinners became a routine to look forward to, and dinners felt like a regular

catch up session with friends.” After receiving a loving welcome to the TCS community, Cheng served as one of the club co-presidents the following year in 2024, hoping to continue building a space she found so rewarding.

Although TCS is committed to uplifting Taiwanese heritage on Harvard’s campus, the organization nonetheless welcomes all identities. “Some of our members were born and raised in Taiwan, some moved to America, and some have never been to Taiwan,” Lin said. “Our mission at TCS is to create an inclusive community for everyone who is connected to Taiwan in some way, whether it be growing up there, having family ties, or even studying abroad. We are ‘small island, big family.’” Liu continued.



TCS continues to grow. “Our efforts to participate in pan-Asian events on campus [have] also been really rewarding, since TCS has grown from a small group

to one with a presence here!” Cheng said.

Recently, TCS has expanded its efforts to collaborate with other Asian student organizations at Harvard. Last month, TCS, alongside the Asian American Association, the Harvard Vietnamese Association, and the Harvard Korean Association, hosted a Lunar New Year celebration in the Kirkland House dining hall. A combination of decorations, food, and arts and crafts strengthened a communal appreciation for Asian and Taiwanese identity at Harvard. TCS also regularly collaborates with the Harvard-Radcliffe Chinese Students Association. Last fall, the clubs held a screening of the movie “Didi,” a coming-of-age film following the story of a Taiwanese American eighth-grader growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area.

TCS is probably best known for its largest event, their annual Night Market. Last November, almost 200 attendees rushed to Quincy dining hall to secure their share of milk tea and fresh Taiwanese food from local vendors. Guests tried their hand at ring toss, darts, and cup toss to win Taiwanese snacks and candies.

Performances from students and groups like the Asian American Dance Troupe, the Crimson Cellos, and the Harvard Whistler’s Society accompanied the festivities. The night culminated with a karaoke segment, where TCS members and audience members alike gave their all to reenact their favorite Mandarin songs. TCS events like the Night Market help build the Taiwanese presence at Harvard and spread awareness of Taiwanese culture.

In Cheng’s words, one of the central philosophies for TCS is to “cultivate a Taiwanese presence on campus,” and these collaborations help provide that cultural exposure to a wider audience. This reinforces one of the organization’s biggest missions: providing a welcoming environment for students who may be unsure where to find a Taiwanese community on campus.

TCS is a place where first-years can become natural friends with upperclassmen, who offer guidance on managing the unfamiliar college experience. Both Lin and Liu echoed the importance of TCS on their first-year Harvard experience. “TCS was the first club where I made friends with upperclassmen,” Lin commented. “Finding upperclassmen whom I can feel comfortable joking around with and spending time with on a regular basis is truly something I cherish,” Liu added.

In addition to their strong on-campus presence, the TCS community extends beyond Cambridge. During breaks in the academic year, members will sometimes meet up in Taiwan to maintain the club’s “family” connections. In winter 2023, members met up with alumni in Taipei. TCS also connects with new pre-frosh in Taiwan, extending a warm welcome to the community over meals. Last year, they watched the New Year’s fireworks together in Taipei.

For many of its members, TCS represents a space where they are allowed to be themselves, comfortably. It’s a family where slipping into Chinese is commonplace, where anyone can sing along to Eric Chou, and where debates about the best drink to pair with aiyu jelly can get lovingly heated.

YOU CAN FIND AJAX FU '28 (AJAXFU@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WITH HIS TCS FAMILY AT THE ELIOT PRIVATE DINING ROOM ON WEDNESDAY NIGHTS.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TAIWANESE CULTURAL SOCIETY

Le Course Qui est Mon Course: Tales From Run Club

How a run club opened the door to a whole new world for me.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

It's 8:30 p.m. on a Tuesday, and I'm dodging pedestrians and street signs on Rue de Bonne Nouvelle in Paris as I jog at a relaxed pace. Suddenly, the runners around me speed up, and I find myself sprinting down the road, passing neighbors at a speed I didn't think was possible after running nearly 5 miles. I feel euphoric—like I could run another 5 miles—when just as quickly, I've reached the end point of this run: Baldoria Pizzeria. I exchange high fives with the other out-of-breath runners and devour the free slice I'm entitled to for showing up and running. This is Foodrunners Club, a hot, new run club based in Paris.

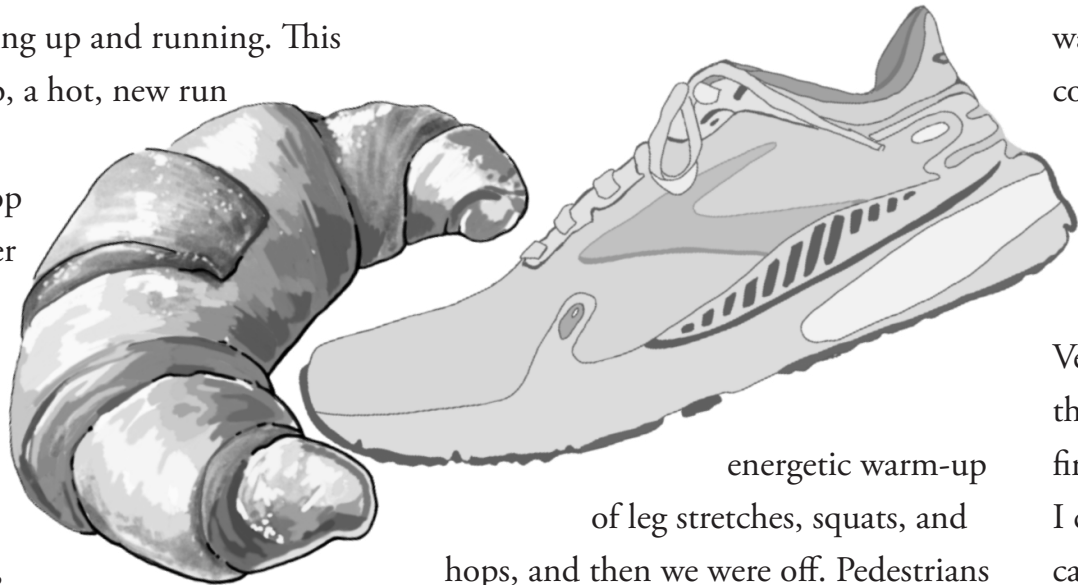
One of my top goals for my semester abroad was to join a local club or sports league. I knew weekly meetups would offer me a sense of community, new friends, and another way to practice French in the real world. Plus, I love to stay active, and club sports have been a staple of my time at Harvard. Unfortunately, there aren't many lacrosse leagues in Paris, and I never heard back from the squash club I reached out to, so I had to look elsewhere.

After hearing about my idea to plan a run tour of the best croissants in Paris, one of my friends in my program sent me a TikTok of Foodrunners Club. I was intrigued immediately. The club promised biweekly 4–5 mile runs, each ending with free food from a new restaurant or boulangerie in Paris, plus the chance to meet people and continue the party at nearby bars after evening runs. It sounded perfect. Too good to be true. For better or worse, I was not alone in this sentiment. I ended up #286 on the waitlist the first time I tried to sign up for a run. Devastated, I set an alarm to be ready to sign up the following week. When I secured my spot, I felt like I had won the lottery.

After I hopped off the Metro, I had fifteen minutes to make

an eight-minute walk, so I peppered in some high knees, leg swings, and hip openers on my stroll over to the restaurant. At first, I wasn't sure if I was in the right place until I saw dozens of twenty-somethings clad in running gear, packed into a tiny restaurant. The air buzzed with conversations between old friends and newcomers shyly introducing themselves. I explained countless times that I was an American here for one semester to everyone I met.

At 7:45 p.m., the head of the club ushered us outside for an



energetic warm-up of leg stretches, squats, and hops, and then we were off. Pedestrians scurried out of the way and cars stopped at intersections to let us—a pack of 100 some people—run by. I felt an odd sense of pride as onlookers took a video or we waved to another run club. We were running, and people noticed. Pride turned into gratitude as we reached the Seine and glimpsed the Eiffel Tower. I could not believe I was running along the Seine with views of world-renowned monuments on a random Tuesday.

Five miles later, we were nearly back to the pizzeria. I finished strong with a sprint that left me feeling accomplished and ready to keep running. I had not run five miles in a few months, so I was stoked that I still had it in me, and then some.

Beyond the awe of seeing the Eiffel Tower and the satisfaction of pushing my physical limits, I was also surprised by the music that blared from the speaker clipped to someone's backpack throughout the run. At least four out of five songs were American throwbacks, tracks I'd danced to at middle school socials and prom. There also was a good number of Spanish songs. As I sang along to "Hips Don't Lie" with a girl who, in fact, *did* "come from Colombia," I was

reminded how globally connected our world has become. Paris is an international city, and my experience with this run club reflects that.

Outside of Parisian pastries, the run club has tried pizza, empanadas, kebabs, and other global cuisines. It offers a snapshot of the diverse culinary scene in Paris, introducing participants to new favorite spots. As I've learned in my Paris history class, the city has a strong and vibrant immigrant community. As I see and try restaurants from every continent on a single walk in my neighborhood, this part of Paris comes to life.

Both the run club and the city of Paris attract people from all around the world. On one run, I was surrounded by this diversity. To my left was a girl from Venezuela, and to my right was a guy from the Netherlands. I had never realized I could find the diverse international experience I craved when coming abroad without catching a flight to another country. Whether in run club or elsewhere in Paris, each person I talk to offers a unique perspective—I feel like I have learned so much about the world from a month of being here.

While studying abroad, it's easy to stay in an American bubble. After all, my program is American, and my friends are American, so it takes an intentional effort to meet true French people. After putting in the effort by running a few miles and introducing myself to strangers at the run club, I can confirm that the effort is worth it. Making new friends from all around the globe is awesome, and it teaches you so much about how different people live life and their views on the world. I chose to study abroad so that I could learn about and explore a new part of the world. No matter how international Harvard is or how many free two-week trips it can send you on, a semester in Cambridge can never immerse you in a new culture the same way that a semester abroad does.

FRANCES CONNORS '26
(MARYFRANCESCONNORS@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) PLANS TO RUN THE
CAMBRIDGE HALF MARATHON...EVEN
IF THERE'S NOT A CROISSANT AT THE
END.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26

Harvard Can Wait: Study Abroad Before It's Too Late

Why more students should leave the Harvard bubble and study abroad.

BY HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26 AND MIA WILCOX '28

At the start of the semester, just a week after winter break, two friends sat in Bluestone Lane deep in conversation about studying abroad. One, a junior who had just voided her final opportunity to study abroad for the spring, admitted to feeling unsure about whether she would come to regret the missed opportunity. Her uncertainty sparked a deeper reflection on Harvard's study-abroad culture and the opportunities that would arise in the coming years. It seems that at Harvard, and generally speaking, few—if any—regret taking the leap to study abroad, yet those who don't often wish they had. So why is studying abroad not a more established part of Harvard's culture?

The infamous 'Harvard Bubble,' that invisible force that seems to confine Harvard students to the Yard and Harvard Square, is one of the key things first-years are warned of at the start of their time at Harvard. For the average Harvard student, it feels like a massive obstacle to cross the Anderson Memorial Bridge into Boston, let alone the Atlantic Ocean to another country. Students feel pressured to make the most out of all eight semesters on campus, taking advantage of the countless academic and extracurricular opportunities on campus. Yet, seizing the opportunity to study abroad provides the perfect excuse to break out of this bubble.

Central to Harvard's reluctance toward studying abroad is a culture of deep-rooted FOMO, also known as the "fear of missing out." But what if we flipped this mindset? Instead of fearing what we'd miss at Harvard, we encourage students to try and reframe this way of thinking. Perhaps, we should all be

having FOMO on the once-in-a-lifetime experience of studying abroad.

Ivy Kargman's '28 sister Sadie Kargman '26 is spending her spring semester at the Sorbonne in Paris. "I think a lot of people at Harvard feel as though they worked so hard to get here and so they want to spend all four years here," Ivy commented, when asked why she thinks more people don't participate more in semesterly study abroad opportunities. "Sadie was very hesitant about going, just because she knew she'd be going alone," she shared. "I feel like junior year is a very formative year. So that's one of the drawbacks to going abroad. But at the same time, I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages."

The anxiety of missing part of junior year rings true for many Harvard students on the fence of studying abroad. However, those like Sadie are challenging this apprehension by viewing the glass-half-full of the unforgettable experience of studying abroad.

Relocating to an entirely new environment alone can be intimidating, and many students are not willing to take the leap that Sadie took. However, Ivy explained that despite the hesitancy and FOMO her sister may have initially experienced, the past few weeks for her have been transformative. In addition to meeting incredible, new people, Ivy shared more about her sister's cultural immersion: "She's going to fun dinners and going to museums, and is really immersing herself in Parisian culture."

"I definitely want to go," Ivy stated when asked if she plans to follow in her sister's footsteps.

The Harvard College Office of

International Education currently has 133 programs posted for semesters abroad, partnering with schools that have international campuses such as Middlebury, Columbia, and Syracuse. There is even an option for students to petition specific university programs if their desired one is not listed. With such a plethora of support and opportunities at our fingertips, it's a wonder more students are not jumping at the chance to go abroad.

Yet, even with all of these accessible opportunities, so many Harvard students still dismiss study abroad, insisting they'll travel after graduation rather than "waste" a semester away from Harvard. However, this mindset overlooks a crucial reality: the high-pressure and fast-paced environment we're immersed in at Harvard doesn't just dissipate after graduation. Instead, it shifts. Many graduates become just as consumed with securing the perfect job as they once were with keeping up at Harvard.

If you're not experiencing FOMO about missing a semester at school, chances are you'll feel it watching your friends secure jobs while you're frolicking in a foreign country. At that point, the pressure to prioritize career ambitions may outweigh the freedom to take time away. The first few years of post-grad is arguably a more essential time to be present than your junior spring as the time comes to enter the workforce. Really, there isn't a better time to go abroad than during college, where you are given a plethora of options and can meet students from other universities while immersing yourself in a language you are actively taking. Harvard will still be here waiting for your return.

If Harvard is about broadening perspectives, why not take that to the next level abroad? Granted, Harvard has world-class academics, influential connections, and a campus filled with talented and driven individuals. However, studying abroad has a variety of benefits that Harvard cannot offer. For one, it provides cultural immersion in a different country: new people, food, language, and norms to explore. Studying abroad offers the unique opportunity to foster a deeper understanding of the world and gain a more global perspective by immersing yourself in a completely different culture. Engaging with people from different backgrounds can expand empathy and enhance the ability to work in different environments.

Franny Connors '26 detailed the diverse range of people she has spent time with while studying abroad in the latest article in her column for the *Harvard Independent*, "A Broad, Abroad vol. 2." On a weekend visit to Madrid, she spent one day with two French expats, and the next with two Parisian girls studying abroad in Madrid.

Another appeal of studying abroad is the once-in-a-lifetime chance to live in another country with little responsibility beyond learning and exploring. Work, financial obligations, and life commitments post-grad make it much harder to spend extended time abroad and truly immerse oneself. Studying abroad presents a rare window to explore a different culture without the pressures of a career or family. Outside of college, there may never be another chance to experience a new country in such an enriching and immersive way with so few responsibilities. "Instead of stressing about how much work I have to do, I'm worried about making time to visit all the spots in Paris I have saved in Google Maps," Connors noted.

The biggest perk of studying abroad is how much easier and cheaper it becomes

to travel to other destinations. Plane tickets are practically the same price as two slices at Pinocchio's and hostels the price of three slices, combined with efficient public transportation that puts the "T" to shame, make weekend trips easier than ever. Instead of waiting for a time in life with enough money to travel the world, a time which may never come, studying abroad provides the perfect way to see new places while you're already halfway there.

Lastly, studying abroad is the perfect time to finally see what the Coriolis effect is all about—the reason moving objects go clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and counterclockwise in the Southern Hemisphere due to the Earth's rotation. Who wouldn't jump at the chance to see your toilet flush in the opposite direction? Take Connors' advice and see for yourself: "More Harvard students should study abroad during term time."

The endless opportunities that come with studying abroad became a reality for Kyle Mandell '25, who completed his semester abroad in spring 2024. Mandell, who is a Romance Languages and Literatures concentrator, spent his spring semester studying in Spain—studying through a joint program with Middlebury College and Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M).

"I didn't have a lot of friends that were planning on going abroad, so it wasn't on my radar freshman and sophomore year," Mandell said, echoing the effects of the abroad-phobic culture at Harvard. Nevertheless, after declaring a Romance Language concentration, Mandell reevaluated and decided to take the leap. He lived with a host family who exclusively spoke Spanish, giving him a complete immersion experience. "It was nice to have a home base in another country, because you

can feel isolated and far away," Mandell said when asked about a highlight of his homestay.

Mandell explained the initial shock of beginning the semester in a new country: "All of your friends are starting their semester at Harvard, and it's like, 'what am I doing here?'" With regards to FOMO, he echoed a piece of advice he received from a friend before embarking on his adventure: "She was like, you're not losing a semester at Harvard, you're gaining a semester abroad."

Despite the many fears and drawbacks of studying abroad, the benefits of diversifying your experience and putting yourself out of your comfort zone outweigh the costs. There is nothing *that* important at Harvard that one semester away would ruin, and regret is far worse than FOMO. Cultural immersion, the chance to travel with little responsibilities, and gaining the ease and accessibility to the whole world are all factors that make studying abroad an unparalleled opportunity to learn, explore, and grow in ways a traditional semester at Harvard simply cannot offer. So take the leap and step outside the Harvard bubble—there's a whole world waiting for you.

**HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26
(HEIDIHEFFELFINGER@
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND
MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)
ENCOURAGE MORE STUDENTS
TO CONSIDER STUDYING
ABROAD.**

**GRAPHIC BY JOYE
WINGARD '28**



IOP: Internationals of Politics

Why international students aren't (but should be) in American political discussions.

BY ELLA RICKETTS '28

To an outsider, the world of American politics might seem more like a brilliantly written SNL skit than a functioning institution. From the White House producing ASMR-style deportation videos to a billionaire worth more than the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of 140 countries running a government department, stepping into this political arena feels not just daunting, but straight-up bizarre.

It's no wonder that many international students on campus hesitate to get involved in one of Harvard's varying political spaces. Whether you are involved in one of the Institute of Politics' 16 programs, campaign in the community, or simply debate policy over lunch, the possibilities to engage in this realm are infinite. But even to me, as a Canadian—a kind of double agent who is only exposed as non-American when I pronounce the word “bag” (behg) or “pasta” (pass-ta)—the idea of joining any political conversation was initially intimidating. I was afraid of feeling underprepared to engage in meaningful debates or having my opinions deemed “invalid” as a result of my nationality.

In the end, both of these worries proved to be wrong. Not only do I plan to be a government concentrator at Harvard where these types of discussions are inevitable, but I have also participated in organizations like Harvard Political Review, Policy Program, and Harvard Public Opinion Project.

International students may be apprehensive engaging in American politics for several reasons. When I participated in the First-Year International Program (FIP), we received a list of controversial topics to tread carefully around when speaking with Americans. The list included key issues such as gun violence, abortion, climate change, and for some reason, evolution (alright, that one may have been in for giggles). Now admittedly, many students struggle with expressing their opinions on contentious

issues, not just internationals. According to a survey from the *Harvard Crimson*, only one-third of Harvard's last graduating class felt comfortable expressing their opinions about controversial topics during their time in college. However, for international students, the fear of saying the wrong thing in an unfamiliar climate is magnified.

While organizations and groups centered around American politics are always open to internationals, they sometimes lack the representation needed to encourage



students from outside the United States to join, something I've noticed within my own extracurricular involvements. Despite having a “World Section,” only four of the 36 board

members at the HPR, including myself, are international. Similarly in HPOP, just a handful of team members are foreigners. This isn't the fault of these organizations, as they can only select from their pool of applicants. If their membership happens to be predominantly American, then it is a reflection of interest—not organizational bias.

I recognize that being Canadian does give me a distinct advantage within American political spaces. While others are navigating the complexities of switching languages, my greatest difficulty is figuring out which Dunkin' order most closely aligns with my usual Tim Hortons order back home. Yet even for native English speakers, American political terminology can be puzzling. A liberal doesn't quite mean an advocate for private property and individual freedoms. A Republican isn't necessarily a supporter of a republic. The Electoral College isn't a place where people study. Even the party colours—yes, I spelled colour with a ‘u’ on purpose—don't align with that of many nations. In the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand, for instance, red represents the primary centre-left party while blue is used for their conservative party.

Moreover, most international students

haven't taken an American government or history class, raising concerns about whether or not they have sufficient knowledge to participate effectively in political debates. Evidently, there is some truth to these beliefs. Internationals might struggle to engage in conversations where familiarity with the Constitution or other founding documents is imperative. They may not know what the Bill of Rights is, how Medicaid and Medicare function, or why the Second Amendment exists (that one still perplexes me). Still, internationals bring something to the table that Americans on campus don't: what it's like to live beyond this nation's borders.

Armed with a lens of objectivity, internationals can analyze political situations with fresh viewpoints, unshaped by the same national loyalties that influence our American peers. Internationals also grew up in various geographical, political, and cultural environments, allowing them to make contributions that extend past domestic policy issues. My own class of 2028 hails students from 94 different countries—meaning there are 94 varying perspectives not captured by the American student body. It's time for us to use those experiences and pool our ideas together to shape politics in an impactful way. If an American ever scoffs at you for not knowing an U.S.-specific fact, ask them to name your country's leader. Chances are, they can't. And to be honest, I probably couldn't either.

So to all internationals, don't be afraid to join a discussion or political organization that piques your interest. We need your worldly perspectives to challenge assumptions and enrich campus dialogue. Finally, to my dearest American friends, remember to welcome your international peers into your political space—you may be surprised by what you learn.

ELLA RICKETTS '28 (ERICKETTS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A GUEST WRITER FOR THE *INDEPENDENT* AND A NON-RESIDENT ALIEN FROM THE SO-CALLED 51ST STATE.

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27



Turkey Germany Malaysia
Canada Iran Kuwait

China
Jordan
Netherlands
Mexico
Vietnam

Indonesia
Peru
Saudi Arabia

Hong Kong
Ghana
France
Israel
Colombia

United Kingdom
Singapore
Russia
Mongolia
Nepal
India
Brazil

Bangladesh Ecuador
Greece Italy Jamaica
Nigeria Philippines
Panama South Korea
Switzerland United Arab Emirates
Kenya

Oman



di Arabia, ndon, re, Pakistan, ia Norway, dan Japan

Thoughts from New Quincy: Learning How to Connect the Dots

Examining how setbacks shape us.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

My Harvard career began with failure. Feeling unmoored as I arrived on campus, I threw myself into trying out for the College's varsity squash. In high school, squash wasn't just a sport—it was a defining part of my identity, and within weeks of arriving on campus I was training relentlessly—running sub-five-minute miles, working out tirelessly, and sacrificing nearly everything for a dream that felt like reclaiming my past glory. Yet, despite all that, in early November, I was cut.

At that crushing moment, I stumbled upon Steve Jobs's 2005 Stanford Commencement speech. His speech is centered around three stories about connecting the dots, love and loss, and death. In his fifteen-minute address, Jobs goes on to explain that every experience—whether a random failure or a moment of joy—plays an integral role in shaping our lives.

Jobs's "connecting the dots" story illustrates how seemingly unrelated, disconnected events come together when viewed in hindsight to reveal a coherent narrative. In his tale of love and loss, he acknowledges that deep passion and the pain of letting go are both essential to personal growth. And finally, when he speaks about death, Jobs confronts our mortality, urging us to live each day with authenticity and courage, unburdened by the fear of failure.

After I failed to walk on freshman year, I woke up each winter morning feeling lost. That feeling of disorientation stayed with me. When sophomore year began, I refused to let go of my dream of playing for the team and naively tried out again. This time, I put in even more effort—spending almost all my time eating well, working out, and staying as fit as possible. Squash is one of the most physically demanding sports I have ever played, and that fall, I was completely obsessed. Yet again, after tryouts ended, I didn't make the team. As Jobs says, sometimes the dots don't seem to connect until much later—and sometimes in the moment, they don't seem to be aligning at all.

Even though my parents and friends tried to warn me of the slim odds, the rejection still felt as devastating as the first go-around, if not worse. At the same time, it felt like the walls around me were crumbling as I was forcefully relocated to the Quad, away from all of my friends, and rejected from the squash community I had longed to be part of. However, I was trying to chase an idealized life that I wasn't even sure I wanted.

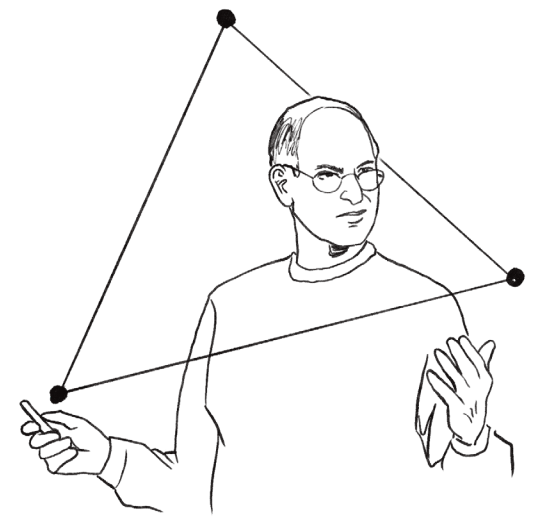
That spring, I came across an April 2023 article in the *Independent* by former vice president Carli Cooperstein '24 titled "The

Power of Uncertainty." She urged readers to view unpredictability and setbacks not as dead ends, but as raw material for creative reinvention—the same raw material Jobs celebrated in his speech. His stories combined with Cooperstein's article remind us that every experience, no matter how painful, plays a role in shaping our future. Getting cut and being told that you are not good enough can be painful in the moment, but Cooperstein and Jobs reminded me that these events happen for a reason, and perhaps one day, I'll look back and understand the connection.

Jobs's words pushed me to see my journey in a new light. "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life," he proclaimed. His message urged me to see that every setback—every rejection on the squash court—wasn't a failure, but simply a dot in a larger picture. While squash felt like my entire life in high school, I was in a new chapter now—one that demanded I expand my horizons. Now at one of the most resource-rich institutions in the world, I learned to embrace not just exciting opportunities and brilliant professors, but also the setbacks that came with growth. My failures, painful as they were, were not dead ends; they were the first stepping stones leading toward discovering something far more important.

Nearly failing Math 21a is another perfect example. I came to Harvard confident in my STEM abilities—buoyed by my sister's success in Human Developmental Regenerative Biology and my self-image as a "good math student" from high school. However, after one grueling semester of five punishing STEM problem sets per week, that confidence shattered, and I no longer loved what I was doing. My love for math and science, once a core part of my identity, evaporated, allowing me to pivot to the social sciences. Once again, I was chasing someone else's dream. I realized that while I enjoyed learning STEM, it was not something I truly loved, and in a place filled with sharper, more passionate peers, that difference mattered. Shifting completely away from STEM felt like a massive gamble at the time, but one that I think has paid off. As Jobs wisely noted, you cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward.

Jobs's words helped me frame my failures when it felt like the walls around me seemed to crumble. His decision to drop out of college, pick up a calligraphy class, and later revolutionize typography on the Mac teaches us that what appears random and risky at the time may be the very foundation for future innovation. Similarly, my failures—both on the squash court and in the classroom—have shaped my Harvard experience to one that is much better than it would have been. Not making the squash team was



one of the biggest blessings of my Harvard career as it freed my time to meet friends and pursue what I love outside of the classroom, a lesson that took me three years to realize.

Of all of Jobs's insights, his closing remarks on death remain among the most powerful sentiments I've ever encountered—I've rewatched that segment hundreds of times. He poses a simple yet profound question: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?"

If the answer is "no" for too many days in a row, something must change. This challenge to reassess my daily life struck a deep chord, urging me to confront routines and dreams that no longer served me. Leaning on my high school identity, one of squash and STEM, was never how I was meant to define myself. Instead, it took time to realize I should pivot toward a life defined by what I truly want to do, rather than by the pursuit of someone else's ideal.

I've come to see that knowing life is finite isn't something to fear—it's a reminder to live fully and honestly. Death is the one destination that none of us can escape. As Jobs elucidates, it clears out the old to make way for the new, and one day, we too will be cleared out. So don't waste the limited time that you have. As Jobs says, "Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become."

At its core, Steve Jobs's speech has helped me reframe my mind and tackle the challenges before me. His words remind me that failure is not a dead end, but a series of dots waiting to be connected into a narrative that is uniquely my own. It is easy to feel discouraged by setbacks, to see them as evidence of personal shortcomings rather than as steps toward growth. But if we shift our perspective, failure becomes a force that shapes us, refines our purpose, and opens doors we may not have otherwise considered. I truly encourage anyone, regardless of how lost or overwhelmed you may feel, to reflect on how failure has shaped you. If you allow yourself to sit with it, to learn from it, you may find that what once seemed like an ending is the beginning of something greater.

LUKE WAGNER '26 (LUKEWAGNER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27

A Tale of Datamatch Troubles

One writer's attempt to end her search for love.

BY THE HOPELESS ROMANTIC '28

By the time Valentine's Day rolled around, there were no anonymous notes slipped under my door and no bouquet of roses from a secret admirer. It seemed there was only one plausible solution to save my first Valentine's Day at Harvard: Datamatch.

Datamatch is a Harvard-invented matchmaking service. It started as a solution to Harvard students' annual loneliness; it has since grown to encompass over 30 campuses. Their website explains: "Datamatch was founded back in 1994 by some Harvard students who decided that February was just much too sad of a time in Cambridge... Datamatch has become a Valentine's Day tradition, with tens of thousands of students annually signing up every year for fun questions, new connections, and free food (yes, sometimes there is such a thing as free lunch)." To the outsider, it might seem that Datamatch and Tinder are one and the same. Isn't Datamatch simply a glorified Tinder, with a few more claims of compatibility and testing?

Nonetheless, I was curious. I began to fill out my profile: I selected my favorite photos of myself before highlighting my love for country music and the outdoors. After thirty minutes of contemplation, I felt assured that a cowboy boot-wearing poet would certainly match with me. Was the love of my life sitting across the Yard in his dorm bed, staring at his computer screen?

Checking our inboxes became a nightly routine for my roommate and me, as we stressed over the "vibes" of our profiles and not-so-jokingly discussed what we would do if no one matched with us. Would our egos recover? Would we say we only engaged in Datamatch "for the plot?" Either way, we both were excited about the possibility of finding our special someone.

I woke up on Valentine's Day, curious and anxious about my matches. Listed below my profile, there were eight possible suitors for my date—sadly not one of them was a country music fan. I perused each boy's profile, hitting "match" on likely prospects, waiting for them to like me back. It appeared after liking six profiles, only two out of six potential matches found me enticing. I took the initiative and reached out to them first. Let's call this match, for the sake of anonymity, "Mr. J."

Mr. J and I agreed that we should meet up. He offered a date suggestion: The Dough Club, 3:00 p.m., Feb. 15. My stomach turned

over until our date. With my sunglasses perched on the bridge of my nose, I attempted to appear nonchalant. There he was, Mr. J, standing outside of The Dough Club. Our eyes met, and our date began. (Do not worry, dear readers. I did inform Mr. J that I was doing an article on my search for love for the *Independent*, and he seemed unbothered by my journalistic pursuits.)

Mr. J and I selected our donuts, and he insisted on paying for my coffee—a true gentleman. After ordering, we decided to take our conversation (and sweets) to the Smith Center, where we sat and shared our fun facts, and in true journalistic fashion, I interviewed him. I asked him the real question: "What were you looking for on Datamatch?" Mr. J replied, "I was looking for love...and food." He informed me that food was the main reason he was there—a sentence every girl wants to hear.

Then, we talked about dating apps. I revealed that I use them, and learned his experience was quite the opposite. Mr. J explained, "I don't usually do dating apps, so I thought, 'Okay, there's an incentive here.'" Apparently, the appeal of free food was all Mr. J needed to push him into the field of dating—an all too familiar feeling.

He admitted that he didn't put much effort into this profile, marking a drastic difference from my detailed profile. We discussed dating app controversies, and I inquired about whether or not he was on dating apps. "If [he was] 20 and single, certainly," was apparently the only reason Mr. J would engage in good old-fashioned Tinder.

Before we veered into our Harvard intros, I asked Mr. J the question that had been lingering in my mind: "Would I be considered your type 'out in the wild?'" Mr. J gave me the answer I was hoping for: "Yeah, yeah."

Our date went fairly well, with my constant attempts to make him laugh and hopefully break the ice a bit more, as we both seemed a little uncomfortable and awkward. It was fairly successful, as we giggled over how our love for reading books competed with the lack of time a college student has—our tight schedules overpowering our hobbies. As the date slowly wound down, I pulled out my last stops to make him laugh—poking fun at myself. Unfortunately, after my initial questions, the date only lasted about 20 more minutes before Mr. J told me that

he should get going.

Before he left, I had two final questions.

With the fear of self-depreciation looming over my head, I asked the two questions no girl wanted to know at the end of a first date. "What would you rate our compatibility on a scale from one to ten?" When Mr. J gave me a nervous smile and sucked his teeth, I knew I wasn't going to get the answer I was hoping for. To maintain my journalistic honesty, I prompted him, "Be brutally honest, it's okay." Mr. J reluctantly answered, "Maybe like a four or a five."

It only went downhill from there. Despite the temptation to skip my final question—given the blow to my ego—I knew I had to ask.

With a forced smile, I asked, "Would you be interested in another date? Be completely honest, it's okay."

Mr. J let me down easily. "No... no," he said, laughing to break the awkward tension. I laughed too. Maybe Mr. J was right—we aren't that compatible—but a thirty-minute date on an otherwise quiet Saturday afternoon still brought me joy and eased the seriousness of the second semester. For a half hour, I could ignore my p-sets and worries about life after graduation—all I had to focus on was making the boy sitting beside me laugh. So thank you, Mr. J, for

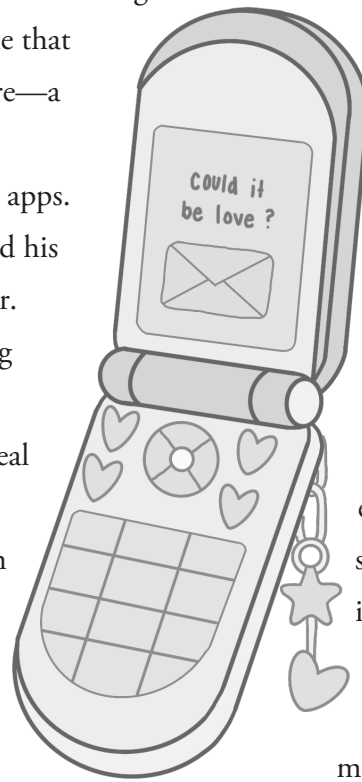
reminding this Hopeless Romantic that life isn't so serious, and even Harvard students have first-date jitters. We make quite the pair—two first-years, both looking for love and free food.

While I didn't meet the love of my life on Datamatch, who's to say he isn't still out there? Heck, maybe he's even reading this article, thinking, "This girl seems kinda cool." I'm still waiting for my fairy tale, but I don't think I'll find him on Hinge or Datamatch.

P.S., even Harvard students are looking for their special someone, although they only admit their hopes to their p-sets. Maybe we all should explore our internal romance a little more, and let our emotional economists take the backseat in our love lives. It's too soon to stop daydreaming, so till next time, Datamatch—maybe that one will wear cowboy boots.

THE HOPELESS ROMANTIC '28 HOPES TO RELATE TO A LOVE SONG, VERY SOON.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26



News and Views: Ban the Books

It's time to end the sports gambling degeneracy.

BY RAUNAK DAGA '25

Since being legalized in 2018, sports gambling has swept the nation at a breathtaking speed. In 38 states, plus Washington, D.C., you can bet on anything—whether it's the Super Bowl, a Valorant match, or how many hot dogs Joey Chestnut can inhale in ten minutes. In the world of sportsbooks, there's a market for everything.

With a 14,700-word opinion, the Supreme Court galvanized the world of sports betting, striking down the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1992 and delegating the permissibility of such gambling to each state. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, just Nevada and Delaware offered regulated sports betting, and only approximately one percent of the U.S. population had access to legal sportsbooks.

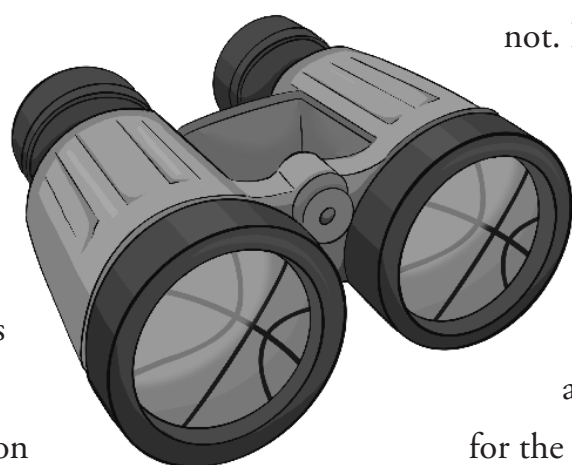
However, the Court's decision led to a rapid shift in this landscape. Most states capitalized on the decision, with proponents of legalization citing the economic benefits of tax revenue and job creation as obvious incentives to launch legal betting markets. Massachusetts, for example, reported \$94 million in tax revenue from sports betting in 2023. Moreover, a recent study conducted by the Legal Sports Report observed that operators have generated \$40 billion of "lifetime gross revenue."

But sports gambling economics are a zero-sum game. Put simply, it's impossible for the three players—the taxman, the sportsbook, and the gambler—to all win. And sadly, research suggests that it's the low-income gambler who stands to lose the most.

In states where sports gambling has been legalized, researchers Hollenbeck, Larsen, and Proserpio found that credit scores have dipped an average of 0.3%, credit lines have decreased by 1.6%, and auto loan delinquency has

increased by 9%. Mowshowitz found that for every \$70,000 sportsbooks rake in from regular gamblers, society eats an expected \$200,000 loss in bankruptcy costs—a brutal 3-to-1 tradeoff that makes this whole system look less like entertainment, and more like financial arson.

And if that weren't bad enough, here's the most alarming finding: Tabarrok observed that legalized sports betting isn't just extracting losses from gamblers, it's slashing household investments by \$50 per quarter, whether they bet or



not. If \$50 per quarter seems scoffable, here's a quick reminder—that represents a 14% loss of annual income

for the average American household.

It's time to be real. Legalized sports gambling is nothing but a massive upward transfer of wealth, siphoning money disproportionately from the poorest of households straight into the hands of our gambling overlords. The industry's marketing and easy access preys on vulnerable populations, offering the false promise of easy riches and, in reality, contributing to financial ruin. This has become uniquely key as a recent survey discovered that around 20% of Americans have placed a sports bet in 2024, which was a 67% increase since 2023. Furthermore, the same analysis found that, of these gamblers, around 29% plan to increase the amount they wagered in 2025.

And the pain doesn't end financially. A study conducted by Kyutaro Matsuzawa at the University of Oregon found a troubling link between sports betting and domestic violence. In states where sports betting is legal, reported incidents of intimate partner violence increase by about 10% following an unexpected home-team

loss in the NFL.

Beyond violence at home, the surge in sports betting has unleashed a torrent of abuse towards the athletes themselves, with bettors lashing out when games don't go their way. A recent NCAA study revealed that one in three college athletes have received hostile messages from disgruntled gamblers, with 90% of this harassment occurring online. Professional athletes are also emotionally tired of the sports betting spurred degeneracy; Trae Young, Josh Hart, Malik Monk, and dozens of other NBA stars have alluded to being fed up with fan's emotional tirades. Things are reaching a tipping point, and Kevin Durant puts it best: "I don't fuck with y'all like that."

The legalization of sports gambling was truly a Trojan horse. We were promised a safer, modern approach to a shady, but truly American, pastime. Instead, we've built a relentless machine that not only extracts wealth from the most vulnerable, but also exacerbates contentious issues, such as domestic strife, while angering the professional athlete space. Even the gamblers themselves are struggling to reconcile with this almost inescapable habit. In April 2024, NBC News reported a dramatic increase in calls placed to gambling addiction hotlines as the promotion of sports betting persists.

The Supreme Court's 2018 decision opened the door to legal gambling, but states were under no obligation to throw it wide open for sportsbooks. It's time to reconsider. If legalized sports gambling continues to prove to be a net negative, then it's not just another vice that we endure—it's a policy mistake that enables one of the most disturbing infringements on financial, mental, and domestic health in recent memory.

RAUNAK DAGA '25 (RDAGA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS A GUEST WRITER FOR THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28

ARTS

“Rooted:” The Rhythm of Our Roots

The 37th annual Ghungroo show, “Rooted,” honored ancestral legacies and embraced South Asian culture through music, dance, and art.

BY RANIA JONES '27

What defines a home? Is it the soil where we are born and raised? Or is it the roots that weave within us?

“Rooted” marks the 37th year of Ghungroo at Harvard, an annual tradition that has grown to become the University’s largest student-run production. As Harvard’s premier showcase of South Asian culture and heritage, Ghungroo is not just a performance, but a love letter to South Asian and diaspora culture, blending music, dance, spoken word, skits, and visual arts. It embraces the enduring bond that ties individuals to their roots—cultural, familial, and ancestral.

This year’s theme, “Rooted,” explores connection and legacy, reflecting on the influence of ancestral experiences and the collective yearning to connect with our histories that can feel both immediate and distant. Ghungroo is the culmination of countless hours of dedication and passion from more than 300 members of Harvard’s South Asian community and broader student body.

“Rooted” was staged over three days at the Agassiz Theater in Radcliffe Yard, with four performances comprising an array of acts. The show featured eight skits, four spoken words, six musical performances, and 20 dance numbers, each a testament to the diversity and richness of South Asian cultures.

For the show’s executive producers, Aditi Kona '26 and Nurayn Khan '26, the task of organizing a show of this magnitude was no small feat. Their role encompassed all logistics beyond the creative aspects of the show, including marketing, ticketing, safety, and coordinating special guests. This year especially, they accomplished something special: three of the weekend’s four performances were completely sold out in advance, a testament to the show’s immense popularity and the intentional effort of the team behind it.

What did audiences experience at “Rooted?” Kona and Khan highlighted several exciting new additions to the show: “We’re seeing a bunch of new dances and bringing in acts that haven’t been done before. So like, Tibetan style.”

Throughout the show, viewers had the opportunity to witness acts that reflect the vast

cultural tapestry of South Asia. The theme “Rooted,” to Kona and Khan, means honoring ancestral cultures, whether from the “homeland” or the diaspora: “The show is just really about honoring so many aspects of the diverse cultures of South Asia, because there are just so many,” shared Khan.

The show is a celebration of the unique ways these cultures come to life in the contemporary world, from hip-hop-infused fusion dances to emotionally charged spoken word performances that reflect the individual experiences of performers.

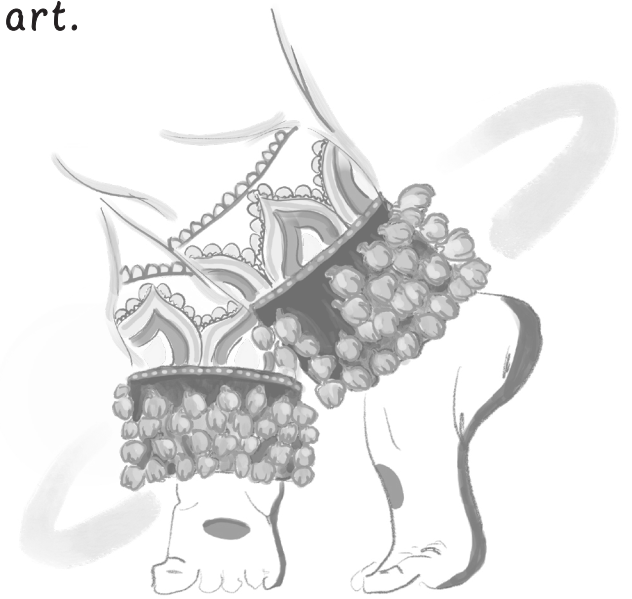
Behind the scenes, the producers faced the logistical challenge of managing a production with over 300 performers and a large, dedicated team. Kona and Khan found ticketing to be especially challenging. “I would say with any show where you have 300 performers and you need to sell out 3/4 times, which is what—1000 plus tickets with two producers—that’s going to be a challenge,” they said.

The two attributed much of their ticket sale success to the support of the Ghungroo Executive Board and the Harvard Undergraduate South Asian Association. “We couldn’t have done it without [the] SAA board. Super thankful for them,” the two expressed.

Kona and Khan also acknowledged the collective effort required to pull off a show of this scale, especially with the added complexity of being Harvard students with many other commitments.

Beyond the performances, “Rooted” also represented the sense of community and support within the South Asian community at Harvard. As Kona and Khan prepared for the show, they frequently found themselves reflecting on the personal connection that made the event so meaningful for them.

For Kona, seeing friends and fellow students support one another is a highlight: “It’s just cute to see people supporting their friends,” she said. Both producers were also particularly excited to welcome several generations of past SAA presidents to the show. “This year, we have four or five generations of SAA Presidents coming to watch the show and for [us] that’s just so exciting because we feel like they’re people that we look up to and



people that have been our mentors,” said Khan. “It is going to be so gratifying, just really being able to have that connection with the history of SAA.”

At its core, “Rooted” is about more than just music, dance, and entertainment. It’s an opportunity for Harvard’s diverse student body to deepen their understanding and appreciation of South Asian culture. Kona and Khan hope that audiences leave the show with a greater appreciation of the richness and complexity of South Asian traditions.

“I hope [viewers] take away an appreciation of the South Asian culture. I think a lot of the time in people’s heads, South Asian culture is just a couple of Bollywood songs they know, or maybe the Indian food at HUDS. But really, it’s so diverse,” Khan emphasized.

Kona added, “It’s so nice to see other people bringing in their own experiences and opinions and history, with creativity, with dancing, and combining with what we already know,” she said.

“Rooted” is about celebrating the shared human experience—the connections we forge with each other, with our backgrounds, and with the diverse cultures that shape who we are. After the show, I longed for nothing more than a hug from my Nanno, a dance session to the Dostana soundtrack with my mom and Khala, and my favorite gulab jamun and paneer biryani from my neighborhood Pakistani restaurant.

As the performers took the stage this past week, they all carried with them not only the weight of their legacies but the strength of a community united in a celebration of its roots.

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WROTE THIS ARTICLE LISTENING TO HER ALL-TIME FAVORITE BOLLYWOOD SONGS.

**GRAPHIC BY ANGIE LI '28
17 | FORUM**

The Faults of Human Connection

This spring's student production of *Gruesome Playground Injuries* presented a raw and emotional exploration of the cyclical, faulty nature of relationships.

BY MARCEL RAMOS CASTANEDA '28

“*Gruesome Playground Injuries*,” written by Rajiv Joseph, is an unconventional play that blends heartbreak, pain, humor, and recklessness into the complex, lifelong relationship between Doug (former *Independent* Editor-in-Chief Andrew Spielmann '25) and Kayleen (Lauren Mei '27). Directed by Texaco Teixeira-Ramos '26, the show ran from Feb. 20–23 in the Loeb Experimental Theater, offering the audience an up-close experience of the flaws and fragility of human relationships. Told in a non-chronological order, the play explores key moments in their lives through both physical and emotional wounds.

The play begins in a school nursery, where the cavalier Doug meets the sharp-witted Kayleen. Doug bears a fresh cut from riding his bike off the roof, while Kayleen is nursing a stomach ache. When Kayleen asks why he did it, Doug gives his recurring answer: he doesn't know. Her curiosity leads her to ask if she can touch his wound, and though hesitant, Doug agrees. Although the play unfolds across different stages of the characters' lives, Spielmann and Mei skillfully embody the shifting emotional states of each phase, capturing the full evolution of their relationship. Their chemistry becomes evident as they draw the audience into moments of unspoken longing, frustration, and emotional tenderness, fostering a deep sense of genuineness.

Despite just being an introduction to the characters, this first scene establishes crucial dynamics that persist throughout the play. First, it reinforces Doug's belief that Kayleen has a healing effect on him, reflecting his deep physical and emotional attachment to her. Additionally, Doug's remark that “girls don't get scars” foreshadows a recurring theme in their relationship—while Kayleen is often positioned as the caretaker, attention is primarily given to Doug's physical injuries, leaving Kayleen's emotional pain overlooked.

The physical set was minimalistic, consisting of two chairs, a screen, and a changing rack where the actors transition between scenes in full view of the audience. This choice creates suspense as viewers anticipate how each set and costume change will shape the next act. Moreover, the simplicity of the set places more emphasis on the characters and their evolving relationship. Notably, the costumes used in previous scenes were not placed back on the rack—a subtle hint to the idea that eventually, the toxic cycle would end, and the characters would reach a healing place.

Most productions of this play emphasize the romantic relationship

between the characters by including kisses in certain scenes, which are used to convey their bond. However, Teixeira-Ramos sought to present a more universal message and chose to remove those romantic elements. “I felt that the characters were more spiritually connected than necessarily romantically, and so I wanted to sort of remove those instances of very clear romance to take the emphasis away from this being a romantic story and more of like a soulmate story,” she explained.

The lack of background information about the characters allows the audience to relate to them more deeply, fostering a sense of empathy. Their struggles are not unique; rather, the play serves as a reflection on the challenges and pain many have faced at some point in life. The title itself is an oxymoron—while “*Gruesome Playground Injuries*” may suggest an element of humor, the play explores heavy themes such as suicide, depression, and sexual assault.

The play follows a chronological structure with two timelines separated by 15 years. It jumps between scenes where Doug and Kayleen are eight, then 23, then back to 13, and so on. While it seems as though their relationship evolves and grows more complicated with age, this constant back-and-forth instead emphasizes their unchanging characteristics. Doug and Kayleen will always be Doug and Kayleen.

The title “*Gruesome Playground Injuries*” can be interpreted as a reflection of their cyclical dynamic—forever trapped in a pattern established from the moment they first met. Doug continuously suffers irrational “playground” injuries, while Kayleen remains the caretaker, tending to his wounds while silently battling her own pain. Throughout their lives, Doug disappears for years until he inevitably returns to Kayleen for help with another injury.

One of the play's most critical scenes occurs when Doug asks Kayleen to use the razor she harms herself with on him. She refuses, insisting that it's completely different when inflicted on someone else. Doug responds, “*I'm not someone else; I'm you.*” This moment encapsulates the idea that Doug and Kayleen are emotionally and physically bound to one another—a theme that Teixeira-Ramos sought to emphasize. “That was a very big picture of their relationship and part of the reason I pushed away from a definitively romantic interpretation. I wanted to explore the idea that they are two sides of the same coin,

constantly drawn back to each other out of an inherent need,” she explained.

After 30 years of a relationship marked by mis-timing, the final act brings the play full circle. This time, Doug is in a wheelchair, weary of always being the one who disregards his own well-being. When Kayleen reaches out to touch him—upholding his long-held belief that she could heal him—he rejects her. At this moment, it seems that Doug has finally broken the cycle of pain and codependency.

As the play concludes, Kayleen reminisces about a memory at the playground, pulling the audience back to the beginning of their relationship. This ending leaves us with the hope that the characters reached a healing place in the relationship and were able to make peace with the past.

The state of the relationship between Doug and Kayleen can be seen as a reflection of their physical and emotional injuries. As the timeline progresses, these injuries become more severe and often life-threatening. The stripped-down, raw nature of the play allowed the audience to fully immerse themselves in the experience, deeply feeling the emotions of the characters throughout the 80-minute performance.

The sound and lighting design played a crucial role in reinforcing the themes throughout the play. Sound cues like the middle school dance music, playground ambiance, and the beeping of a heart monitor not only set the scene but also symbolized memory, trauma, and the fleeting nature of each moment. Meanwhile, the lighting marked transitions in time and emotion—soft, warm tones evoked childhood innocence, while colder, harsher lighting emphasized the weight of their trauma. Together, these elements brought each scene a heightened sense of emotional ambiance.

This production of “*Gruesome Playground Injuries*” was, as described by Teixeira-Ramos, a “very ephemeral emotional experience in the theater.” The brilliant and poignant performances by Spielmann and Mei captured the essence of the play's central theme—that while we may feel trapped in our own patterns, time enables us to reach a place of peace and healing.

MARCEL RAMOS CASTANEDA '28
(MRAMOSCASTANEDA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)
WILL TRY TO WATCH MORE PLAYS FROM NOW ON.

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27

A Guide to Jules Sanders's Room Decorations

The *Independent's* resident tastemaker proves that his dorm room is not depressing.

BY JULES SANDERS '28

Last weekend, my friends pointed out to me that they had never seen my dorm. My room—a Canaday hallway single that cannot imaginably exceed about 120 square feet—isn't somewhere I spend a lot of time, largely on account of the (probably wrong) size estimation I just provided. Yet my friends' assertion that my room was "just kind of dead" is in no way an accurate reflection of the time I have spent decorating what space I do have and perfecting the aesthetic I'm going for, which probably amounts to, like, at least an hour. And I deserve credit for that. So, I've decided to list various objects that are in my room and illuminate how they all come together to form something greater than the sum of their parts.

Poster of Different Kinds of Trees

We're starting off strong here. Above my bookshelf rests a minimalist "Poster of Different Kinds of Trees," nestled in a similarly minimalist plain brown frame. Sugar pine, western hemlock, western larch, grand fir, douglas-fir, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, noble fir, and western white pine—I definitely knew those all from memory and didn't just have to stand up to check. I think my favorite is the noble fir. There's something so regal about it—much like my dorm room.

Big Keyboard

Mom and Dad, thank you so much for the big Yamaha keyboard you got me for my birthday! I have loved melodramatically playing "WaitingRoom," "Night

Shift," and "Washing Machine Heart" on it every night, even though I myself do not relate to the lyrics of those songs. There's just one issue: it is so large that it actually hangs over my desk, and I can no longer use said desk for non-piano activities. Again, I love the piano and I am so thankful that you got it for me. It's just that every time I try to take notes on seventh-century Byzantine missionary activity from my room, I end up totally distracted by the prospect of dishing out some languid chords and depressing vocals at 4 a.m. for the rest of the Canaday community.

Box that Contained Big Keyboard

Okay, so when I unboxed the big piano (and, in the process, accidentally cut my fingers with the keys I was using to slice open the tape), I was left with a huge cardboard box that still takes up about one-fifth of my entire floor space. I want to throw it out, but I genuinely don't know how to dispose of it. I have tripped over its frayed edges at least four times, and yet each time that happens, I think to myself how the process of getting rid of the box would probably be more work than just stepping over it until somebody else can figure this whole mess out. Even now, the words printed onto it glare at me from the floor: "Handle with care. Fragile. Thank you." That's a bold statement coming from the

box, considering it has not handled me with care.



Lots of Books

There's something so gratifying about having a shelf full of books you've read the past semester—"Ulysses," "Daisy Miller," "Frankenstein,"—and, of course, "Wicked." I bought "Wicked" right when I returned to campus in January, solely for the purpose of doing a bit about it being the most intellectually stimulating book I've read this semester. Unfortunately, the timing for said bit has never been quite right, so I'm just doing it now to get some utility out of the \$30 the Coop charged me for it. Fair warning for any other Jonathan Bailey fans thinking about reading the source material: the book is way more disturbing and gross than I thought it was going to be.

Lamps

"Um...what else?" I wondered aloud as I surveyed my room for more content. What's cool about one of the lamps in my dorm is that it actually has a little container for pens and whatnot.

Power Strip

I just had to plug in my laptop and saw my power strip. There are currently three chargers plugged into it: a USB-C for said laptop, a Lightning connector for my phone, and some other type of wire I don't know the name of for the Big Piano.

Hair Dye

Just kidding, haters! My dirty blond is au naturel.

JULES SANDERS '28 (JULESSANDERS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) RECEIVED CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR HIS LAST LISTICLE AND WOULD LIKE MORE ATTENTION.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27

A Trip to Berlin: Willkommen to the Kit Kat Klub

What to know about MIT Cabaret's standout performance of the controversial musical.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

As one of Harvard's closest neighbors, MIT has long drawn students to its campus for academics, events, and even the occasional frat party. Alongside the school's many academic attractions, the MIT Theatre Guild stands out for its impressive productions. This season's performance of "Cabaret" was no exception.

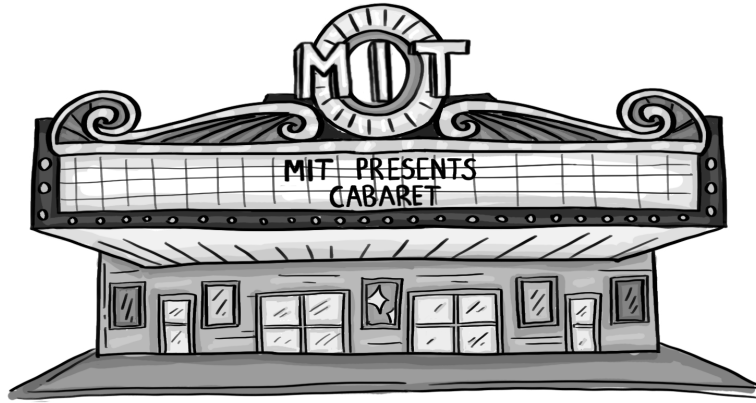
"Cabaret" is a musical set in 1930s Berlin—a city caught between the glittering excess of the Weimar era and the looming shadow of political unrest. The musical is notorious for leaving audiences feeling a mixture of awe and distress due to its combination of bold choreography and iconic songs with heavy themes.

The Emcee, played by Michael Mandanas, guided the audience through the events of the musical, encouraging them to leave all their troubles behind as they entered the Kit Kat Klub, a real nightclub located in Berlin. Clifford Bradshaw, a struggling American writer played by Reidyn Wingate, found himself doing just that when he stumbled into Sally Bowles, a British cabaret singer and dancer at the Kit Kat Klub, played by Michaela Purvis.

"Cabaret takes us to 1930s Berlin through the lens of a group of people who either think they're removed from the events happening around them or think they will not be affected. Specifically, Jewish and queer folks," Purvis said in an email interview with the *Independent*, also a co-choreographer of the show.

She explained that this season, the MIT Theatre Guild's version of "Cabaret" stood out even more than usual, and not just because of the breathtaking costumes or unforgettable performances of iconic songs. The extraordinary aspect of their production originated from the backgrounds of the cast and crew.

"I think a new level was added from the lived experiences of our cast and directorial staff. Black



Cliff and Black (mixed) Sally have an even larger set of issues than their usually white counterparts on larger stages," Purvis wrote. This added a new level of depth to their performance, as the actors were able to use their personal experiences to create unique representations of their characters.

Purvis believes that she was able to use the physical and mental aspects of Sally's character to do just that, making her Sally different from most past productions. She also used her own story to explain how she related to Sally. "Many of my experiences as a Black, queer woman in the current climate really resonate with the issues during that period. Almost frighteningly so," Purvis shared.

The social and political issues Purvis discussed slowly came to light throughout the show, and as Purvis pointed out, many of the characters try to remove themselves from what is happening as Berlin descends into political madness. At this point, the city was teetering on the edge of collapse—Nazi Germany was on the rise and nearly every character in the musical was in danger of becoming a target.

Due to this fraught historical moment, the musical also ends up addressing some heavier themes, including antisemitism, racism, homophobia, and abortion. These themes can be controversial. "These were and still are people's lived realities," Purvis said, reminding us that it is necessary to include these themes to depict the most meaningful and accurate show possible.

When asked about audience reaction to these themes, Purvis discussed the various responses that she received. "I saw some older folks shaking their heads over the promiscuity of some of the Kit Kat Klub numbers, but I chuckled at that. And I could hear hesitant

clapping at the end of Act I. And sniffles and hiccups for the title number," she said.

That emotional response was no accident—the supporting cast and ensemble infused the production with energy, seamlessly transitioning between humor, seduction, and dread. Standout moments included the performance of "Money" and the chilling rendition of "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," which shifts from a simple folk tune to a haunting warning of the rise of the Nazis. Every scene was gripping, brought to life by breathtaking costumes and the cast's unwavering commitment to the story's emotional depth.

The orchestra played a crucial role in shaping this atmosphere. Their performance was phenomenal, elevating each moment with music that perfectly complemented the action on stage, even in the eeriest of scenes. As the show neared its conclusion, the audience was drawn deeper into the haunting reality unfolding before them.

Purvis discussed the scene where that haunting reality reaches its peak. When asked if she believes the audience got the take-home message of "Cabaret," she replied, "I knew it hit every night when the last cymbal crashed and the lights went out...and it was horrifyingly silent."

This version of Cabaret was more than just a musical—it was a reminder of the fragility of freedom and the danger of complacency. With striking performances, bold choreography, and an unflinching embrace of the musical's darker themes, the MIT Theatre Guild's "Cabaret" delivered an unforgettable production.

The MIT Theatre Guild's next production will be "A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder." The Guild's website details information about their upcoming performances.

OLIVIA LUNSETH '28
(OLIVIALUNSETH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.

GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO HWANG '28

SPORTS

Lost In Translation: The Life of an ESL Student-Athlete

The art of juggling sports, school, and a new way of life.

BY LAETTIA CARTELLIERI '27

The challenge of balancing elite sports and academics is hard enough, but with language barriers, cultural confusion, and fast-paced professors to the mix, it becomes a whole new game. For international student-athletes, adapting to life in the United States comes with plenty of unexpected hurdles, both on and off the field.

On the Harvard field hockey team, “ESL” has become the catch-all excuse for communication mishaps. Whether it is a teammate blanking on the English word for something mid-sentence, or just nodding in silent confusion, hoping for the best—these “ESL” moments define countless unforgettable interactions each season. Lara Beekhuis '27, a sophomore from the Netherlands, first encountered this language barrier when she asked her teammate if she had a blue eye.

“They are actually quite brown,” her teammate replied.

Confused and wondering if she now had only a singular, sole eye and its color had changed, her teammate looked at Beekhuis confused; Beekhuis looked back, equally dumbstruck. Beekhuis waited for confirmation that her teammate was okay, while her teammate worried if Beekhuis had developed an undiagnosed vision problem.

It took a few moments to unveil the mystery: Beekhuis was referring to her teammate’s bruised eye—her black eye—but from a direct Dutch translation: blue.

These ESL moments are not just felt by those who grew up in countries where English is not the primary language. Milly Cooper '27, a rower from Australia, shared that coming to the United States meant adjusting to an entirely different set of expressions, despite speaking English her whole life. “One of the first days on campus, I told my teammates I’d grab my runners before heading out. I quickly realized I’d be saying sneakers for the next four years. Let us not talk about ‘thongs’—back home, that just means flip-flops. That was a quick adjustment too,” Cooper said.

Furthermore, coming to Harvard can provide a wake-up call on the quality of your English. Andreas Savva '27, a sophomore soccer player from Cyprus, said, “I thought in Cyprus [my English] was much better.”

For the record, his English is great. But the fact that this thought lingers in the back of his mind speaks volumes about the added challenges international athletes face daily. Even native speakers face that underlying doubt when keeping up with

rapid-fire conversations, decoding American slang, or wondering if what they just said made sense.

Of course, moving to a new country isn’t just about mistaking black eyes for blue ones—it’s about adapting to an entirely new culture. From understanding why Americans say “How are you” but don’t expect an answer, to navigating the unwritten rules of small talk, cultural adjustments go far beyond the classroom and the field: they even make their way into the kitchen.

Staying hydrated is key, especially as a student-athlete, so Saava underscored how pleasant of a surprise it was coming from Cyprus when he found out that water in the United States is in fact, free. With that, he highlighted that the incredible portion sizes made it seem like the United States might have cracked the code for free lunches as well—not just free water. He then emphasized that just as he was beginning to understand the food and water situation, the scheduling of meals, completely threw him off. “Back home, dinner is at a civilized 8 or 9 p.m. In the U.S., by the time I am finished with lunch, Americans are already halfway through their dinner with the dining halls opening at 4:30! Now if I eat with them at 6, I’m hungry again at 11 or 12... I am basically forced to go get some Felipe’s,” Savva said.

Language mishaps and cultural confusion aside, one of the biggest hurdles for international student-athletes is the academic transition. Writing essays in what is a second language—though it probably feels like a second language for everyone at some point—is daunting enough. Discussion-based seminars add another layer of pressure, especially when you are translating your thoughts in real time, only to have the conversation move on before you have even figured out if your phrasing made sense.

The fear of saying something slightly off or using an awkward phrase can make even the most confident student hesitate. On the field, a quick glance at a teammate can clear up any confusion—but this strategy doesn’t quite translate in the classroom. “There have honestly been countless moments where rather than ask for clarification, I just smile and nod along in class, hoping context clues would eventually fill in the blanks,” Savva admitted.

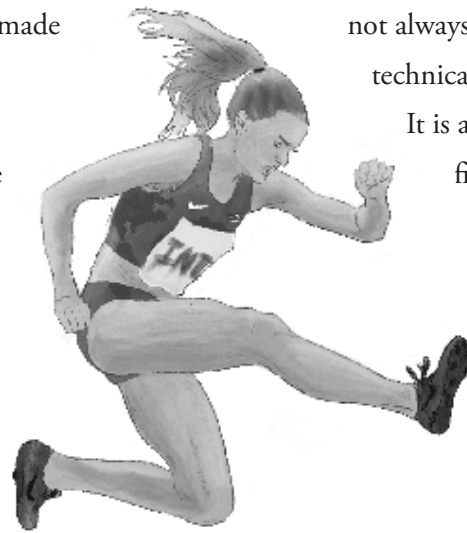
All of this begs the question: knowing

everything they do now, would they go through it all again? Factoring in the stress of moving countries, the struggle of decoding English, the demands of a Division I training schedule, and the inevitable late-night burrito runs, the resounding answer is a bit surprising. Beekhuis, Cooper, and Savva all agreed that despite the challenges, the experience is worth every struggle. Internalizing a new language, embracing a different culture, and immersing themselves in the American sports mentality have shaped them in ways they never expected. Beekhuis shared advice for incoming international student-athletes: “Just try to constantly learn and grow. No one is judging you. Take risks, and laugh off the mistakes.”

The experiences of this select group of Harvard students highlight a truth that often gets lost in the rush toward achievement, especially at Harvard. Real success is not about having all the answers from the start—it is about staying open to the process of figuring them out. Perhaps that is why their answers were immediate and unwavering when asked whether they would go through it all again. In the end, the struggles, the missteps, and even the occasional ESL moments are not just part of the experience; they are the experience itself.

For international student-athletes, the process isn’t always smooth, but this discomfort is exactly what fuels their growth. It forces players to develop adaptability, problem-solving skills, and a level of mental toughness that others don’t encounter until much later in life. In many ways, this journey is a reflection of what it means to truly push beyond one’s comfort zone—something every student, not just international athletes, can learn from. Growth is not always neat, success is not just about technical skills or academic performance.

It is about embracing uncertainty, finding humor in failure, and remaining open to continuous learning, even when things feel overwhelming.



*Home sick Lost Confused
Juggling Scared
Culture Shock*

LAETTIA CARTELLIERI '27 (LCARTELLIERI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ADMITTEDLY ALSO AN ESL, FROM TIME TO TIME.

GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27

What the Puck?

Canada maintains its title as the premier “hockey country” after victory in the NHL’s 4 Nations Face-Off.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT '28

This past weekend, hockey fans were left wondering if a stadium rattled with antagonizing boos during a national anthem could be a secret pre-game ritual to guarantee victory. The United States defeated Canada 3–1 deep in enemy territory on Feb. 15 at the Bell Centre in Montreal. However, when defending their honor on the homefront on Feb. 21, the United States fell short 2–3 in overtime during the NHL’s 4 Nations Face-Off tournament championship at TD Garden in Boston.

A unique opportunity for NHL players from the United States, Canada, Finland, and Sweden to represent their nations, the tournament was a marketable success. The series ended in a historic matchup that broke ESPN network streaming records for the largest audience of any hockey game or non-NFL event with a colossal 10.4 million viewers. Given its substantial traction, the game was called “bigger” than the Stanley Cup playoffs by Canadian defenseman P.K. Subban. The rematch between the United States and Canada, a rivalry like no other in the world of hockey, even drew the attention of both nations’ leaders: President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau personally issued support to their respective teams.

Although it was a 4 Nations Face-Off, the other two teams’ performances became practically insignificant due to the infamous international hockey rivalry between the United States and Canada, which is now exacerbated by growing political tensions. Finland fell flat with a 1–2 record in the tournament, while Sweden had an admirable showing, taking reigning team Canada into overtime and defeating the United States 2–1 on Monday.

Before the first face-off between Canada and the United States, the political tensions surrounding the tournament fueled competitive banter between fans. As soon as the game started, viewers

were entertained by three fights in the first nine seconds. Two of these were carried out by the Tkachuk brothers, Matthew and Brady, who have become infamous for their old-fashioned, physical play. Their distinctive style emulates their father, hockey icon Keith Tkachuk, who played in the NHL and four times for Team USA on the Olympic stage.

Having galvanized American fans to crash the Harvard Canadian Club’s screening of the game, I was extremely relieved when the United States defeated Canada in the semi-finals. Not only did the win spare me a great deal of torment, but it also secured the team a position in the final match of the tournament. Canada’s 5–3 win over Finland to advance to the championship sparked anticipation for the final game of the series—another rematch of the age-old rivalry. Take arguably the most intense fans of any professional sport, add an element of national pride into the mix of their competition, and you have just brewed the perfect conditions for a cinematic match-up.

As expected, both teams came out with a dynamic start in the first period, and even to an untrained eye, it was apparent a close match was ahead. Canada drew first blood as Nathan MacKinnon of the Colorado Avalanche scored a goal from the top of the slot. MacKinnon was a valuable asset to Canada, scoring four goals in four games; after the tournament, he was named the overall MVP. Despite their initial deficit, announcers reassured supporters of Team USA that they had given up the first goal in every previous game in the tournament. Sure enough, fan-favorite Brady Tkachuk of the Ottawa Senators followed shortly with a game-leveling wrist-shot goal before the end of the first period.

Tkachuk’s teammate from the Senators, Jake Sanderson, opened the second period with a snap shot goal, providing the U.S. with a one-point advantage. The only power play of the match occurred during the second period. Team USA was successful in their penalty kill;

just as the predominantly American crowd began to regain energy and confidence in their team, Florida Panthers Sam Bennet equalized the score for Canada with a wrist-shot goal.

The third period was characterized by 20 minutes of anxiety-inducing chaos as both teams battled to keep the puck out of their net. Despite the unease, a moment of true hockey magic occurred as fans erupted into chants of “JOHNNY HOCKEY... JOHNNY HOCKEY” in dedication to Johnny Gaudreau. American NHL star and previous player of the Columbus Blue Jackets and Boston College, Gaudreau was tragically killed earlier this year. His name filled the arena as the game came to the end of regulation play.

In the high stakes of overtime, there seemed no better player to secure the title for Canada than the captain of the Edmonton Oilers, Canadian national treasure, and poster child of the NHL, Connor McDavid. After a series of phenomenal saves from the St. Louis Blues goalie, Jordan Bennington, the game came to a cinematic end as McDavid scored the picture-perfect game-winning goal for Canada in OT. Whether you’re a fan of McDavid’s or not, this legendary moment was an undeniable demonstration of his generational talent that further cemented his position as a legend in hockey history.

This tournament provided a glimpse at what the NHL is calling the next “golden era” of hockey on both national and international stages. Fans and players have developed an exhilarating dynamic, both in and out of arenas that continues to grow the game. Whether you were lucky enough to secure tickets before they reached astronomical prices or you watched the game in a group of students huddled around a Macbook at Brain Break, the 4 Nations Face-Off series invited many into an exhilarating time for international hockey competition ahead of the 2026 Winter Olympics.

MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL HUMBLLY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT, AS A LOYAL MONTREAL CANADIENS FAN, SHE SELECTED THE WRONG TEAM FOR THIS TOURNAMENT.

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



Squat, Stretch, Sweat

An aspiring Pilates princess's guide to the classes of Cambridge.

BY ANTONIA M. SALAME '28

If your Instagram Reels Explore page looks anything like mine, then you are well-acquainted with the term “Pilates princess.” At least from my experience, a Pilates princess seems to be a frequent Pilates-goer who happens to own about 45 different pastel workout sets and always rocks a slickback. Over the past year or so, Pilates classes seem to have taken hold of the fitness industry, and Cambridge is no exception to this craze. With all the different options, how can you possibly deduce which pilates class reigns supreme? This past week, I visited three different locations around the Square so that I can help you choose your best fit.

First off, it's important to establish what makes a workout a slam dunk for me. I like hard classes. I know there is value in a good yoga class (and I could use more of this zen in my everyday life), but I want to leave the class feeling like I may collapse. Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between how much a workout class feels like an MIT frat and how much I tend to enjoy it. I want my classes to be high-energy and fun. Based on my criteria, here is how I would rank Harvard Square's Pilates.

Breathe Cambridge

I took Breathe Cambridge's Inferno Hot Pilates class at 7 a.m. this past Tuesday. My favorite part about this class was undoubtedly the music. Once they started playing “Maneater” by Nelly Furtado, I knew I was in for a treat. The studio was large, packed, and heated, providing an overall good vibe.

I appreciated that this class was easy to follow; none of the moves were confusing which allowed me to get straight into it. 25 seconds on and five seconds off is the name of the game at this studio, and I enjoyed the Tabata-style repetition. We performed mountain climbers, curtsy lunges, and squats; the class moved together in dance-like unison. There were cardio components and opportunities to incorporate weights to increase the difficulty. The music was loud and the high-energy instructor made this my favorite class I took this week. Compared to most Pilates classes I've taken,

Breathe is definitely higher intensity. I'd classify it as a sort of Pilates-HIIT fusion. A single class at Breathe is \$25, though they become more affordable if you buy in bulk. Luckily, Breathe offers a beginner's offer of 10 days of unlimited classes for \$30—it is worth checking out.

Corepower

We have all seen Corepower pop up on our For You page. The Corepower room is darker and more intimate than Breathe's and weights incorporation is built into the class.

I took the Yoga Sculpt class—one of the studio's higher-intensity options. The dim ambiance and sleek black weights made me feel like the Pilates princesses on my feed. We transitioned between poses in a distinctively seamless yoga flow format, incorporating weights for movements like squat pulses and lunges. The music was slightly less MIT-frat like compared to Breathe and there was a bit of a learning curve to get the hang of Corepower's yoga-esque exercises. Finally, this class was slightly less physically challenging than the Breathe class.

I had to hand it to the instructor, though. She repeatedly called us “Yogis” which made me feel pretty professional. This was undoubtedly a great class and I would take it again; it just did not hit my criteria in the same way that Breathe did. Corepower also offers a free, week-long unlimited class trial, so try them both out and decide for yourself.

Harvard Rec

I think we all downloaded the Rec app the first week of the fall semester and told ourselves we would take advantage of the free classes. If you are anything like me, that was a sad lie. However, I did venture to Hemenway to take a Harvard-sponsored Mat Pilates class this week. First of all, immense points to this class for being 100% free. The instructor was very nice but the environment was not very MIT-like; rather than a sweaty, clamoring, dark basement,

the quiet music and well-lit room gave this class a distinct air of calm. Unlike the other two classes, this studio was not heated. While a lack of heat made it feel like the workout was less intense, I could reenter society without scaring people on the street afterward.

Ultimately, I enjoyed that this class incorporated a Pilates ring and ball, making the workout feel unique and unlike something I could come up with on my own. We switched exercises often and there was not a lot of repetition which kept things interesting despite the lack of loud music. The moves were definitely lower intensity than the other two (no lunging, squatting, etc.) but I still felt the pilates shakes and got a good workout out of it. Overall, this was a good, standard Pilates class; my only tangible complaint is that I wish the music was louder.

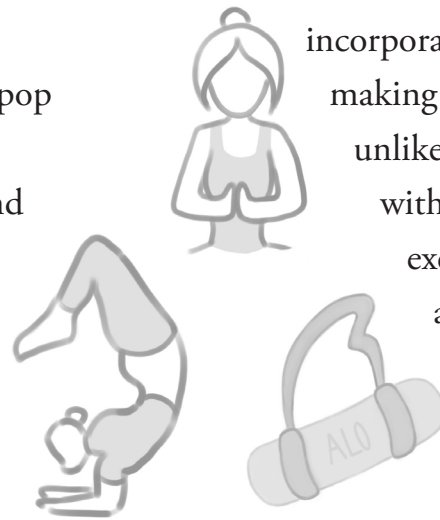
Honorable Mention: Rosie Graham

Pilates on Youtube

Truth be told, I did not do one of Rosie Graham's YouTube Pilates classes this week. There are only so many days in a week and too many problem sets to count. However, in the past I've found myself visibly shaking during Rosie Graham's Youtube mat Pilates series. I am almost always sore the next day. I was tempted to put this in the first place based on sheer convenience. The ability to hit play and take a Pilates class whenever it fits your schedule is seriously underrated. I would say Rosie Graham's moves are about as hard as Corepower's, though they have less of a yoga flow component. As long as I focus during my YouTube workouts, I get the same workout as I would from a studio class. While studio classes are more fun if you want that true Pilates princess aesthetic, Rosie Graham is perfect if you are on the go or looking to not break the bank.

**ANTONIA M. SALAME '28
(AMSALAME@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS SORE.**

GRAPHIC BY KELLY TUNG '27



COVER ART BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27
 LAYOUT BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27 AND RILEY CULLINAN '27

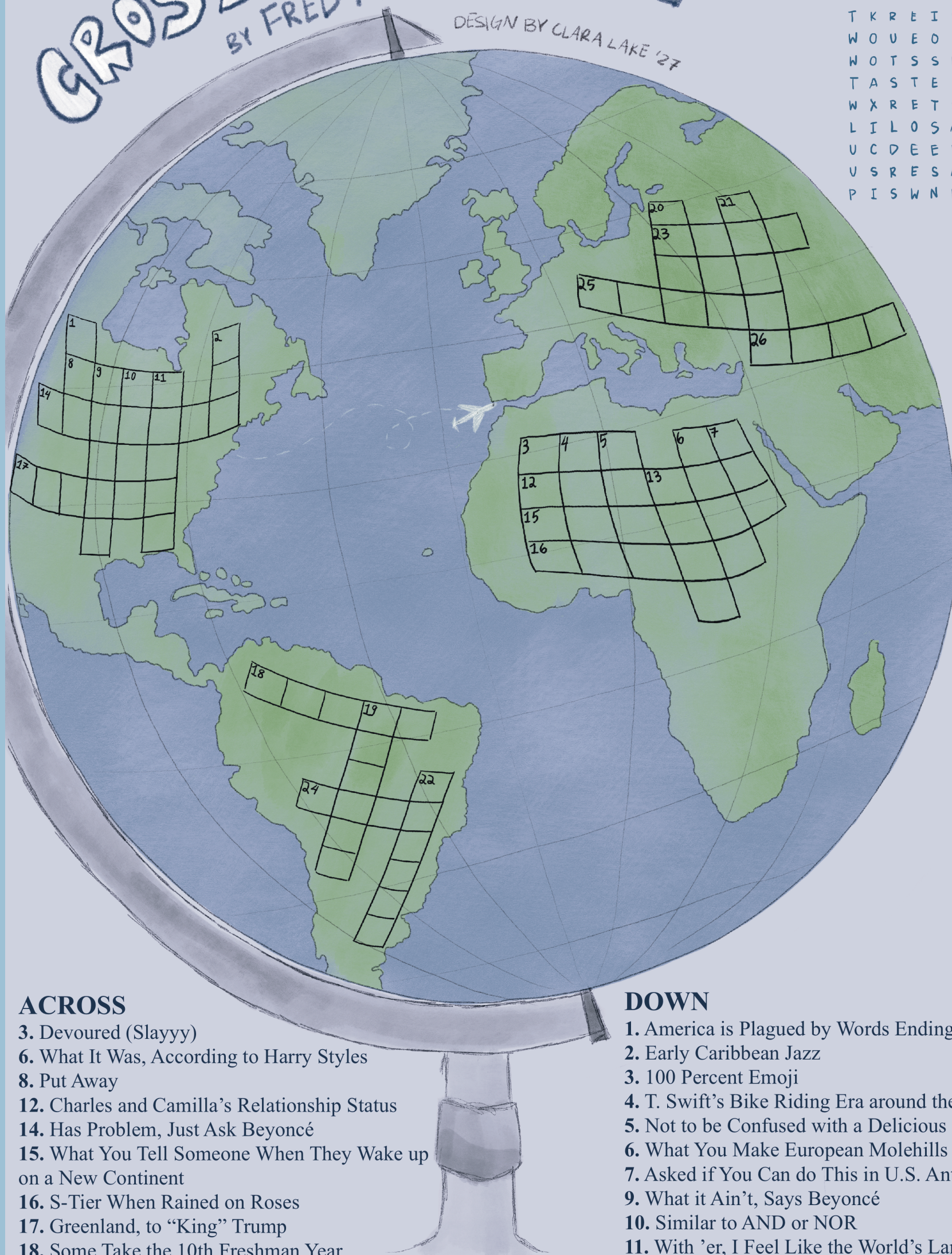
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CROSS the GLOBE

BY FRED KLEIN '28

DESIGN BY CLARA LAKE '27

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ACROSS

3. Devoured (Slayyy)
6. What It Was, According to Harry Styles
8. Put Away
12. Charles and Camilla's Relationship Status
14. Has Problem, Just Ask Beyoncé
15. What You Tell Someone When They Wake up on a New Continent
16. S-Tier When Rained on Roses
17. Greenland, to "King" Trump
18. Some Take the 10th Freshman Year
23. Replaces "A" in a Geography Parody of Not Like Us
24. Wendy Williams River Pun, Outs Husband
25. Purpose For Your Mouth Buds
26. Ship Off, Without its D

DOWN

1. America is Plagued by Words Ending in This
2. Early Caribbean Jazz
3. 100 Percent Emoji
4. T. Swift's Bike Riding Era around the Eiffel in July
5. Not to be Confused with a Delicious Greek Sandwich
6. What You Make European Molehills Into
7. Asked if You Can do This in U.S. Anthem
9. What it Ain't, Says Beyoncé
10. Similar to AND or NOR
11. With 'er, I Feel Like the World's Largest Research Library
13. This Guy has a Papal Due at 11:59 p.m.
19. Cradle of Humanity
20. Southeast Asia's Only Landlocked Country
21. Carole Baskin's Enemy's Animal of Interest
22. Succulent Land

Katie Merriam *Layla Charosovi*

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