

APRIL 10, 2025

HARVARD

VOL LVI, ISSUE 25

INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

MUNCHIES



CONTENTS

3. Weed Issue Coming Soon

by *Harvard Independent* Staff

4. Joining the Table: Harvard Food Literacy Project

by David Daniel '28

5. Biting Into Business: Harvard Square's Dessert Profile

by Sidney Regelbrugge '28

6. Hot Takes: Munchies Edition

by Calvin Frank '28

8. Democracy on the Brink: Technology, Reliability, and the Future of Democracy in Latin America

by Nashla Turcios '28

10. Welcoming the 2025 HUA Co-Presidents

by Meena Behringer '27

11. Bon App -Temps: The Art of Savoring French Meals

by Frances Connors '26

12. Food For Thought

by Mia Wilcox '28

13. Dazed and Confused

by Sir Lancelot

14. What's Your Munch?

by Clara Lake '27

16. Thoughts From New Quincy: High on Nationalism

by Luke Wagner '26

17. I Was Here

by Marcel Ramos Casta eda '28

18. A Case for Handwriting

by Frida L pez '27

19. Munchies vs. Michelin: Exploring the Art of Cooking

by Natalie Cooper '28

20. Dressed-Up Fries: A Mash-Up

by Natalie Cooper '28

21. Addicted To My Air Fryer

by Ilana Feder '26

22. Russell's Sprouts: Chocolate Peanut Butter Oat Clusters

by Alma Russell '26

23. Heff's HUDS Hacks

by Heidi Heffelfinger '26

24. Got Me Singing in the Shower

by Ben Kaufman '28

25. Calling All Artists!

by Rania Jones '27 and Sara Kumar '27

26. Sports Spotlight: Women's 4x400m Relay Team

by Olivia Lunseth '28

27. Sports Spotlight: Mason Langenbrunner and Joe Miller

by Jordan Wasserberger '27

28. Crossed? Word.

by Fred Klein '28

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.

For general or business inquiries, contact president@harvardindependent.com. Address Letters to the Editor, op-eds, or comments regarding content to editorinchief@harvardindependent.com. To subscribe to bi-weekly mailed print issues, email subscriptions@harvardindependent.com.

We belong to no one but ourselves.

MASTHEAD

EXECUTIVE BOARD

President: Katie Merriam '26

Editor-in-Chief: Layla Chaaraoui '26

Vice President: Luke Wagner '26

Managing Editor: Jonah Karafiol '26

EDITORIAL BOARD

News Editor: Sara Kumar '27

Forum Editor: Rania Jones '27

Arts Editor: Kayla Reifel '26

Sports Editor: Kate Oliver '26

Editorial Comp Director: Meena Behringer '27

Associate News Editor: Jules Sanders '28

Associate Forum Editor: Pippa Lee '28

Associate Arts Editor: Sachi Laumas '26

Associate Sports Editor: Alejandro Sanchez '26

Game Designer: Han Nguyen '27

Copy Editor: Calvin Frank '28

Copy Editor: Caroline Stohrer '28

Copy Editor: Raina Wang '28

BUSINESS BOARD

BOPs Comp Director: Keith Hannon '27

Business Director: Mia Tavares '27

Operations Director: Ella Bikoff '27

Advertising Director: Tomas Arroyo '27

Programs Director: Breagh Bridge '27

Programs Director: Cate Buchan '27

Publishing Director: Anya Govil '28

Subscriptions Director: Whitney Ford '28

Community Chair: Anthony Goenaga '26

Community Chair: Caroline Bae '28

Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Frida Lopez '27

MULTIMEDIA BOARD

Multimedia Director: Patrick Sliz '27

Website Director: Daniel Rosario '27

Video Director: Ryan Irving '27

Social Media Director: Natalie Blanchfield '28

Photo & Podcast Director: Jordan Wasserberger '27

DESIGN BOARD

Design Editor: Christie Beckley '27

Design Editor: Riley Cullinan '27

Design Comp Director: Clara Lake '27

STAFF WRITERS

Mir Zayid Alam '25, Kya Brooks '25, Taybah Crorie '25, Hannah Davis '25, Aidan Fitzsimons '25, Andrew Spielmann '25, Adedoyin Adebayo '26, Andrew Christie '26, Gauri Sood '26, Ilana Feder '26, Heidi Heffelfinger '26, Santiago Kelly '26, Andrew Morrissey '26, Maddy Tunnell '26, Nina Berkman '27, Sophie Dauer '27, Sophie Depaul '27, Lucas Cohen-d'Arbeloff '27, Ari Desai '27, Natalie Frank '27, Sophia Ghafouri '27, Jai Glazer '27, Denny Gulia-Janovski '27, Vincent Honrubia '27, Kaitlyn Hou '27, Gemma Maltby '27, Roberto Quesada '27, Christina Shi '27, Lucie Stefanoni '27, Ellie Tunnell '27, Wessal Bakry '28, Tyler Dang '28, Ajax Fu '28, Antonia Melina Salame '28, Mia Wilcox '28

BUSINESS & OPERATIONS STAFF

Jude Herwitz '25, Eliza Kimball '25, Mimi Koenig '25, Michael Oved '25, Aanya Afridi '26, Gary Zhan '26, Isabella Andrade '27, Ella Galova '27, Bautista Martinez '27, Nicholas McQuilling '27, Matthew Moore '27, Kyler Rno '28

DESIGN STAFF

Seattle Hickey '25, David Li '25, Annelise Fisher '26, El Richards '26, Reeve Sykes '26, Jenny Jia '27, Emily Pallan '27, Sophia Rascoff '27, Lauren Zhang '27, Miranda Chao Hwang '28, Allyson Xu '28

THE SUSTAINERS

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

MARK SHIELDS '70

JIM VASEFF '71

DAVID SMITH '75

RANDY BUCKLIN '82

MARK PELOFSKY '84

JULIE DAM '93

WILL RECKLER '99



The Weed Issue is coming...

Fill out the *Independent's*
anonymous Weed Issue
Survey, and look for the
results next Thursday,
April 17th



Joining the Table: Harvard Food Literacy Project

Expanding the intersection between food and the liberal arts experience.

BY DAVID DANIEL '28

Whether it be reunions in Annenberg, dining hall takeout, or a late-night run to Pinocchio's, food is a pervasive aspect of the college experience. But for some at Harvard, food is more than just a backdrop to busy student life—it's an entry point into deeper questions about sustainability, health, and community.

As a student-led initiative under Harvard University Dining Services that uses food as a lens for learning, the Harvard Food Literacy Project recognizes the unique importance of cuisine. From hands-on cooking classes to public speaker series and food system research projects, the FLP invites students to reimagine how they engage with what's on their plate—and how it got there.

At its core, the FLP focuses on four main topics: environmental sustainability, nutrition, food preparation, and food's relationship with the community. Each year from May to June, the FLP hires undergraduate fellows to represent their House or first-year community, attend weekly in-person meetings, and organize food education events. Fellows from each residential House plan events or personal projects each semester—anything from trips to Allandale Farm, where HUDS sources fresh produce, or workshops with local food entrepreneurs.

For FLP student captain Amarachi Nwogu '25, a senior in Lowell House concentrating in Integrative Biology, the FLP has been a four-year journey of exploration and impact. "It was actually the first organization I joined at Harvard," she recalled. "I was already quite interested in food and the environment, specifically issues of food insecurity and how that impacts [the] community."

Nwogu helps lead a team of students in organizing events, managing personal projects, and hosting educational programs to facilitate campus-wide dialogue around food.

"Over the years, I've put on quite a lot of events, but I think one of my favorites was a collaboration with the Little Crêpe Café," Nwogu said. On this trip, she learned the intricacies of crepe-making and hosted discussions on the nature

of operating a small business in the food industry. "I really enjoyed getting to talk to people in the food industry from our greater Cambridge community, learning how they are integrated parts of our community, and learning about creating a small business in general," Nwogu said.

The FLP's approach to nutritional education is intentionally interdisciplinary. Fellows and members are not required to already be interested in nutrition or agriculture in particular. Students interested in business, technology, sustainability, public health, or even cooking can all find a space to learn and grow.

In addition to public events,

FLP fellows can work on semester-long personal projects, often in small teams of up to three students. The

projects often involve digging deeper into issues systemic to the food industry, including food insecurity, agricultural sustainability, and cultural identity. "The FLP really encourages not only academic learning but experiential learning," Nwogu said.

Because the FLP is housed by HUDS, there are continuous opportunities for collaboration with staff and managers from dining services on personal projects and initiatives. "The food system is so integral to how we define our identities, our cultures... even how a geographic area could be defined," Nwogu shared, highlighting the importance of Harvard supporting programs like the FLP.

The FLP also connects campus dining to the broader Boston and Cambridge communities through Heat-N-Eats, a food recovery initiative that packages surplus food from Annenberg into balanced, microwavable meals for local shelters, residential hotels, and food banks via the nonprofit Food for Free. "These are meals that contain a protein, a vegetable, a starch, and they're packaged pretty professionally," Nwogu said.

Beyond these specific events and projects, on a larger scale, the FLP encourages Harvard College undergraduates to rethink

the way they view and relate to food on campus. Within the buffet-style setup of the Harvard dining halls, it is often difficult to make conscious eating choices in comparison to when a student would cook and prepare a meal themselves. "It's pretty easy to overlook the process of the system of food being prepared from being grown or raised, distributed, processed, marketed, prepared, and then consumed...I think we have the tendency to focus on just the consumption side," Nwogu added.

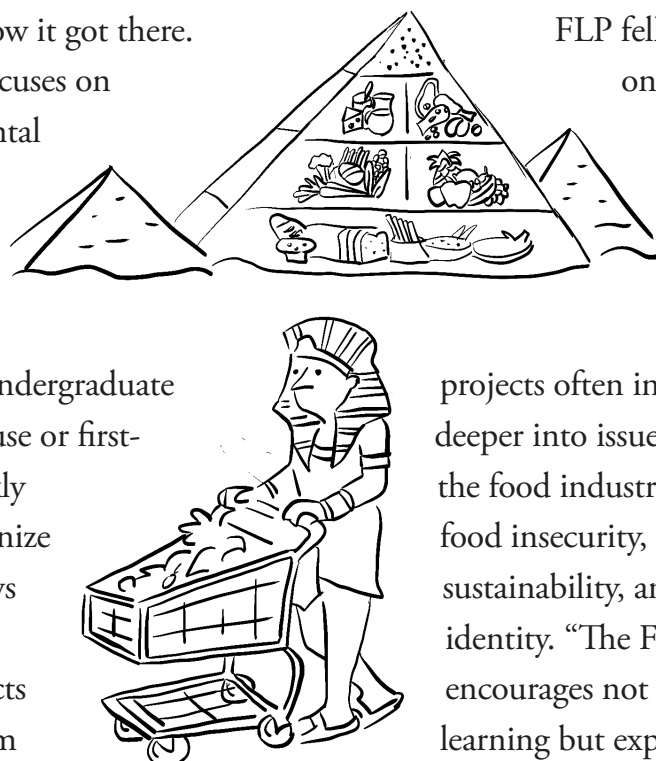
Nwogu emphasized that Harvard students in particular can benefit from the opportunity to engage more with the systems that feed us. "I think it's also an opportunity for Harvard students to learn more about HUDS and to actually engage with HUDS workers and dining hall staff," she said. "I've been able to get connected with the people who are so often behind the scenes."

Ultimately, the FLP hopes to demonstrate to its members and peripheral participants that, to fully engage with the liberal arts curriculum of Harvard, one must pursue didactic experience beyond the classroom. The FLP believes that understanding the complex process that food undergoes as it travels from farm to table will provide undergraduates with not only a deeper cultural and scientific understanding of food but a chance to better connect with the community both inside and outside of campus. Harvard's support of these programs ensures students can truly grasp this crucial part of the Harvard College identity.

Interested students can subscribe to *Eater's Digest*, a weekly newsletter of upcoming FLP events and campus food news, or attend any of the public speaker sessions. For those looking to take on a more active role, applications to become a fellow usually open in the summer for the fall semester. Freshmen can apply to be first-year fellows, upperclassmen can apply to represent their House, and there are also Food Recovery Fellow positions for students to lead the Heat-N-Eats volunteering program.

DAVID DANIEL '28 (DAVID_DANIEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY EMILY PALLAN '27



Biting Into Business: Harvard Square's Dessert Profile

Macarons, acai, and everything in between.

BY SIDNEY REGELBRUGGE '28

As you circle the Yard and journey through Harvard Square, you are likely to come across hungry Harvard undergraduates wandering about. While their bellies are already full from the dining hall menu, there is one craving that a college meal plan just can't suffice: the desire for a sweet treat. Harvard Square is known for dishing up a range of confectionaries—one of the hottest attractions is the recently opened SoBol, or the familiar favorite Le Macaron: French Bakery & Pastries. These flavorful businesses offer Harvard students and community members alike unique options for indulgence as they explore the Square.

Located at 5 John F Kennedy St., SoBol serves acai bowls, smoothies, and waffles. The Long Island-based company was originally founded in 2013, and it has since expanded across the country, including to Harvard Square this past month. SoBol aims to make healthy food more accessible. At its March 5 grand opening which featured a \$2 acai bowl deal, large crowds of hungry students and Cambridge residents lined the block.

"I think we sold over 500 bowls, and we were doing \$2 bowls, and I know there was a few people that did get two bowls because that was the max per customer," manager Meet Patel said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "If we want to go to a safe conservative number, let's just go...we had 400 people," he said.

Opening day saw the Harvard Square SoBol at a high point, and customer visits have been relatively consistent since. "It's been a little bit slower than that, you know," he said. "We were offering \$2 bowls, so of course [we] had the entire student body of Harvard show up, but in terms of sales, we're at a decent spot."

With sunnier days approaching,

Patel was excited to share what customers can expect from the location.

"On third-party delivery services, we're doing a bunch of specials right now where it can be pay \$15, get \$5 off, or DoorDash, we're doing something to buy a bowl, get a smoothie for free. I think it's Uber Eats. It's [spend] \$20, get \$5 off," Patel said. "If you're a member of the rock climbing gym upstairs, Central Rock Climb, we're doing a deal with them, where on Tuesdays they can get an \$8 bowl, and...10% off anytime," Patel added. Patel also mentioned SoBol's ability to work with any Harvard student organization interested in their options for catering or group services.

Between loyal patrons and tourists, the cafe sees plenty of business. And students from all of Boston's colleges may see familiar faces if they walk into SoBol, as the establishment primarily employs undergraduates. "They are all college students," Patel said. "We have a few people from Northeastern, some people from Harvard, one person from Lesley, one person from Suffolk, and we also have a few high schoolers from Cambridge Rindge & Latin."

Just across the street from SoBol is Le Macaron, a storefront that serves classic French patisseries. While they are famous for their macarons, the bakery also serves up luxurious gelato and other sweet treats. Originally, Le Macaron was founded in 2009 by mother and daughter pair Rosie and Audrey Guillem as the culmination of their dream to share their appreciation for French culture beyond the country's bounds through pastries. The shop did not become a franchise until 2012, but today, they serve up fancy goodies all across the country.

Ida Fladhammer '25, a Harvard senior and Le Macaron employee, shared

with the *Independent* the bakery's history. "[The Harvard Square Le Macaron location opened] Aug. 2, 2022... It is a franchise, it is based on a mother-daughter duo, and they made it originally for them."

Attributing the new influx of customers to the onset of warmer spring weather, Fladhammer expects a rise in attraction to the shop. "It kind of depends on the season. Our busiest season tends to be the summer season, so both when a bunch of students like coming to campus for commencement and students just generally like to go back to school," Fladhammer stated.

Such an increase in business inevitably also brings a shift in sales, oftentimes depending on the time of day. "I would say during the morning it is the pastries—those are really popular—and then more so in the afternoon, the macarons," Fladhammer said.

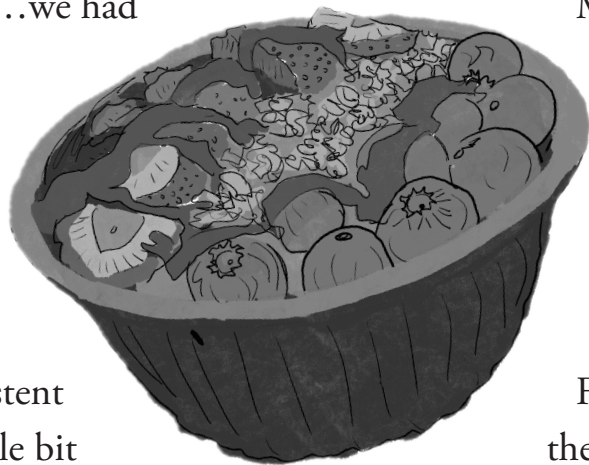
"I really like the basil ones and then the lotus blossom [ones]." The special season item is the Mon Chere, which Fladhammer described as a "cherry-chocolate macaron."

While Le Macaron is not currently offering promotional deals, it participates annually in the renowned Harvard Valentine's Day Datamatch partnership and offers a back-to-school deal in September.

Between Le Macaron, SoBol, and other sweet-treat destinations, Harvard Square has plenty to offer its community of college students and community-goers. Beyond the eclectic menus of these storefronts, these locations are also an opportunity for those looking to support local businesses and visit their classmates hard at work.

SIDNEY REGELBRUGGE '28 (SIDNEYREGELBRUGGE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS NOW DAYDREAMING ABOUT A SOBOL MANGO-PINEAPPLE SMOOTHIE.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27



Hot Takes: Munchies Edition

Harvard undergraduates share their food-related “hot takes.”

BY KALVIN FRANK '28

A few weeks ago, the *Harvard Independent* published an article asking Harvard students about their hottest takes. Many of the opinions shared ended up being food-related, with one first-year claiming that “HUDS banana bread pudding is pure fuego” and another student saying they’d “rather eat foods with Red 40 because...they’re more visually appealing.”

But what’s the reason for such disparate food preferences? According to a BBC article, personal flavor preferences derive from various factors, including the number of papillae on one’s tongue, genetics, and the flavors one was exposed to during development.

A simple walk through Harvard Square demonstrates this flavor diversity, with restaurants representing countless global cuisines. Harvard undergraduates come from various cultures and were thus raised on distinct flavors. Because of this, it is inevitable that there will be different tastes and distastes across the student body, some of which may raise eyebrows. After inviting students to participate in an anonymous survey asking for their hottest food takes, results revealed the following opinions:

1. Sausage and strawberry yogurt.

“Sweet and salty. Perfect balance in the mouth. A combination of textures like no other.”

— Anonymous '27

2. Cottage cheese and maple syrup at the dining hall.

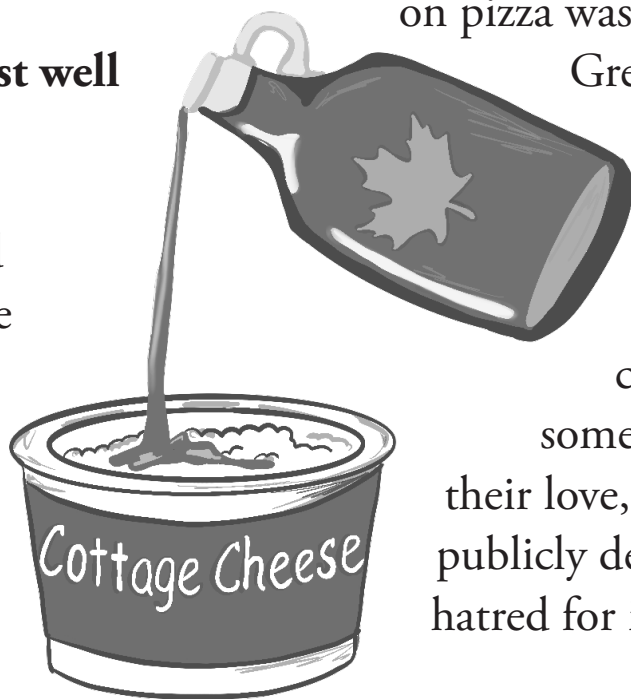
“Every time I make this, people look at me in disgust, telling me I’m nasty.” — Anonymous '27

3. Fries with mayo are better than fries with ketchup.

“Ketchup is too sweet.”
— Anonymous '26

4. A burger is best well done.

“I hate raw meat; it’s disgusting and makes me feel like I’m eating an innocent little animal alive.”
— Anonymous '26



5. Harvard University Dining Services (HUDS) is good.

Anonymous '27 did not elaborate on this. However, Niche gives Harvard food a B- rating for their campus dining options.

6. Peanut-butter-and-pickle sandwiches.

“Picnic + this sandwich + frolic = awesome.” — Anonymous '28

7. Pineapple belongs on pizza.

“It’s good.” — Anonymous '28

8. Kimchi and scrambled eggs.

“It’s the perfect savory and salty breakfast.” — Anonymous '26

9. Pickles are the best post-workout food.

Anonymous '27 did not provide reasoning. Yet, a sizable group of

runners swear by the effects of pickle juice on reducing cramps. Other research has discovered that pickle juice can relieve the condition after its onset.

10. Pineapple belongs on pizza.

The second take of this nature, yet Anonymous '25 likewise did not comment further. Pineapple on pizza was created by a Greek immigrant in Canada in 1954. Since then, it has stirred considerable controversy, with some proclaiming their love, and others publicly declaring their hatred for it.

11. Eggs and yams.

“It’s really good!” — Anonymous '25. It is pretty standard to find egg scramble recipes containing various vegetables, including yams.

12. I like Lay’s potato chips in vanilla yogurt (fly by).

Anonymous did not offer justification for this, but Lay’s does. Although slightly different from this combo, the company’s official website has a recipe for a potato chip sundae.

13. Sprite + lemonade + milk.

“It’s just milkis!!! It’s very good.”
— Anonymous '27

14. Chicken nuggets are great with ice cream.

“WENDY’S try it!”
— Anonymous '28

15. Chips with chocolate cake.

“It’s good.” — Anonymous
’28. Lay’s also has a recipe for chocolate cake with chips.

16. Cherries on pizza are fire.

“Bro, just try it, trust me.”
— Anonymous ’27

17. Cucumbers and brownies.

Anonymous ’27 did not provide more explanation. Upon research of the combo, closely related to cucumbers, zucchini brownies are a popular health food item with hundreds of online recipes.

18. Crisps (Chips) in sandwiches.

“It’s something I haven’t heard anyone at Harvard do. Yet.”
— Anonymous ’27

19. Apples and tahini.

Anonymous ’25 gave no reason. However, some do enjoy fruit salad with a sweet tahini dressing. People also use it to dip veggies in.

20. The best condiment to dip McDonald’s chicken nuggets in is honey—just straight honey, not honey mustard, and this only applies to McDonald’s chicken nuggets, no others.

“Because it’s delicious.”
— Anonymous ’25

21. Peanut butter & sriracha on a toasted bagel.

“HUDS special .”
— Anonymous ’28

22. Pasta and ketchup.

“It’s good.” — Anonymous ’27. Though seemingly unusual, this dish is quite popular in Japan and is called “Spaghetti Napolitan.”

23. Cheese doesn’t belong on a burger.

“It’s bad.” — Anonymous ’27. While it is classic to eat a burger with a melted slice of American cheese on it, 68% of the world is lactose intolerant, so most of the world cannot enjoy what is seen as the typical route of consumption.

24. Salad and banana.

“It’s soo good.” — Anonymous ’27. Although adding bananas is uncommon, many salad recipes call for adding fruit.

25. Cheese that’s not from a cow isn’t right (i.e., goat cheese, etc.).

Anonymous ’27 did not give a reason. Despite this opinion, the goat milk market has actually been growing quite fast in recent years. The cow dairy industry is also predicted to decline.

26. Ketchup in ceviche.

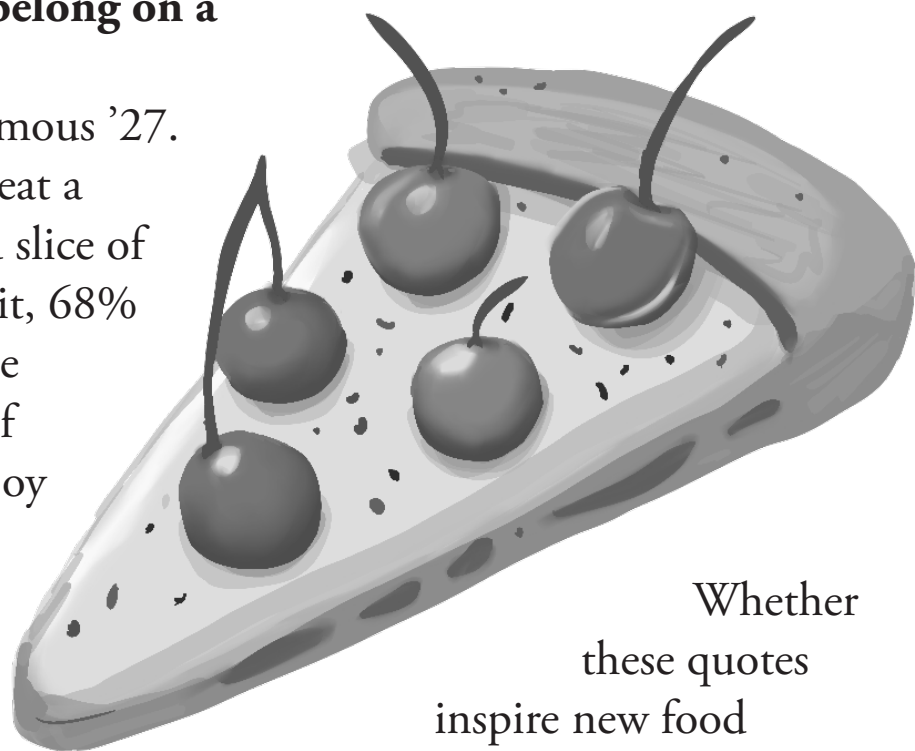
“Peruvians hate me.”
— Anonymous. Some recipes call for adding a dash of ketchup to ceviche, mainly ones that include shrimp, likely because it is similar to shrimp cocktail sauce.

27. Steak is bad.

Anonymous ’26 did not share why. The U.S. has the second-highest beef consumption per capita (behind Argentina). A study also found that 12% of Americans consume 50% of the beef consumed in the U.S.

28. Soggy Raisin Bran is the best cereal.

“It must be soggy until it’s mush.”
— Anonymous ’27



Whether these quotes inspire new food combinations or elicit disgust, there are inevitably many takeaways from these undergraduates’ unique flavor preferences; perhaps it’s the American obsession with condiments or students’ exploration of dining hall food combos. One thing is certain—our eating habits are quite different. Yet one common theme from these takes still emerges: the well-known combination of sweet and salty flavoring.

In an interview with Vox, Pastry chef and Top Chef alumna Malika Ameen explained this popular pairing. “Salt is a flavor enhancer, and when it’s correctly combined with something sweet, it creates flavor layering,” she explains. And when this flavor layering is achieved, the brain reacts positively, receiving signals from the flavor receptors caused by sensory-specific tastes. Ever wonder why someone would even think to dip sausage in yogurt? Well this is it. Stay experimental when it comes to food; it’s only biological.

KALVIN FRANK ’28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD EAT MOST OF THESE FOOD COMBOS.

GRAPHICS BY ANNELISE FISHER ’26

Democracy on the Brink: Technology, Reliability, and the Future of Democracy in Latin America

How struggles with legitimacy, populism, and digital disruption are undermining inclusive governance.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

The Institute of Politics JFK Forum recently led a conversation examining how democratic institutions—legislatures, political parties, and judicial systems—have been slow to adapt to a new global context marked by digital disruption and widespread public distrust in government. Hosted on April 4, the panel brought together moderator Steven Levitsky, director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard and co-author of *The New York Times* bestseller “How Democracies Die,” and former President of Peru Dr. Francisco Sagasti.

Concerns about rising authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic institutions in Latin America have grown in recent years. In Nicaragua, the Ortega-Murillo regime has cracked down on dissent since the 2018 protests, shutting down independent media and violating fundamental human rights. In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele—praised for reducing crime—has been criticized by human rights groups for consolidating absolute power and eliminating institutional checks and balances.

Similar trends have emerged in South America: Peru’s Congress has undermined judicial and electoral independence by replacing key officials with party loyalists, while in Brazil, the Supreme Federal Court has drawn criticism for actions seen as weakening democratic norms, including suspending access to social media platforms like X, formerly Twitter, during the 2024 elections.

Peru was central to the IOP discussion, as Sagasti reflected on his experience governing the region during civil unrest. He noted the country’s long history of democratic backsliding, with much of the 20th century dominated by authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships rooted in the legacy of colonialism. Despite this, the 21st century has arguably been one of Peru’s most democratic periods, though significant institutional challenges remain.

Levitsky reinforced this reality by citing key statistics.

“Peruvian politics has been slowly imploding for a decade,” he said. “We’re at a point now where the president has a 3% approval rating—if we’re generous, maybe 4%. And that president is being held hostage by a legislature with a 2% approval rating. How can we step back from the brink? I’m not asking for Switzerland—but how do we get back to a minimally functioning democracy?” Sagasti acknowledged that rebuilding trust in democratic institutions after the deadly state repression of 2022–2023 will be a difficult task, but he holds a hopeful outlook.

“It’s going to be harder now, though—because the current group in power has embedded itself in institutions across the country,” he said. “We also have tools. Rather than only complaining about fake news on social media, let’s use those same platforms strategically—to disseminate truth, to share information that resonates, and to mobilize.”

Another topic that emerged from the conversation was the distinction between legality and legitimacy in democratic governance—a line that is often blurred but important to understand. The panelists stressed that, while governments may come to power through legal means, this alone does not guarantee their legitimacy.

Sagasti illustrated this point using Peru’s current political crisis. “The current government in Peru is legal—but it is not legitimate,” he said. Legitimacy, according to him, rests on three conditions: first, the consent of the governed; second, the pursuit of policies that serve the common good; and third, respect for institutions. “This government fails on all three counts,” Sagasti said.

Populism is also on the rise in the region—a reality acknowledged by Levitsky.

“One thing we’ve seen over the last 25 years is that these outsiders—often populists—very often end up assaulting democratic institutions,” he said. “Why

has public discontent reached such levels throughout Latin America? And what can be done to try to restore a minimum of public trust in institutions?”

For Sagasti, the issue extends beyond Latin America.

“This is not just a Latin American problem,” he affirmed. “This is a problem worldwide. We’re seeing it everywhere. Wherever you go, you see electorates turning against incumbents.”

“We have to look at the roots of this discontent—at historical processes, technological changes, demographic changes, migration, and so on. And what it really means in practice is that the democratic arrangements we’ve had over the last half-century are no longer working as they were supposed to,” Sagasti continued.

Both speakers emphasized that rapid structural shifts are fueling this widespread disillusionment with democratic systems. Among the most disruptive of these is the transformation brought on by new technologies. As Sagasti noted, digital innovation has altered how people engage with politics, weakened traditional intermediaries like political parties, and enabled forms of communication that facilitate the spread of populist ideology.

The rapid evolution of technology has disrupted long-established democratic systems, where political parties, legislatures, and regulatory institutions once served as the primary channels for representation, decision-making, and oversight. For instance, legislatures and regulatory agencies worldwide have struggled to keep pace with exponential technological advancements like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things. Sagasti highlighted the impact of how technologies are reshaping electoral politics.

“One of the key things that’s happened is that the role of political parties—which used to be to listen to their members, aggregate demands, filter them through ideology, and propose them to citizens—has broken down,” he said.

Sagasti also emphasized the recent shift in social media’s impact on politics. “People have direct access to views, data, and information. The intermediary role of parties is fading. Political scientists call it disintermediation. And we haven’t yet found effective ways to listen, process, aggregate, and project diverse views in a meaningful way for the electorate.”

“Then you pile on technological change, automation, and lack of opportunity due to things like AI, and it creates a perfect storm—an explosive situation that erodes public trust in institutions and opens the way to autocratic leaders making empty promises,” he continued.

In this sense, technology is not just a disruptor—it’s a catalyst for political instability when left unregulated and poorly understood. Governing nation-states in today’s rapidly evolving technological landscape present unprecedented challenges, like outdated regulatory systems and the spread of misinformation. This makes it challenging for governments to develop effective policies that respond to the social, economic, and political disruptions caused by rapid technological change.

Levitsky raised the question of whether these policies should be technical or political in nature: “So, is the solution technological or political? What are the first steps toward reducing this distrust of institutions?” he asked.

For Sagasti, effective policies must pursue two objectives: strengthening early education and regulating emerging digital platforms. “We need action at several levels. I’ll start with the most fundamental: infant care and primary education,” he said. “Unless we raise a new generation that can understand this chaotic world, who have internalized values like mutual respect and human dignity—it will be very difficult to stabilize democracy in the medium and long run.”

Sagasti then transitioned to regulating the digital world. “We must rethink how we regulate social media and teach people to filter out misinformation. That’s a learnable skill. We can train people in digital literacy and critical thinking,” he continued.

“We must train a new generation of leaders. Young people who understand we are living in a time of chaos, ambiguity, and

rapid transformation—and who can still act with integrity and commitment to human values,” he said.

The panel addressed the grave consequences that can arise when a government lacks legitimacy, particularly in moments of internal conflict. Levitsky pointed to Peru’s recent history as an example. In late 2022 and early 2023, following the removal of President Pedro Castillo, widespread protests erupted in the Andean highlands. The state responded violently, leaving more than 50 civilians dead.



“It was one of the worst episodes of state repression in Latin America in the 21st century,” Levitsky said. “And yet, there’s been no political or legal accountability. So my question is: What happened? How could Peru reach a point where 50 civilians are killed—and the reaction is indifference?”

Sagasti offered a sobering explanation of how the government’s mismanagement of the military and police led to deadly force. According to him, much of the problem stems from a fundamental lack of knowledge among political leaders about how the military and police function.

“There is an absolute ignorance by political leaders about how the military and police operate,” he warned. “They think these institutions are like any other public agency. That’s a fatal mistake.” He recounted a visit to a military academy, where he heard a cadet say: “We are trained to kill. Terrorists are trained to kill us. It’s us or them.”

In this context, Sagasti explained,

labeling protesters as “terrorists”—whether out of ignorance or political convenience—can have catastrophic consequences. “That triggers a reflexive response. The armed forces are trained to eliminate terrorists,” he said. “And then, if that leader congratulates the army or police for their actions, it’s even worse. They feel vindicated.”

Yet even as the need for new leadership grows more urgent, younger generations are increasingly hesitant to enter the political arena. Discontent with modern politics—driven by corruption, instability, and lack of institutional accountability—has discouraged many from pursuing public service, particularly in Latin America.

In Peru, surveys have shown that trust in political institutions is among the lowest in the region, and student involvement in party politics has significantly declined. For the panelists, this presented a worrisome reality. “I’ve been teaching Peruvian students for a couple of decades, and one of the hardest things to witness is this: so many of you are incredibly talented, but you come here, think about going into public service, and then look at Peruvian politics and say: ‘Good God, I’m not doing that,’” Levitsky said regarding the trend of political disengagement. “And if *you*—the best of your generation—don’t go into politics, then we’re really screwed.”

Levitsky’s emphasis on the need for younger generations to engage in politics was echoed by Sagasti, who stressed the close relationship between politics and policy. “It’s not enough to go into policy. You have to get into politics,” Sagasti said. “You need to enter early. Bring your policy skills. Form a team. But you must engage in the political arena—because otherwise, nothing changes.”

For both panelists, rebuilding trust, legitimacy, and a stable democratic order will require more than legal change—it will demand institutional accountability, moral adjustments, and a new generation of leaders equipped to navigate a complex and rapidly shifting world.

NASHLA TURCIOS ’28
(NASHLATURCIOS@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR
THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY EL
RICHARDS ’26

Welcoming the 2025 HUA Co-Presidents

Abdullah Shahid Sial '27 and Caleb N. Thompson '27 will head the next Harvard Undergraduate Association.

BY MEENA BEHRINGER '27

The 2025 Harvard Undergraduate Associate election voted Abdullah Shahid Sial '27 and Caleb N. Thompson '27 as the co-presidents for the upcoming academic year. The pair ran on a campaign to make the HUA actively student-first, resonating with voters amid campus uncertainty and demands for better campus life decisions. Sial and Thompson clinched the election by a clear majority, scoring 35.49% of the vote in the first round alone, with 691 votes.

Voting for all HUA positions for the 2025-2026 academic year was open to Harvard undergraduates from April 2-4 via the Voting Booth on the SOCO Website. All election results were determined through an instant-runoff ranked-choice voting system. The HUA Election Commission released the results in an email to the Harvard community on April 4. In addition to the co-presidents, eight other officers were elected to the upcoming HUA cabinet.

Sial and Thompson's platform emphasized fighting for students' best interests first: "Building an HUA That Works—For You." They aim to empower student voices and push for student representation in key administrative decisions, as well as advocate for amenities to improve daily student life. The pair stressed that they will not be "the Administration's Mouthpiece," but instead engage with and support the student community.

Unlike four of the other co-presidential candidate pairs, Sial and Thompson had no prior experience with the HUA. Seeing contested issues on campus go unresolved and a lack of connection between the HUA and student body during prior administrations motivated their run for office.

"We want to be an advocate for student interests and student hopes," Thompson said in an interview with the *Independent*. "It's super important that we get student force behind the negotiations and conversations that we as presidents have with the administration. I think historically, that's not happened as much as it should, and if the administration just sees us too going in and talking with them about these issues, like shopping week getting pushed back so much, registration having to be so early, linking groups getting taken away."

For Sial, an international student from Pakistan, the decision to run was influenced by the Harvard Administration's original resolution to deny winter housing for international students on full financial aid. Sial explained to the *Independent* that this decision broke from precedent, causing bipartisan uproar on campus—still, the student government failed to act.

"People were in consensus

that this is wrong," Sial said. "Even then, people who were [our] elected representatives of us... they refused to, at the absolute minimum, give any comments saying that what the housing office is doing is bad. And that's when we realized there is something fundamentally wrong with this system, because this sort of thing won't happen at any of the universities that have a powerful student government."

The new co-presidents aim to bridge the gap between the HUA and the administration through increased transparency and dynamic communication with students. "There's a huge disconnect... that's a big part of our platform, and the way we're going to do that is being way more transparent and being way more connected with the students, talking with them [and] having a forum and a newsletter, hopefully every week, that says what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what the administration is saying about different negotiations happening," Thompson explained.

To enrich student life, the pair declared they would lobby for less administrative interference in social events, hot breakfast in every house neighborhood, extended dining hall hours and offerings, a phone version of HUID, laundry subsidies, free printing, airport shuttles, and earlier HUA semesterly grant funding timelines.

"I think if you're an elected representative of the student body, [your] first and only responsibility is to serve the people who brought [you] in power, and that's the responsibility, which needs to be handled with a lot of caution," Sial said. "And more than that, it needs to be done [justly], because that's the only reason why we won the election—because people believed in what we ran on."

Coming from diverse backgrounds themselves—both from home and on campus—Sial and Thompson recognize the importance of elevating a mix of perspectives on the Harvard undergraduate experience. In addition to his international background, Sial studies Applied Mathematics with Physics, while Thompson grew up in a small town in western Colorado and studies Statistics and Economics. "It was quite a transition for me coming from that environment to college and understanding how difficult it's been for me at times, hopefully, by being in a leadership position [and] contributing that new perspective and bringing good ideas about how we can make a better experience for students from my background and other backgrounds like my running mate, Sial," elaborated Thompson.

Sial and Thompson are more than just running mates—they are close friends, too. The two met early in their first year at Harvard and bonded over conversations in Annenberg before both being

sorted into Mather House. Thompson emphasized the trust and respect he had for Sial, a "lifelong friend and a brother," especially after the two had visited and met each other's families.

"The moment we found out that we won, Sial and I were in different parts of Mather; we ran out to the courtyard and hugged each other, and we called each other's mothers," Thompson shared.

Thompson commented on their platform's strong resonance with campus: "Having occupied many different campus spaces and different organizations, [we had] a good breadth of student familiarity." He also noted that he believed their platform resonated with international voters during a time of uncertainty regarding student visas on campus. The pair used creative Instagram content to expand their reach as well. "We had three funny videos, some of them self depreciating, and this message that people appreciated, just that we're very serious about the work we're doing, but we're not taking ourselves too seriously... I think that resonated with people." Such hopes may have been actualized by the election turnout, which with 1947 ballots cast was a 34% increase in turnout from 2024.

The two have strong visions for their transition to co-presidency. "I'm most excited to attack this with a high degree of passion and high degree of pragmatism," Thompson said. "I care so much about the experience of students here, and that's always what's going to guide the decision-making on my end, is just thinking, 'How can I make the student experience for the undergraduate body of Harvard the best that it can possibly be?'"

"We would want to echo whatever the students are feeling at the moment, and it isn't the best of feelings," Sial emphasized, discussing their next steps.

Sial and Thompson expressed tremendous gratitude for the support of the Harvard community during their successful campaign and beyond. Friends and communities provided help with logistics, campaigning, and preparation. "The number one thing that gave us so much success is being blessed to be surrounded by such incredible people and such an incredible team that was really serious about us getting elected and worked really hard because we were outside candidates," Thompson said.

"We are immensely, immensely grateful for the support we got... It's all to show that people believe in our platform, and this is something we'll stick to, and we do want to be held accountable if we don't," Sial concluded.

**MEENA BEHRINGER '27
(MEENABEHRINGER@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR
THE INDEPENDENT.**

GRAPHIC BY SEATTLE HICKEY '25



Bon App -Temps: The Art of Savoring French Meals

My observations on the French way of eating.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

There's always something to do in the kitchen—something to chop, something to peel, something to stir. Last weekend, after tiring myself of reading, painting, and walking around my host family's country home, I wandered into the kitchen, where my host dad's sister was preparing dinner and the next day's lunch. Eager for a task, I was thrilled when she handed me a garlic press, a few peeled garlic cloves, some chili peppers, and a handful of mustard seeds with instructions to get pressing. Soon, the warm, sharp aromas of garlic and chili filled the air, ready to be mixed into an overnight marinade for ribs.

As the resident American, she asked for my advice on the meat. I regretfully informed her that my eight prior years as a pescatarian (a streak broken for France) left me clueless about rib marinades or cooking times. Still, I happily tasted the sauce she'd prepared and was impressed that she had whipped it up without a recipe. It was a French reminder: simple cooking is often best.

Beyond these culinary moments, one of my favorite parts of living with a host family is eating like a true Parisian and experiencing the everyday side of French gastronomy. For many, French cuisine might conjure up images of duck confit, beef bourguignon, and endless croissants, but I've learned the real French diet is much simpler, rooted in fresh ingredients and thoughtful preparation. I'm lucky to live with a host dad who's a professional chef and a host mom who cooks delicious meals daily, giving me a rich balance of simple meals and celebratory feasts.

The starkest difference between meals in the U.S. and Paris is breakfast or *petit d jeuner*. While most Parisians aren't puffing a cigarette and eating a bar of chocolate at 8 a.m., their first meal is a far cry from the American breakfast of sugary cereal or protein-packed yogurt. From my observations, typical French breakfast fare is a *tartine*, or toasted baguette with butter or jam, espresso or tea, and fruit—not a croissant in sight. After consuming too much American fitness content on Instagram, I used to stress about not getting 30 grams of protein first thing in the morning. But so far? No consequences.

When it comes to lunch, I've had two distinct experiences: the student experience and the non-student experience.

Unlike American high schools, French *lyc es* don't provide students lunch, so they're on their own. My program is on the same block as a high school, and every day between 12 and 1 p.m., I see swarms of students queuing outside the local sandwich shop, boulangeries, burger stand, and fast-food joints. Most go for the *formule  tudiant*—a set meal with a sandwich, drink, and dessert for  5 to  9—not a bad deal! University students get an even better offer: student cafeterias called *Resto'U* around the city serve a hot meal with sides and dessert for 3.30 euros. The food is surprisingly good for the price.

For non-students with a bit more room in their budget, lunch is often the biggest meal of the day. It's common for working Parisians to take a one or two-hour break to eat with their colleagues, usually enjoying

a main dish, an appetizer, or dessert, and maybe even a glass of wine. On weekends with my host family, lunch tends to be more elaborate than dinner.

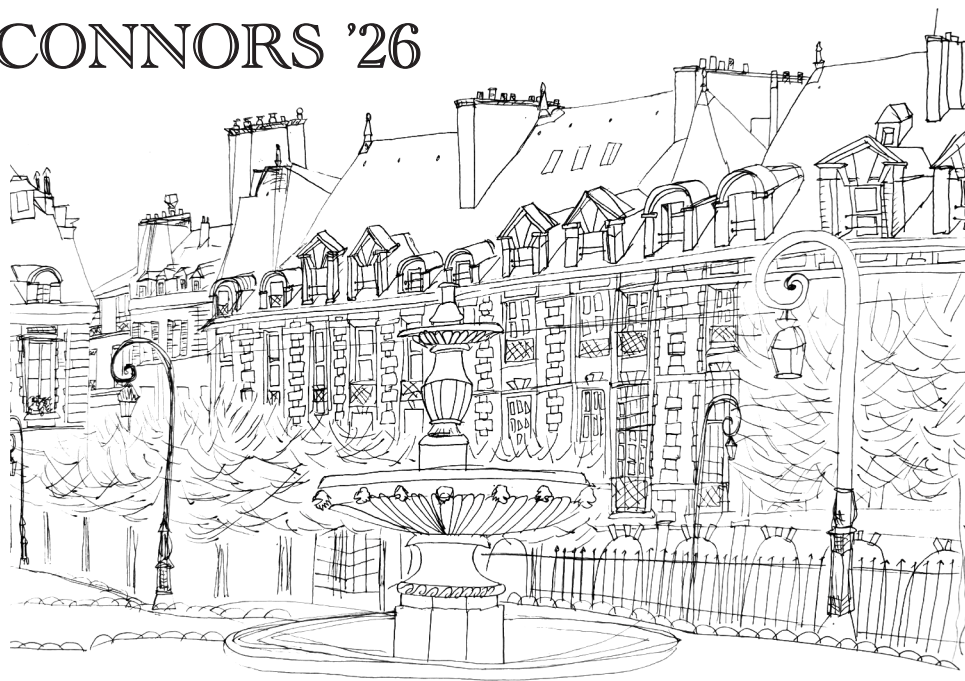
During our weekend away, Saturday lunch kicked off with herbed chicken and stuffed tomatoes. Because freshness is such a priority, leftovers are practically nonexistent—we divided the dishes until every last piece of chicken and tomato was gone. Then came a brief salad course (greens and homemade dressing), followed by a cheese plate. Even though I've had cheese every week since arriving, I still get self-conscious when it's my turn to slice, worried I'll break the strict French cutting rules. Slicing off the tip of a wedge of brie, for example, is a big no-no, and each cheese has its specific cutting geometry that I'm still learning.

Once everyone had their fill of cheese—without any slicing faux pas on my part—and used bread to clean up their plates, my host dad's sister brought out a dessert: a raspberry tart and chocolate mousse. The only store-bought items on the table, she'd picked them up that morning from a local boulangerie. Just when I thought the meal was finished, someone called for espressos, and we lingered at the table a little longer. Two and a half hours had passed in the blink of an eye, and I left the table feeling satisfied and surprisingly light, not heavy like I would after a similarly lengthy meal in the U.S. Though to be fair, that may have been the wine talking.

Because we had enjoyed such a hearty lunch, dinner that night was kept simple. For a starter, I dipped artichoke leaves into a citrusy, buttery homemade sauce. The main course, split among nine people, included an onion tart, three omelets, and a generous helping of greens. Afterward, we returned to the familiar rhythm of bread and cheese—this time with a few new varieties—before enjoying rice pudding for dessert. Though the fare was lighter, the meal still stretched on for over three hours, thanks to post-dessert debates on French and American politics that kept us chatting long after the plates were cleared.

Weeknight dinners with the host family follow a similar formula: an uncomplicated entr e—often a savory tart, quiche, or meat—served alongside salad (always with homemade dressing), followed by bread and cheese. Sugary desserts are rare; we usually finish with fruit or yogurt, and wine is generally reserved for the weekends. In addition to these cozy family dinners, I've also been fortunate enough to attend a few French dinner parties hosted by my family, which offer a longer, more elaborate dining experience.

Dinner parties begin at the typical French hour of 7:30 or 8 p.m. in the living room with *un ap ritif*—a kind of cocktail hour. We'll spend about an hour sipping on spritzes, wine, or beer, and snacking on olives,



An ink drawing done by Frances Connors '26

chips, or other light snacks. Unlike in the U.S., there's no cheese before dinner—it's strictly saved for later.

At our most recent dinner party, my host dad prepared an exquisite five-course meal. After the *ap ritif*, we started with prawns, paused for a salad, moved on to a rich beef bourguignon, passed around the ever-present cheese plate, and finished with a strawberry and whipped cream cake. Each course was savored and unrushed. By the time we wrapped up at 11:30 p.m.—four hours after we'd started—it had become my longest dinner yet. Whether it was the smaller portions or the leisurely pace, I didn't feel overstuffed like I sometimes do after a Thanksgiving dinner.

Since arriving in Paris, I've picked up several new eating habits that I'm excited to bring home. First is a deeper appreciation for whole foods and simple meals. French cuisine revolves around fresh ingredients and homemade sauces, and snacks are usually minimally processed—just fruit or a hunk of baguette. I've come to love the idea of keeping meals simple rather than chasing complicated recipes. Second is the after-dinner fruit. I used to eat fruit in the evening sporadically, but now I can't finish dinner without a clementine, an apple, or something similarly refreshing.

And third—maybe most importantly—is the art of longer meals. At Harvard, I always prefer to sit down with friends for meals instead of eating from to-go containers in the library like many of my peers. I've always believed that long meals are a meaningful way to connect with friends and pause during busy days, but I'm not yet at the French level of two-and-a-half-hour lunches or four-hour dinners. Differences in meal time reflect a broader difference in the French and American way of life; in France, people prioritize enjoying life and socializing in a way that the workaholic culture of America could learn from. The breaking of bread is one of humanity's oldest rituals, and the French seem to understand this intuitively: meals are not just for eating, but for savoring, sharing, and staying at the table a little while longer.

FRANCES CONNORS '26 (MARYFRANCESCONNORS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HAS FINALLY DEVELOPED A TASTE FOR BLUE CHEESE.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27

Food For Thought

A reflection on first-year dining hall culture at Harvard.

BY MIA WILCOX '28

With only five weeks left in my first year at Harvard, I've begun reflecting on the people and places that have made Cambridge feel like home. And surprisingly, despite everything that Harvard University Dining Services lacks (which is...a lot), Annenberg—affectionately known as 'Berg'—is one place I know I will miss.

Dining hall culture is a cornerstone of freshman life at Harvard. Coming from a family that centers food around pleasure and connection, I knew that transitioning away from home-cooked meals would be challenging. Unfortunately, HUDS food standards didn't exactly make that transition smoother—my new friends and I were greeted with pink chicken, scavenging rats, and still-frozen cucumbers. That said, looking past the endless possibilities for complaint, Berg has been a central part of my first year at Harvard.

Its towering Gothic architecture makes it truly unique to the freshman experience all on its own. If you ever take a second to glance up from your tray, you can't help but be struck by the grandeur and beauty of the arches and stained-glass windows of Berg—it truly feels like eating at Hogwarts.

But what makes Berg special isn't the food or even the building—it's the people. As a first-year-only dining hall, Annenberg is where friendships begin. During our first few weeks, PAFs encouraged their PAFees to be bold about sitting next to new people, taking advantage of the concentrated space of other first-year students looking to make friends. I look fondly back on the first weeks of school, as my new friends and I openly approached anyone who dared to make eye contact with us in the Berg lanes—a luxury that no longer feels socially acceptable after winter break, as friendships solidify. In doing so, I met so many new people—people I may not have met if we were not all forced to eat in the same place, many of whom have since become my closest friends.

"I don't think there's any other place on campus for first-years to meet each other like in Annenberg," said Ashton Bryant '28. "I think all of the first semester, I was comfortable going to any table and sitting down and talking to people. And I think because of that, I've gotten to know so many people."

Bryant, who's from Australia, recalled his first American Thanksgiving in Berg last semester. "I liked when they did a Thanksgiving setup with the decorations, and [my friends] Dutch, Ben, and I took a little photo. That was pretty cool because I'd never done Thanksgiving before,

and we sat for the photos, like a family photo."

As someone who eats at Berg nearly every day—three meals a day, seven days a week—he opts to take advantage of the dining hall's social connection, which many other freshmen forfeit for other River House dining halls or the diverse food options of Harvard Square.

"[Annenberg is] much more quiet than it was in the first semester," Bryant said. "I think people probably are a little bit fed up, so they're not going."

Still, for those who stay, Berg remains a hub of community. Kerry Mariato, who has worked at Berg for almost 22 years, reiterated its importance to the first-year experience.

"It's crucial that the first-year students... understand the importance of coming here and eating and sitting down and just socializing."

Mariato spoke with pride about the team behind the scenes. "Berg consists of 80-plus workers. They're all of different backgrounds, with diverse individuals who, day in and day out, strive to make the meals for the students... It's remarkable, right?" Over the years, he's held a variety of roles including Lead—overseeing daily operations and staff training—, Pantry Steward, and General Services. He's watched countless freshmen grow into their space.

"You guys are bonding and networking with each other—it's just fascinating to observe," Mariato continued.

"It seems to me that at Berg, the students are in a rush for the first four months," he described when asked about student dynamics he has witnessed. "And then, right after the winter break, you see them more calm, more comfortable, but by the time they get comfortable, it's time to go."

I've felt this shift myself. Just as I have come to appreciate the community Berg offers—especially the camaraderie with those that I rarely see outside of the dining hall—I am faced with the daunting reality that very soon these spontaneous interactions vanish as we all move into our separate upperclassman housing. I will need to make a real personal

effort to retain many of the relationships exclusive to Berg, and I'll no longer be able to rely on catching the eye of the smiling faces of friends from my seat at table B-7. The loss of this environment could very well mean the fizzling of some of these friendships.

Of course, the end of Berg marks more than just a dining transition—it's also the end of freshman housing. As a devoted Pennypacker resident, I've come to see many parallels between the communities fostered by these first-year-only environments. The Berg community is much like the Pennypacker community: bonded over something that is lacking—good food in the former, and proximity to the Yard, Science Center, and Harvard Square in the latter. But it's those minor, shared grievances that quietly stitch people together.

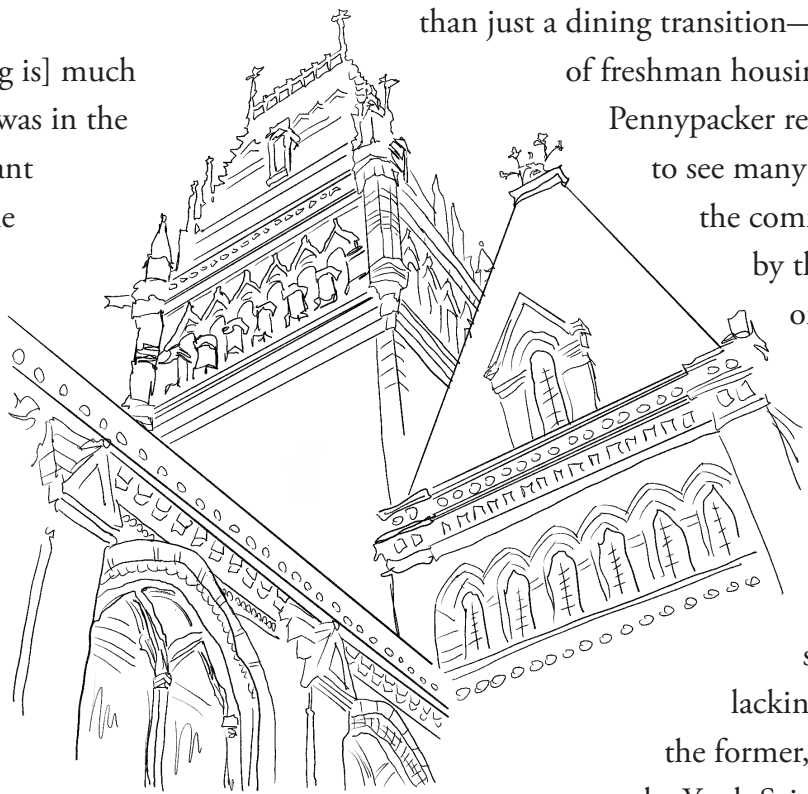
Lately, I've gained a new appreciation for the almost daily interactions with the familiar faces I pass on the way to the drinks station, the people I never became close with, but who still made this year feel full. These relationships, no longer organically facilitated by Berg, are the ones I'll miss most.

Being from New York, I came to Harvard knowing a sizable group of people. Berg made it possible for me to branch out from this group and become friends with people from vastly different places and backgrounds—a skier from Alaska, an artist from Ukraine—whom I otherwise may not have encountered during my time at Harvard. In my sentimentality, I've started to let go of my grudge against HUDS food and instead savor the time we have left together.

Soon enough, we'll be scattered across our new Houses, forging new rhythms. I'll be at Quincy, home of the (objectively superior) hot breakfast, ready to find new connections—but I'll always carry a little Berg with me.

MIA WILCOX '28 (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO SEE EVERYONE IN QUINCY D-HALL FOR HOT BREAKFAST NEXT YEAR.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTIE BECKLEY '27



Dazed and Confused

A meditation on hunger, meaning, and the blur between escape and return.

BY SIR LANCELOT

The Knights have returned—not for glory, but to kill the same dragon, high and half-laughing.

Everyone is tired.

Not in the way sleep fixes, but in the way that lingers behind the eyes. The kind of tired that sits beneath conversation, beneath caffeine, beneath even the desire to name it.

One night, I felt it settle in—quiet, heavy, not quite sadness—but something close. I was on the common room couch, high, eating dry cereal out of a ceramic bowl from the dining hall. Someone had put on soft jazz beats. No one was talking. The lights were dim. It wasn't joy, exactly. But it was the first time all week I hadn't felt like I was bracing for something. The tiredness didn't leave. It just softened.

It creeps in quietly. In the pause between inbox pings, in the way a sentence stalls in your throat during section at the moment you open a new tab and forget what for. It's the weight of always moving toward something—an internship, a fellowship, a relationship that shimmers just enough to keep you chasing.

Days built like scaffolding, every decision propped against the next, angled toward a version of yourself you've never met but are expected to become. It's not just the pressure to succeed. It's the pressure to mean. To curate a life that reads like a resume before it's even begun—like meaning is something to present, not something to feel. Like purpose is performative, not lived.

So you nod along. You pick your concentration. You update your LinkedIn bio. You act like the why was answered long ago—because asking it now would mean pausing.

And so, sometimes, we get high.

Not to escape the world, exactly. Just to blur its edges. To loosen the grip without letting go. The calendar thins, the inbox fades to background noise, and time loses its sharpness—no longer something to be divided and spent, but something ambient, like heat.

Weed doesn't lift you out of your life. It just lets you step sideways—into the negative space between bullet points. Not transcendence, but suspension.

You're still in the room but slightly to the left of it. Still yourself, but without the tight choreography. It's a softness the world rarely allows—unscheduled, unscored, slightly out of focus. And for a little while, that's enough.

And in that softness, hunger arrives.

We call it the munchies, but the word is misleading.

It makes hunger sound like a punchline. A joke in a stoner movie. But that's not how it feels to me. This kind of hunger isn't funny—it's disorienting. It isn't even entirely physical. It's

something else—a hunger that rises not from absence but from presence. From the way the body suddenly is heard again, how it begins to speak in its own language.

The mouth wants salt. The stomach wants warmth. The self wants anchoring. You find yourself searching the fridge like it might hold meaning.

There's a quiet absurdity to it—standing barefoot in the glow of the refrigerator, staring at expired condiments and a half-eaten sandwich, trying to feed something—something more than just the body. The edible slows your thoughts just enough to let you feel the shape of the void.

You're not craving calories. You're craving clarity. A flicker of something true—not useful, not impressive, just real. A glimpse of meaning that feels like it belongs to you, not your portfolio.

But sometimes, clarity doesn't come gently.

I got too high once and ended up pacing my room for an hour, convinced I had accidentally designed my entire life around being impressive. Every choice—my classes, my clubs, even the way I dressed—suddenly looked like branding. I wasn't hungry. I wasn't sad. I was just exposed. Like I had finally turned the mirror around and didn't like what I saw. It wasn't a breakdown. It was more like a glitch in the narrative. And for a second, I didn't want to fix it.

At Harvard, we don't know how to be still unless it serves a purpose. Every hour is scheduled. Every dream must justify its cost. Even rest is commodified—rendered legible as “self-care,” folded back into the logic of utility. Nothing is sacred unless it can be cited. Nothing is enough unless it can be explained.

So when we finally slow down, we don't find peace. We find uncertainty. The disorientation of not being told what to want.

The University tells us to ask questions. But only within their framework. To innovate, but only toward marketable ends. To be authentic, but not inconveniently so.

And so we perform. Constantly. For an invisible audience, hoping to be seen, hoping to matter, hoping that someone—an employer, a fellowship committee, the idea of the future—might confirm our worth.

And when that confirmation doesn't arrive? We eat. We scroll. We smoke. We fill the silence with texture. Because emptiness without narrative is unbearable. Even the stoned mind wants resolution.

I once spent twenty minutes comparing the texture of three different granola bars. Not the

taste. The texture. I took tiny bites, slowly, like some kind of snack sommelier, trying to decide which one felt most like an answer. It wasn't about hunger. It was about needing something—*anything*—to land. To feel sure of even one small thing.

And yet, in the haze, there are moments—brief, fleeting—when something almost makes sense. When I'm high, a bite of food can feel transcendent. A thought loops just right. A sentence lands with weight. The world reveals itself not as chaotic, but absurd—and somehow beautiful in its absurdity.

You think: maybe this is it. Maybe this is the clarity. Maybe the point is that there is no point—and somehow, that feels like freedom.

But it doesn't last.

The clarity blurs. Edges return. Sobriety creeps in—not as punishment, but as form. Time reasserts itself. The inbox refills. The questions that once felt profound begin to sound indulgent. There is work to do. There is always work to do.

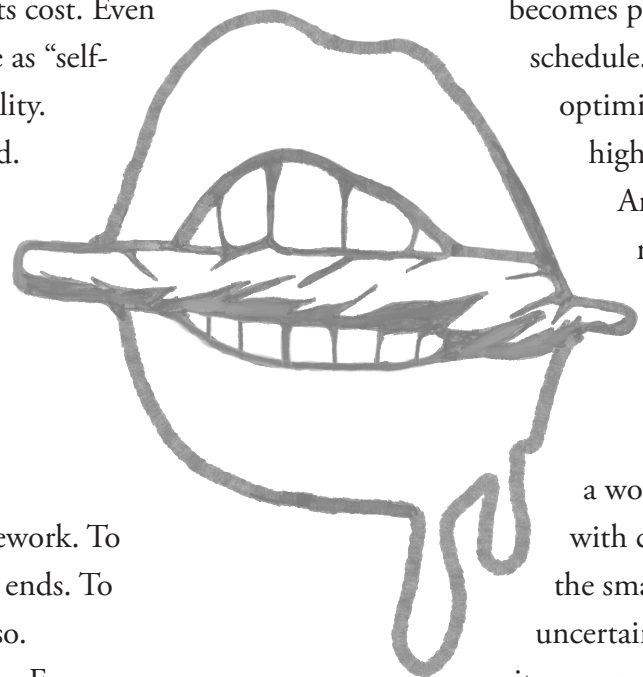
And yet—something lingers.

Not an answer, but a question more fully formed. A trace of the moment when you remembered you were not just a mind attached to a task, but a body, a self, a consciousness adrift in a world that has never quite made sense. A moment when your hunger felt like something honest. When your confusion wasn't something to solve but to inhabit.

Even our escapes are eventually folded back into the systems we try to escape. Weed becomes part of the schedule. Snacks are optimized. We get high efficiently. And yet—we return. To the high. To the pause. To the question. Because in a world obsessed with certainty, even the smallest act of uncertainty becomes its own resistance. To sit with longing, without resolving it. To hunger, and not immediately feed. To be unsure and still remain.

Maybe that's all we can do.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? — Mark 8:36



GRAPHIC BY JOYE WINGARD '28

What's your m



unch?



Thoughts From New Quincy: High on Nationalism

The craving for substance in American identity.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

America has the munchies. From sea to shining sea, from Doritos Locos Tacos to Manifest Destiny, this country was built on a bottomless appetite—insatiable, indiscriminate, and utterly divorced from actual need. Expansion wasn't just policy—it was craving. A sudden, stoned hunger for land, for oil, for more. Why stop at thirteen colonies when you could grab Texas, California, and a side of Guam?

The American Dream is a late-night fridge raid—chaotic, impulsive, directionless. Everything gets reheated at once. Nothing makes sense together. No plate.

And it's not just our fridge. It's not just our food. It's everyone else's, too.

America stumbles into the global kitchen like a high roommate on a rampage. It raids your pantry, eats your leftovers, spills your cereal, then gives you a lecture on democracy with a mouthful of Cheez-Its. It installs a microwave on your counter without asking, then hands you a pamphlet about free markets. It tells you it's helping—bringing progress, liberation, and economic growth. Then it leaves a sticky note that says “you're welcome,” written in oil and airstrikes.

That's American foreign policy. We arrive uninvited, eat what we want, break what we don't understand, and insist it was all for the greater good. Then we move on to the next kitchen. We call it “nation-building.” It's just hunger dressed up in the language of imperialism.

Craving is core to the American mythos. It's baked into the slogans: land of opportunity, pursuit of happiness, American Dream. But like any good edible, it always kicks in harder than expected.

The craving turns manic. It scales. The snack becomes a feast. The feast becomes a war.

We wanted freedom, so we forged an empire. We wanted wealth, so we built machines of extraction. We wanted safety, so we armed the world.

And every time the buzz wears off, we just reach for more—another country, another product, another identity crisis smothered in sugar and spectacle.

Consumption isn't a side effect of American identity—it is the identity. Capitalism tells us we are what we buy. Patriotism tells us we are what we conquer. Together, they create a national high: euphoric, disoriented, a little numb, and quietly sad.

Maybe it's the Protestant work ethic in our bones. Maybe it's capitalism convincing us that rest is laziness and pleasure is weakness. Either way, joy has to be earned—or else apologized for.

Our snacks reflect our psyche: engineered, extreme, and impossible to ignore. We make chips taste like bacon cheeseburgers.

We deep-fry ice cream.

We've exported fast food

more reliably than freedom.

‘Flamin’ Hot’ isn't a flavor—it's a foreign policy: overstimulating, underthought, and impossible to clean up after.

Even our candy is intense. Sour Patch Kids are psychological warfare in sugar form.

American snacks don't comfort. They escalate. They're built for extremism—louder, hotter, more.

We're a country that fears moderation like it fears communism. Subtlety is suspicious. Excess is patriotic. Bigger is always better—even when it's bloated, wasteful, and slowly killing you.

It's not enough to be full—you must overflow. The cupboard must be stocked. The tray must be piled high. And life must be optimized for maximum output.

Even rest is performative. You don't just chill—you biohack. You don't just take a break—you “invest in your wellness.” The American relationship to pleasure is paradoxical: You can indulge, but only if you confess afterward. Indulgence without guilt is un-American.

We eat the donut, then say we'll “run it off.” We binge-watch, but call it a “guilty pleasure.” Even vacation must be justified—made educational, cultural, productive. Rest isn't rest unless it's earned. Pleasure must be balanced, neutralized, explained away. It's not enough to enjoy something—you have to signal that you're aware it's too much. That you know better.

And in all this, we don't even ask: Are we actually enjoying any of it?

Like the stoner who keeps eating long after the joy is gone, America keeps going—because stopping would mean reckoning. With ourselves. With history. With the fact that we're full but never satisfied. We've binged the entire buffet of modernity and still think dessert will save us.

And when the existential nausea sets in, we do what we've always done: blame the wrong things. We say we need more, not less. More growth. More walls. More gas. More military. More noise.

The truth is, we're terrified of hunger. Of stillness. Of not knowing what comes next. Hunger implies lack. Lack suggests vulnerability. And vulnerability feels too close to failure. So we create endless distractions, cravings, and expansion. We feed the void with plastic and policy, corn syrup and conquest.

But cravings are never just about food. They're about feeling. About longing. About



what's missing. The U.S. doesn't just crave land or oil or influence—it craves validation. Righteousness. The illusion of control.

That's why American identity always comes with a side of moral superiority. Every war is a rescue mission. Every invasion, a favor. Every regime change, a gift. As if liberation can be air-dropped.

We raid the global fridge, take the last slice, then tell the world it was for its own good. Too greasy. Too chaotic. Democracy's the cleaner option—gluten-free, American-made, and delivered by drone.

This isn't just history—it's habit. National impulse. We consume because we can. Because we've been told it's our right. And because somewhere, deep in the cultural gut, we fear the silence that follows when we stop chewing.

One day, maybe we'll come down. Take a breath. Open the fridge and realize: we've devoured everything—except ourselves. Maybe then we'll learn to sit with hunger instead of sprinting toward satisfaction. Maybe we'll try moderation, humility, even curiosity.

Imagine an America that doesn't release a new Mountain Dew flavor every three weeks. That doesn't livestream rocket launches like Super Bowls. That doesn't name military operations like video games. One where “enough” isn't a punchline.

But until then, pass the Oreos. And also the \$850 billion defense budget.

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

GRAPHIC BY KAYLA LE '28

I Was Here

A personal reflection from a human rights trip to Poland.

BY MARCEL RAMOS CASTAÑEDA '28

In December 2023, shortly after my acceptance to Harvard, I traveled to Poland to visit all six Nazi extermination camps—where over 2.7 million people were murdered, the majority of them Jews. Those two weeks were emotionally exhausting and grueling. My instinct afterward was to mentally lock the experience away, to avoid confronting the weight of what I had seen.

However, just a week before spring break, a discussion in my class “Gen Ed 1131: Loss” resurfaced those memories.

“Would you care about what was written on your tombstone?” someone asked. Another student quickly answered, “Epitaphs are for family and friends—to give them closure and the right image of who you were. Personally, I wouldn’t mind, since I’d be dead.” I sat with that for a moment. To me, caring about what’s written on your tombstone isn’t about vanity—it’s about legacy. It’s about wanting to live a life that mattered, that left something behind.

And suddenly, I was back in Poland. Specifically, Treblinka—the second-deadliest Nazi extermination camp. I remember with vividness the deafening silence of the field—17,000 stones scattered across the grounds where the extermination camp once stood. Some of the stones are etched with the names of towns and villages, places from which people were deported. But the vast majority are unmarked—symbols of the individuals whose identities were lost forever.

More than 800,000 people were murdered at Treblinka by the Nazis. They never had the privilege to wonder about legacy, to wonder what might be written on their tombstone, what would be said at their funeral, or to even live a full life. At the center of the memorial stands the main monument, inscribed with the words “Never Again,” in Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, German, French, English, and Russian: **עוד לעולם מער, קיינמאל מער** Nigdy więcej, Nie wieder, Plus jamais, Never again, Никогда больше.

The first camp we visited was Stutthof, near Gdańsk. There, I saw a preserved gas chamber for the first time. Its walls were marked with blue streaks—Zyklon B residue. I stood in that space,

overwhelmed. How is someone supposed to process that? I still don’t know.

I kept wondering: How many people my age had stood here? People just like us, worrying about their future, thinking about who they wanted to become, and what they hoped to do in the world.

I couldn’t even claim to be empathetic—how could I be?

How would I react to watching the life and hope slowly drain from the faces of the people I love? To wake up one morning and find them gone during routine inspections—or worse, to wake up beside them and realize they’re no longer breathing?



What would go through my mind in those final moments, as exhaustion overtakes me? As hope flickers out, the will to live unravels, and the boundaries of humanity blur? Under such conditions, the significance of life begins to crumble. What is life? What is humanity?

It doesn’t make sense. In other extermination camps such as Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau, you could see—just beyond the barbed wire—houses, neighborhoods, signs of ordinary life. During the war, residents living near Auschwitz saw the smoke. They *smelled* the ashes of burning bodies. How is this possible? But even in the darkest depths of despair, there are instances of human greatness—moments of hope that shine so brightly that they defy words.

Among the 17,000 stones at Treblinka, only one bears a name: Janusz Korczak, also known by his pen name, Henryk Goldszmit. A doctor, educator, and writer, he cared for the orphaned children of the Warsaw Ghetto. When offered a chance to escape deportation, he refused. Instead, he stayed with the children, walking with them toward the unknown. He would not let them face

death alone.

In the face of genocide, a man chose love, loyalty, and selflessness. If that is possible, then I am proud to be human. But it’s this contrast—the capacity for both monstrous cruelty and extraordinary grace—that again raises those same questions: What is life? What is humanity?

The Holocaust is filled with stories like Korczak’s. Scattered among the ashes are testimonies of resistance, kindness, and moral courage—proof that even in our bleakest chapters, we are capable of greatness.

Going back to the original question about tombstones, I believe we all carry an inherent motif—a desire to say, “I was here.”

I was here.

“I was here” is an acknowledgment of our existence.

A quiet rebellion against invisibility. A basic human need to be seen, to be known, to matter.

The power and beauty of recognizing one’s own uniqueness and place in the world were taken from the people buried beneath those stones—and continue to be taken from countless others today.

The importance of memorials lies in our recognition of their human rights. We grieve and mourn the unjust, inhuman way in which they died. We fight to preserve history so that it never happens again.

And we honor them by saying, “I was here”—for them.

In the aftermath of such loss and horror, it’s natural to question whether life has any meaning at all. And maybe that’s where existentialism offers us something profound—not a denial of meaning, but an invitation to create it. The meaning of life isn’t something we find; it’s something we build. And by choosing to remember, to reflect, and to act, we begin to write our own answer to the question: *What does it mean to be human?*

For me, it means trying to live a life of remembrance, passion, and fulfillment—a life that, one day, will firmly say: *I was here.*

MARCEL RAMOS CASTAÑEDA '28 (MAMOSCASTANEDA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS GRATEFUL HIS MOM TOOK HIM ON THAT TRIP TO POLAND.

GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27

A Case for Handwriting

What your keyboard erased: effort, memory and meaning.

BY FRIDA LÓPEZ '27

Very few of us, as students in the 21st century, have truly experienced what it's like to write mostly by hand. In lecture halls today, it's increasingly rare to see someone taking notes on paper. The sight is almost extinct. A familiar scene: a large lecture room, every student behind the laptop, and the only sounds are the professor's voice and the soft, rhythmic tapping of keyboards.

But something has been lost.

Ideally, those keyboard taps would mean notetaking.

But let's be honest: writing—real writing—is slowly dying. Or more precisely, we are killing it.

And by real writing, I don't just mean the act of putting words and ideas onto paper. I mean the painful act of thinking that comes with it—the strain, the slowness, the mess. That whole process of grappling with an idea until it becomes clear enough to articulate.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not a Luddite. I'm not against computers—the computer didn't kill writing. It just killed the struggle that makes writing meaningful in the first place. And once the act of engaging with your mistakes by

writing in a paper was fully dead, AI came to kill writing itself, including the mechanical act of typing in a computer.

Handwriting can be awkward and inconvenient. Scratched-out phrases, shaky traces, and messy drafts are only a few of the many inconveniences of writing on a piece of paper. But in that mess, there's value. Writing by hand forces you to reflect on your thought process and trace your thinking. It slows you down

just enough to catch what you're trying to say. There's resistance. There's friction. And that friction gives your ideas weight.

When you take notes by hand, you can't capture everything verbatim. On a keyboard you are always writing ahead of your thought, racing to write word by word what the professor is saying without even realizing that you are not actually listening. Paper denies you that speed, so you're forced to make choices—what's worth writing, what can be left out. And that process of choosing is what helps you to understand.

Typing doesn't offer that same pause. On a keyboard, you can transcribe without listening. When writing an essay, you can easily erase, change, copy, paste, reorder, grammar and spell-check, and much

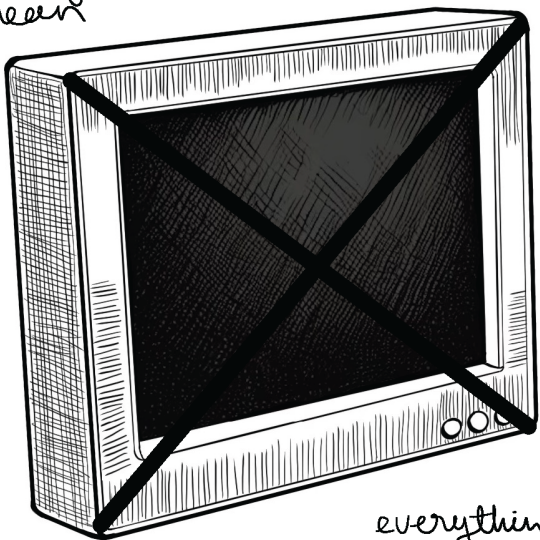
more. All without a single trace of the mistakes you have made. That is why so many professors are starting to ban computers in lecture halls. And when they do that, sometimes against the will of the students, it works.

Handwriting is brutal in contrast. I'm not saying we should abandon our laptops and paper. But I am saying that we should pay attention to what we're giving up. Writing when it's difficult, when it's slow, and when it requires effort—that's when it teaches us the most. It throws mistakes at us. That's when it becomes more than a record. It becomes a tool for thinking.

Writing is not clean, and it does not have to be. So maybe it's worth picking up the pen a little more often. Not out of nostalgia, but because the act of writing—real writing—still has something to teach us.

Frida López '27
(fridalopezbravo@harvard.edu)
is trying to hand write all of her class notes this semester

Graphic by
Kelly Tang '28



Munchies vs. Michelin: Exploring the Art of Cooking

A conversation with Will McKibben '25, professionally trained chef and member of the Signet Society for his work in the Culinary Arts.

BY NATALIE COOPER '28

In the culinary world, there seem to be two opposite realms: the casual, crave-worthy indulgence of “munchies” and the meticulously crafted masterpieces of Michelin-starred dining. At first glance, the two could not be further apart—one is messy, quick, and easy; the other is precise, time-consuming, and technically arduous. The former could be viewed as artless, while the other gains praise as true art.

But is that divide really so clear-cut? Will McKibben '25 doesn't think so. A professional chef and member of the Signet Society for his work in the culinary arts, McKibben brings both technical training and philosophical depth to the kitchen. While working under award-winning chef Finn Walter at the West Texas restaurant, The Nicolett, he not only sharpened his skills but also developed a mindset that would come to shape both his cooking and his outlook on life.

“The main driving philosophy behind everything I do in cooking...is intentionality,” McKibben said, sharing advice from Walter. “Whatever you do, you should be completely pure in the intention behind it...There's a misconception that fine dining chefs have this crazy palette—that if it's not caviar, crème fraîche, then I don't want it—which is just really far from the truth. It's more about whatever you're trying to do, do it well,” he continued.

This perspective challenges the hierarchy we've come to accept around food. One might expect a reverence for formality in the culinary world, but instead, McKibben lights up when talking about one of Harvard Square's most beloved late-night spots.

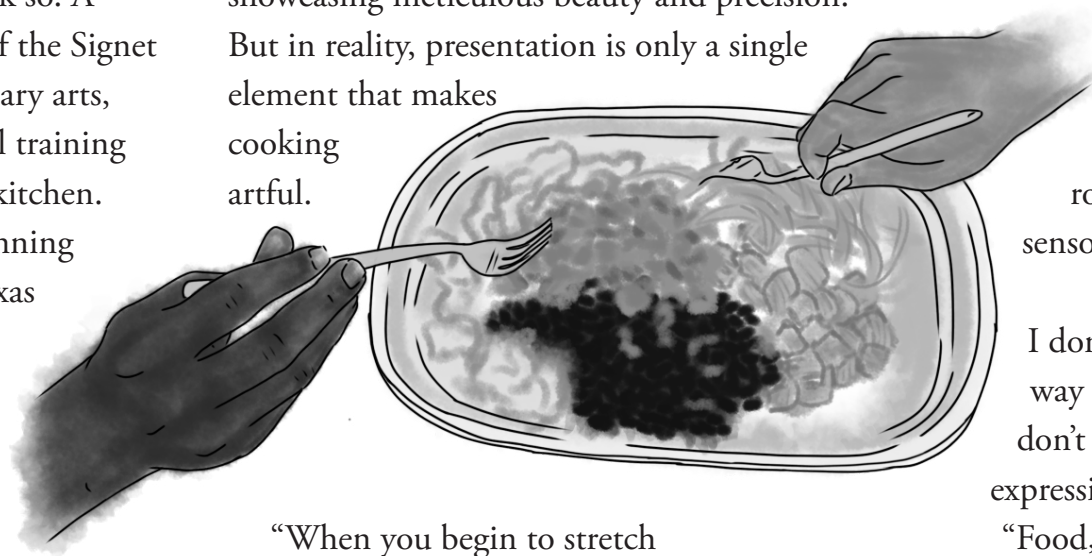
“I love El Jefe's. I think it's great,” he said. “Why? Because the intention behind their food is to be [for] a drunk, slutty night—and they do it, and they do it really well. Not everything needs to be fine dining.”

McKibben reframes food not by how it looks, but by how well it fits its intended purpose—how *intentional* all of its components are.

“I think also in a lot of contemporary

fine dining, that gets lost—a lot of doing things just for show, just because it looks cool,” he continued. “And Finn told me—he was like, any dish that you make, you—or any chef—should be able to come up and point to something and say, ‘Why is this here?’ And you should have a really strong answer. If the dish doesn't need that component, it shouldn't be there.”

One might assume that fine dining is inherently artistic, with complex presentations showcasing meticulous beauty and precision. But in reality, presentation is only a single element that makes cooking artful.



“When you begin to stretch the intentionality of the food you're making into the realm of the cerebral, that's when presentation begins to matter,” McKibben explained.

In fine dining, presentation isn't just about aesthetics—it's about how every component of a dish works together to create a sensory experience. The more refined and thoughtful the dining experience, the more intentional every aspect of the dish must be, from flavor to form.

Yet, presentation isn't always about making something look pristine or abstract. McKibben recalled a more personal, everyday experience to show how the presentation's significance shifts with context.

“You know, when my grandma makes me chicken and dumplings—maybe one of my favorites—it's right out of the pot on the stove,” McKibben said, explaining how at home, it's about the love and comfort embedded in the dish, not its visual elegance. “The higher and more cerebral you go in food, the more intentional each component has to be,” he added. “There is no presentation for your grandma's chicken and dumplings. Presentation is important, but first you have to do everything else,” McKibben said. “Then,

it becomes another element that you have to juggle perfectly.”

For McKibben, cooking is about much more than form—it's also about the emotional impact it creates. “I don't think cooking as an art form should just be about the form of it,” he said. “The minute you start using food as a physical representative medium, then you're just painting or sculpting with other things.

The emotional element, the *intentionality* of what it's supposed to elicit and feel, is the

most important thing.” In

this way, McKibben

sees cooking not just as an art, but as an art with a purpose,

rooted in creating meaningful, sensory experiences for others.

“Cooking is an art form, but I don't necessarily see it the same way others do,” he explained. “I don't view it as a pure form of self-expression.”

“Food, as an art form, is inherently less personal,” he continued. “Unlike other art forms, the act of making food is always done for someone else.” And that, he says, makes all the difference.

A painting can exist solely for its creator, a poem can remain unread in a desk drawer. But food? Food is meant to be shared. The act of making it is inseparable from the act of serving it to someone. It's an art that demands interaction and relies on intention. For McKibben, cooking transcends more common modes of artistic expression. He believes it is “the most pure, cerebral way of connecting and communicating emotions.”

In his view, cooking is not just about self-expression—it's about creating a shared experience, a universal connection that resonates with others in a way that no other art form quite can.

NATALIE COOPER '28 (NATALIE.COOPER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) BELIEVES THAT IF COOKING IS AN ART, FELIPE'S QUESADILLAS ARE MASTERPIECES.

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28

Dressed-Up Fries: A Mash-Up

A recipe inspired by a conversation with Will McKibben '25.

BY NATALIE COOPER '28

After interviewing Will McKibben '25 on cooking as an art form for the Independent, I could not stop thinking about the tension he described between fine dining and foods that are affectionately known as “munchies.” He made me realize that foods often dismissed as messy—late-night nachos, over-sauced burritos, crinkle-cut fries doused in mystery condiments—have the potential to be incredibly thoughtful.

In the spirit of McKibben's philosophy—where the artistry of cooking lies not in prestige, but rather in purpose—this recipe offers a playful yet intentional spin on a classic late-night comfort food. It doesn't matter if you're fresh off a long night in Lamont or just craving something indulgent and elevated—these loaded fries combine munchie-level satisfaction with finesse. They're easy to make, totally customizable—and, yes, absurdly good.

You can grab fries from the dining hall, Quincy Grille, or go the extra mile and make your own. Either way, the goal is the same: flavor-forward, indulgence—done well.

Ingredients:

- French fries (store-bought, from the grille, or homemade—about two paper baskets worth)
- 1 tsp Creole seasoning, or BBQ rub
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- Mayo and ketchup, for drizzling
- 1 tsp dried or fresh rosemary, finely chopped

Optional Add-Ons:

- Crushed red pepper or cayenne, for heat
- Lemon zest for brightness
- Truffle oil (if you're into that)
- Chili crisp for crunch and depth
- Ranch drizzle (instead of mayo)

Instructions:

1. Start Hot. This recipe is all about timing—fries are at their peak when they're fresh, crisp, and still steaming. Whether you're pulling them from the fryer, the oven, or the dining hall grille,

don't wait. Toss them into a large mixing bowl the second they're ready. If you're working with takeout-style fries, give them a quick minute in the oven to crisp back up.

2. Season like you mean it. While the fries are still warm (this part's key), shower them with grated Parmesan, garlic powder, rosemary, and your spice blend of choice. I usually go for Creole or Berbere, but you can get creative here. Toss thoroughly—every fry should feel seen. Don't be afraid to taste one in the process; you're not just the cook, you're quality control.

3. Salt and pepper to taste. Some dining hall fries are already salty enough. Others are weirdly bland. Taste as you go, and season accordingly. Trust your gut.

4. Plate with style. Once seasoned, lay your fries out on a tray or plate. Now comes the fun part: the drizzle. Using ketchup and mayo (or spicy mayo if you're feeling bold), create a crisscross pattern over the top. It doesn't need to be perfect—it just needs to look like you meant it. Use whatever tool you have on hand: spoon, fork, squeeze bottle, or aggressively shaken packet.

5. Serve immediately. These fries wait for no one. Grab a few friends, cue up something on Netflix, and dig in. They're salty, cheesy, herby, a little messy, and definitely delicious.

The beauty of this fries recipe lies in its adaptability.

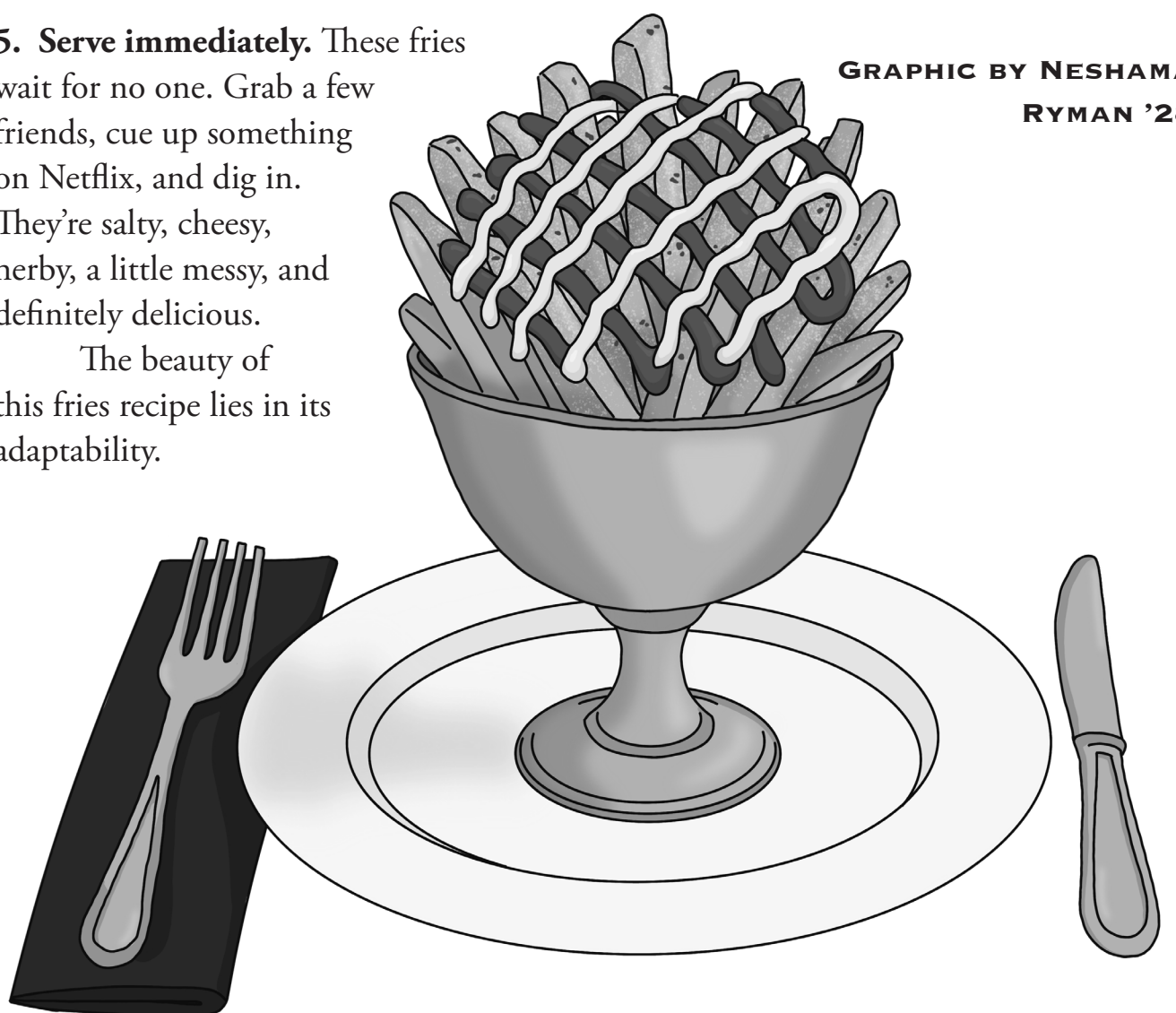
Don't have rosemary? Use thyme or oregano. Hate mayo? Sub in ranch or aioli. Want to make it vegan? Ditch the cheese, amp up the spice, and drizzle with tahini or vegan sriracha mayo. You could even take it in a Mediterranean direction with za'atar and lemon yogurt sauce, or go full fusion with miso butter and sesame seeds. The idea isn't to follow this recipe perfectly. It's to think like a chef, even if you're stoned and staring blankly into your mini fridge at 1:30 a.m.

As McKibben reminded me, cooking is not about fancy tools or expensive ingredients. It's about doing whatever you're doing with care and intention—even if what you're doing is making fries in your pajamas. There's quiet artistry in elevating the mundane.

McKibben's words stuck with me: “The emotional element, the intentionality of what it's supposed to elicit and feel, is the most important thing.” This recipe is my response. As McKibben would say, it's a little slutty, a little cerebral, and honestly—it's kind of art.

NATALIE COOPER '28 (NCOOPER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS CURRENTLY ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR SOMEONE TO SPLIT FRIES WITH.

GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN '28

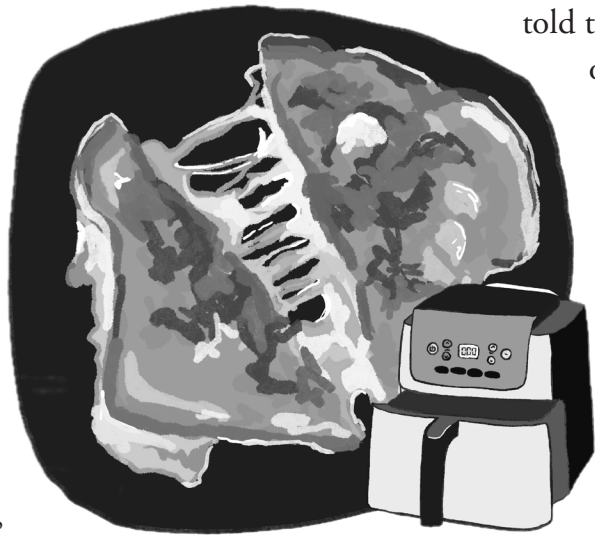


Addicted To My Air Fryer

An original creative writing piece.

BY ILANA FEDER '26

Steve was your typical Harvard first-year. He planned on studying economics and had never felt freer now that he could hide his grades from his parents. He was in love with a girl who lived above him in Canaday, but he couldn't remember if her name was "Chloe" or "Zoe" and was too scared to ask her. The craziest thing Steve did in high school was disable his Life360 so he could secretly get picked up by a girl at 11:00 p.m. They made out in the backseat of her Volkswagen Jetta at the town pool parking lot. He got mono three weeks later. Now, at Harvard, Steve was determined to make these next four years the "craziest years of his life."



Steve was put in a suite with two other boys who were basically carbon copies of him. His roommates, Kevin and Tyler, shared the same goals of wanting to be more spontaneous and try new things, and make the most of their "college experience." Despite these sentiments, the first month of school went by, and the new things they tried were more along the lines of comping the Venture Capital Group instead of going to parties. Steve was getting to the point in the semester where the enhanced Wednesday brain break in Annenberg was the most exciting part of his week. He was craving that rush, but his needs were not being fulfilled. He never did drugs, and the drunkest he'd ever been was off of three Bud Light Platins. His boredom and stress were bubbling up and needed to be released.

On a random Tuesday in October, Steve got an email that a package had arrived for him. He was puzzled as he wasn't expecting anything from his family or Amazon. He came out of the Science Center with the mysterious package that weighed about 10 pounds and was in the shape of an almost perfect square. Steve made it back to his dorm and was eager to open it up.

Upon ripping the package open, Steve let out a loud, "What the fuck?" He was standing face to face with an...air fryer. Kevin and Tyler ran into Steve's room, curious as to what made Steve drop the f-bomb (he rarely cursed). Kevin saw the air fryer on top of Steve's nightstand.

"Yo, bro, why did you order that?"

Kevin asked.

"I swear I didn't. It just showed up," Steve tried to explain.

"Okay, well, you know you're not allowed to have that in here. You have to mail it back to wherever it came from," Tyler added.

It was a no-brainer. Steve didn't order the air fryer; it was against the Harvard fire code to have one in the room. He was going to send it back. But, deep down, something was compelling him to keep it.

"I know. I'll get it out of here," Steve told the boys, unsure of how truthful his own words were.

The next day, Steve went through the motions of his usual schedule. In a rush from one class to another, he made a turkey and cheese sandwich and placed it in a to-go box. He ate half and saved the other half for later. When Steve finally returned home after his long day, he was startled to see the big, black box in his room that he had forgotten about.

The air fryer sat there, staring at Steve, teasing him. Steve knew better than to give in, but then he remembered the remaining half of his sandwich in his bag. Steve approached the air fryer apprehensively.

"What's the harm in air-frying just half a sandwich?" Steve asked himself. Surrendering to his whim, Steve unraveled the air fryer cord and plugged it into his desk outlet. Shiny buttons came on as he slowly put the sandwich onto the frying rack. After eight minutes, the alarm went off. Steve opened the air fryer. A work of art emerged out of this magical box. Steve found his gaze resting upon a hot, cheesy sandwich that made his eyes sparkle with wonder. Steve's pupils dilated as he brought the sandwich to his mouth and took a bite. "Oh, fuck," was all he could think as the perfectly warm, crispy sandwich rolled around his tongue and down his throat.

Steve spent the rest of the week distracted. He sat through lectures physically, but mentally, he was somewhere else. Steve was daydreaming about the air fryer. He could feel the grooves of the frying rack and hear the sounds of the buttons. A chill would run down Steve's spine each time his mind wandered to the air fryer's perfect curves. He imagined going to Trader Joe's and buying hash browns, pizza bagels, and chicken nuggets just to shove into his air fryer and then his mouth. He wanted to put so many things into that air fryer—so many things. To Steve, it seemed that the opportunities were endless. He knew it was wrong. It wasn't just bad, it was against policy.

But if it was so wrong, why did it feel so right?

Eventually, Steve started skipping his classes. His roommates grew concerned. They realized they hadn't seen or heard from Steve in three days. Kevin and Tyler knocked on Steve's door. There was no answer. They knocked again, banging louder and louder. Still no answer. They grew more worried and decided to open the door.

Inside Steve's room, the lights were off, and they could barely make out the shape of a person sitting on the carpeted floor.

"Steve?" Kevin asked, not sure of what he was seeing.

Steve was rocking back and forth on the floor. The heat was blasting, but he was shivering. Specks of sweat beaded his forehead. Right next to him sat the air fryer. Kevin and Tyler tried to make out what Steve was saying, but he kept mumbling to himself. It sounded like he was trying to say, "More mozzarella sticks," between every twitch. Steve continued pressing random buttons on the air fryer so much that it seemed like he was trying to communicate Morse code.

"Steve, you need help," said Tyler.

But Steve couldn't hear him. His mind was blank. All that consumed him was the air fryer. Kevin and Tyler shared concerned glances and retreated from the horrifying sight.

The following morning, Steve's parents came to pick him up. Kevin and Tyler had told their proctor that Steve wasn't doing well. They figured it would be best for Steve to return home and find himself again. His parents were devastated and shocked to hear the news because Steve had always been their perfect child.

"WHO SENT THIS AIR FRYER?" shouted Steve's mom, demanding answers for how her baby boy became so broken. No one had an answer for her. In the same week, the dean sent an email reminding undergraduate students of the rules of dorm appliances and the consequences of hiding them in their rooms.

Steve never made it back to Harvard. It took a long time for him to fight his air fryer demons. Shortly after Steve left, Kevin and Tyler decided to throw the air fryer into the Charles River. To this day, it sits at the bottom of the river, waiting for Steve to turn it on again.

ILANA FEDER '26 (ILANAFEDER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY ANNA SHAO '28

Russell's Sprouts: Chocolate Peanut Butter Oat Clusters

Like oatmeal got high and found itself.

BY ALMA RUSSELL '26

It is officially munchies season, which means there must be “healthy” snacks and treats on hand at all times. Considering these cookies contain oats, milk, and peanut butter, they’re basically a hearty breakfast alternative. This recipe is no-bake and only takes about 10 minutes to throw together on the stovetop, so it’s perfect for a pre- or post-gardening session with lots of room for mistakes.

Chocolate Peanut Butter Oat Clusters Recipe

Recipe adapted from Real Food with Jessica.

Ingredients:

- 3 cups old-fashioned oats
- ½ cup butter
- 2 cups white sugar
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- ¼ cup cocoa powder
- Parchment or wax paper

Steps:

1. Measure your oats and set them aside.
2. Melt the butter in a large pan. Add the sugar, milk, peanut butter, and cocoa powder.
3. Stir over medium-high heat until ingredients are combined. Don’t stop stirring!
4. Once it is boiling (rolling, not just small bubbles around the edge),

continue to stir for four minutes.

5. Turn off the heat and add the vanilla extract, stirring to incorporate.

6. Add the oats and mix until coated. Work quickly, as the mixture will harden as it cools.

7. Using a greased spoon or cookie scoop, scoop two tablespoon clusters onto wax paper.

8. Let fully cool for about 20 minutes.

Tips:

Depending on how sweet you like your sweet treats, you can limit the amount of sugar to 1 cup instead of 2 cups. I find they’re on the sweeter side. The dining hall has peanut butter, oats, butter, milk, and sugar, so run to Tommy’s, grab some cocoa powder and vanilla, and get to cooking!

These cookies hit the



spot. Chewy, peanut buttery, chocolatey—what’s better after a nice sesh? When you’re running late to class and don’t want to eat those fly-by Oreo cookies for the fifth day in a row, meal-prep some chocolate peanut butter oat clusters instead! You can make them in a communal kitchen; just make sure to store them in a tightly fitted container or they’ll lose their chew. I have yet to meet someone who doesn’t like them. For more recipes and meal inspiration, check out @almondsfooddiary on Instagram!



ALMA RUSSELL '26
(**ALMARUSSELL@**
COLLEGE.HARVARD.
EDU) SWEARS SHE’S
NOT HIGH RIGHT NOW;
SHE JUST REALLY
LOVES THESE COOKIES.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
ALMA RUSSELL '26

Heff's HUDS Hacks

A collection of dining hall recipes to make HUDS edible—and even enjoyable.

BY HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26

As a self-proclaimed foodie, it is an understatement to say that Harvard University Dining Services is a massive disappointment. The cost for the meal plan for the Spring 2025 semester totaled \$4,134, which breaks down to about \$35 per day. This cost is widely agreed upon by the student body as simply too high, especially considering the food options that it purchases. The HUDS bagged eggs, avocado purée, and corned beef hash (that I still have yet to try) pale in comparison to my typical breakfast at home of avocados on sourdough toast topped with cherry tomatoes and a drizzle of balsamic. But through my three years here, I've come up with a few tips and tricks to hack the HUDS experience, and I'm here to share my wisdom through this assembly of recipes.

Ciabatta Caprese Crunch

If you ever see me in Pfoho d-hall during lunch, this sandwich is guaranteed to be on my plate.

Ingredients:

- 1 ciabatta bread roll
- Mayo
- Pesto
- 2 slices turkey (optional)
- 3 mozzarella cheese circles
- 4 tomato slices
- Salt (optional)
- Balsamic glaze

Instructions:

1. Split your ciabatta roll in half and put it through the toaster once to lightly toast.
2. Evenly spread mayo on one side of the toasted bread and pesto on the other.
3. Optional: Put two slices of turkey on one side of the bread.
4. Put two mozzarella circles on the other side of the bread. Split the third mozzarella circle in half to fill the rest of this side.
5. Place the tomato slices on top of the mozzarella. Optional: salt the tomatoes.
6. Drizzle balsamic glaze on top of the tomato slices. Measure with your heart.
7. Place the two sides of the sandwich together, wrap in foil, and put into the panini press on low heat. Take it out when the mozzarella is as melty as you prefer (or when you're done waiting).
8. Cut your finished sandwich in half and enjoy!

Deconstructed Ciabatta Caprese Crunch

When a sandwich is too much effort but you still want something flavorful.

Ingredients:

- 2-3 pieces mozzarella
- 2-3 tomato slices
- Pesto
- Balsamic glaze

Instructions:

1. Plate your mozzarella.
2. Place one tomato slice on top of each mozzarella slice.
3. Put a dollop of pesto on each tomato.
4. Drizzle balsamic glaze on top. Again, measure with your heart.
5. Pat yourself on the back. Job well done.

East-Asian Cuisine-Inspired Rice Bowl

You'll find this recipe in my bowl at Dunster late dinner.

Ingredients:

- Rice (preferably sticky rice, but any kind is fine)
- Crispy pork bites (ground beef can be substituted)
- Cucumbers
- Shredded carrots
- Edamame
- Pickled onions
- Over-easy fried egg
- Sesame oil
- Soy sauce
- Boom boom sauce
- Green onions

Instructions:

1. Grab a big bowl from the salad bar. Fill 1/3 of the bowl with rice.
2. Pour equal parts sesame oil and soy sauce on the rice.
3. Top the rice with equal amounts pork bites, cucumbers, edamame, shredded carrots, and pickled onions.
4. Put your fried egg on top. Once complete, your toppings should cover all of your rice.
5. Lightly drizzle boom boom sauce over top. Garnish with green onions.
6. Complete!

Hannah's Cucumber Heaven

Inspired by my lovely roommate Hannah Nguyen '26 and her version of a HUDS cucumber salad.

Ingredients:

- Cucumbers
- 1 part rice vinegar
- 2 parts sesame oil
- 2 parts soy sauce
- Agave nectar (honey can be substituted)
- Spoonful of red pepper flakes
- Spoonful of sesame seeds

Instructions:

1. Fill a large bowl with cucumbers. (Your bowl should be FILLED—leave only 1 inch of room from the top of the bowl for mixing space.)
2. Pour your rice vinegar over the cucumbers.
3. Pour the sesame oil and soy sauce over the cucumbers.
4. Put a small spoonful bit of agave (or honey) over the cucumbers. Mix.
5. Sprinkle red pepper flakes and sesame seeds on top. Mix again.

Note: best enjoyed when shared with friends.

Southwest Chicken Salad

Healthy and hearty.

Ingredients:

- Romaine lettuce
- 3 spoonfuls corn
- 1 chicken breast
- 3 spoonfuls black beans
- 1 handful cherry tomatoes
- Cheese
- 2 parts barbecue sauce
- 3 parts ranch

- 1 part boom boom sauce
- Lemon juice
- Wonton strips

Instructions:

1. Fill a large bowl with romaine lettuce.
 2. Top with equal parts chicken, cherry tomatoes, corn, and black beans until 3/4 of your lettuce bed is full.
 3. Dressing: Mix three parts ranch to two parts barbeque sauce in a separate bowl. Add one part boom boom sauce and a couple drops of lemon juice and mix again.
 4. Pour dressing over the salad and mix.
- Top with cheese and wonton strips and enjoy!

Rocco's Wrap

A HUDS take on a chicken Caesar wrap.

Ingredients:

- Tortilla
- 1/2 bowl romaine lettuce
- 1 chicken breast
- Large spoonful of Caesar dressing
- Dash of lemon juice
- Dash of buffalo sauce (or original Cholula)
- Spoonful of parmesan cheese
- Croutons

Instructions:

1. Fill a large bowl with romaine lettuce.
2. In a separate bowl, take your chicken and use two forks to shred it into small pieces. Add the chicken to your bowl of lettuce.
3. Top with Caesar dressing (don't be shy!), a smidgen of lemon juice, and buffalo sauce to your taste. Sprinkle parmesan and croutons on top.
4. Cut up the salad mixture until it is the texture of your liking.
5. Take a tortilla and dump the salad mixture on top. Use your expert wrapping skills to fold the wrap.
6. Take two pieces of foil and use a stick of butter to spread butter across the foil (this will make your tortilla extra crispy). Fold your wrap in the foil and place it in the panini press on low-medium heat.
7. Take your wrap out and cut it in half. Add more Caesar dressing if necessary.
8. And there it is! HUDS chicken Caesar wrap complete.

Root Beer Float

Simple and nostalgic. Easy to forget how easy it is to make.

Ingredients:

- Vanilla ice cream
- Root beer

Instructions:

1. Assemble. (Scoop ice cream. Pour root beer over top.)
2. Enjoy.

HEIDI HEFFELFINGER '26
(HEIDIHEFFELFINGER@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS STILL
TRAUMATIZED FROM FINDING
A MYSTERIOUS STRING IN HER
POTATOES FRESHMAN YEAR.

GRAPHIC BY EL RICHARDS '26

Got Me Singing in the Shower

From Becky G to rewarding eats, the 2025 Cultural Rhythms Festival pulled out all the stops.

BY BEN KAUFMAN '28

It's springtime again, and with the changing seasons comes the annual event that everyone's talking about: the annual Cultural Rhythms Festival. Throughout the week, student groups strutted the fashion runway, prepared their favorite foods from home, and showcased their heritages through dance and music—all to celebrate cultural identity and community at Harvard.

This year's culminating show, hosted in Sanders Theatre on April 5, dazzled as a celebration of global traditions and diverse artistry. Organized by the Harvard Foundation for Intercultural and Race Relations, the event named singer, songwriter, and activist Becky G (Rebbeca Gomez) as the 2025 Artist of the Year. Past recipients of the award include world-famous artists such as Salma Hayek, Will Smith, and Rihanna.

Before the main show, the Cultural Rhythms Food Festival on Friday had already drawn hundreds of students to sample a world of flavors. With tables lining the outside of Memorial Church, student organizations served up home-cooked cultural favorites. I tasted my way from Mexico to Morocco, and I could tell that each plate carried the soul of a community.

Eager to get my eat on, I grabbed a plate of grilled-fried chicken from the Generational African American Students Association, doused in sweet soy glaze and still crispy even after sitting in a pan. Then I went to the Fuerza Latina table, which offered smooth, rich flan that I scarfed down in seconds. Harvard Hillel handed out fluffy challah rolls, lightly sweet and comforting, like the best home-baked bread. At the Nigerian Students Association table, I helped myself to a heaping serving of jollof rice and warm, golden puff puff—score! I ended on a sweet note with fried dough

from the Black Muslim Collective, sitting down in the Yard to yap away as I always do (shout out to Layla, the *Independent's* Editor-in-Chief, for indulging me that Friday).

While the festival filled my belly, the Cultural Rhythms Show and Award Ceremony on Saturday night was a visual feast of dance and music. This year's lineup featured 10 student groups, each offering a riveting performance that left me absolutely floored. My personal favorites, Candela and Bhangra, brought especially vivid fashion and style to their performances. When the Bhangra dancers came out on the stage, they were all smiles and brought the *energy*!

I wasn't alone in being impressed by the performances. "I really like Candela," said Gabe Timoteo '28, an audience member. "I like the choreography, especially the music. I'm Brazilian myself, so it reminds me a lot of Brazilian music. So I just loved the whole act, loved it, loved it."

It wasn't just the performers who were having fun. The hosts, Isabela Gonzalez-Lawand '26 and Tiffany Onyeiwu '25, often got in on the dances too; I especially enjoyed their attempt to walk over the tinikling sticks brought by the Harvard Undergraduate Philippine Forum while not getting their feet caught between the massive bamboo poles. You just had to be there to believe it.

While we sometimes laughed and cheered as the night went on, the show also grappled with more serious topics. Recognizing the local Wampanoag tribes and people, LeMonie Hutt '26 delivered a land acknowledgment to start the show, offering the audience time to reflect and feel gratitude for the recognition of minorities shown at events like Cultural Rhythms. Right after, Alta

Mauro, the Associate Dean for Inclusion and Belonging, gave her thoughts on the importance of cultural diversity in our current political climate alongside Habiba Braimah, Senior Director of the Harvard Foundation.

To be frank, I didn't know who Becky G was before Cultural Rhythms. But for every one of you who have heard "Shower" (think "I'm dancing in the mirror, and singing in the shower") on the radio in 2014, you've encountered Gomez before. Since then, she has made herself anything *but* a one-hit wonder—her collabs span from Pitbull to Sean Paul, and she even has three songs with more than 500 million plays on Spotify.

With her work through the past decade, there's no denying Becky G's icon status, and Gomez accepted the plaque like the winner she is. "I want 100%—100% of my pride in both sides of who I am: Mexican and American," she reflected, telling the story of how she came to terms with her own two identities. As a white-Asian American, I felt that message speak to me. No wonder Gomez has found success outside her "Shower" days, as she has ventured across Latin music, rap, and hip-hop.

That story resonated with Timoteo as well: "It's a big inspiration for my own Latino brothers, especially for my Latina sisters, to see a Latina artist," he said. "I think it's empowering for women—for Latina women, something I'm a big supporter of."

Overall, the 2025 Cultural Rhythms Festival struck a strong balance between celebration and substance. The sampling of student-made dishes felt personal and inviting to me, while the main show at Sanders Theatre showcased standout performances that I still thought back on days later. Thoughtful moments, from the land acknowledgment and reflections on identity, added depth without slowing the momentum. With events like Cultural Rhythms still running strong at Harvard, I'm heartened that our community continues to find entertaining yet engaging ways to lead purposeful, cultural conversations.

BEN KAUFMAN '28 (BENKAUFMAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STILL STRUGGLES TO SPELL THE WORD "RHYTHM."

GRAPHIC BY CLARA LAKE '27



Calling All Artists!

A Boston-wide art gallery coming to Harvard on April 18 is looking for student submissions.

BY RANIA JONES '27 AND SARA KUMAR '27

There are moments when the art world feels like a quiet, distant thing—locked behind gallery walls. But in certain spaces, art belongs to everyone. Art breaks free, and the walls speak louder than ever.

From April 18-21, Harvard University's Gallery at 92 Seattle St. will host an exhibition that promises more than just art on its walls. Organized by Harvard students and open to all emerging creatives in the Greater Boston CSA, the Boston-wide Art Gallery is putting out a bold call for submissions: artists, photographers, filmmakers, musicians, and volunteers are all invited to take part.

No prior experience is required, and no medium is off-limits. Whether it's paint on canvas, a short film, or a haunting black-and-white photograph, all aspiring artists are welcome.

After recognizing the lack of professional opportunities for young artists, curator Katherrin Billordo '26 was inspired to bring a more inclusive creative scene to Harvard. Billordo's journey started in Chicago at 16, organizing youth art shows in hopes of broadening the production space. "There were [few opportunities] for emerging artists to share their work without feeling intimidated, excluded, or paying fees," Billordo wrote in a statement to the *Independent*.

"With this free show, I carried that same mission to Boston—applying for grants, putting up 75+ flyers around campus, messaging local artist collectives on Instagram, cold-emailing art professors from 10+ Boston universities, and coordinating

drop-off logistics with dozens of artists I had never met," she added.

"We're aiming to create a fun, free, and welcoming environment that brings artists together, challenges the exclusivity of traditional galleries, and makes space for self-expression, community, and creativity."

At its core, this exhibition isn't just a creative outlet—it's a movement. From protest posters to street murals to emotionally charged performances, art has become a tool for resistance, healing, and collective action. This upcoming show leans into that tradition, inviting participants to explore not just what they create, but why they create. It opens the door for art that speaks to lived experience—pieces that challenge systems, celebrate culture, call out injustice, or simply carve space for joy in resistance.

This gallery calls attention to the recent rise in popularity and appreciation for younger artists in the creative community, especially

among older individuals. "People of my generation want to feel in tune with whatever artwork they're buying and are more focused

on experiencing art – in that way, you naturally meet a lot of emerging artists," GenZ art collector Jeffrey Liu expressed in an interview with Art Basel earlier this year.

The opening reception will take place on Friday, April 18, and will feature live music, local food, activities, and drinks—everything you'd hope for on a Friday night where creativity takes center stage. Local musicians, photographers, and performers are encouraged to apply to help bring this opening event to

life. The full exhibit will remain open through Sunday, April 21.

Ultimately, this exhibition is a testament to Billordo's desire to make the artistic profession more inclusive and welcoming to emerging voices. "Every step was about making space for new voices and building a platform where creativity, accessibility, diversity, and connection could thrive," Billordo said.

To Billardo, this exhibit will go beyond the art on its walls. "This gallery proves that art isn't just about showcasing work; it's about building empathy, community, and new relationships," she added.

Projects like Billardo's have the ability to fulfill the art world's desire for expression and community. "I feel lucky to have found a gallery who shares my artistic vision and serves as a true space for growth," commented Wei Libo, a Paris-based sculptor, on the power of galleries focused on emerging creators in the same Art Basel discussion.

The Boston Art Gallery's goals are clear: to spark empathy, deepen self-expression, and build real connections. With artists from across backgrounds and experiences, the show aims to be a dynamic learning space—one where new perspectives thrive and community is everything.

This isn't just another student show—it's a call to reimagine what a gallery can be. Submissions are still open—no entry fees, just the audacity to create and a community that's eagerly waiting to listen.

RANIA JONES '27 (RJONES@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) AND SARA KUMAR '27 (SJKUMAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ARE PLANNING ON HEADING TO 92 SEATTLE ST. ON APRIL 18.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISTAN DARSHAN '25



SPORTS

Sports Spotlight: Women's 4x400m Relay Team

Following a historic indoor season, this relay team is ready to see what they can do outdoors.

BY OLIVIA LUNSETH '28

The Harvard women's 4x400-meter relay team has just concluded a historic indoor track season in style, finishing sixth place at the NCAA Indoor Championships and earning All-American First Team Honors. Before this final indoor meet, they broke their school record for the fourth time, resetting it to 3:30.28. The team plans to carry this momentum into the outdoor season with more achievements in sight.

The 4x400-meter relay is one of the most well-known events in track and field. It is the grand finale of the meet and a final chance to earn points for teams. In this relay, four team members each run 400 meters, one lap around an outdoor track or two around an indoor one. The Harvard women's 4x400-meter team—comprised of Victoria Bossong '25, Chloe Fair '25, Izzy Goudros '25, and Sophia Gorriaran '27—has proven time and time again that they thrive under pressure with their combination of speed, strategy, and teamwork.

"I think we just channel each other's energy and have fun out there," Gorriaran shared.

"None of us stressed about it, it's not any of our main events," she added. "It's kind of like no stress, no pressure."

Bossong and Gorriaran run the same main event: the 800-meter. Fair specializes in the 400-meter hurdles, which are only competed during the outdoor season, so during the indoor season, she runs the 200-meter, 400-meter, and distance medley relay. Goudros focuses on the pentathlon (five events, scored as one event) during the indoor season and the heptathlon (seven events over two days, scored as one event) during the outdoor season.

All four of these athletes earned All-American First Team Honors at the NCAA Indoor Championships in their respective events as well as the 4x400-meter relay. Bossong and Gorriaran placed second and sixth in the 800-meter, respectively. Fair ran the 400-meter leg of the distance medley relay that placed seventh, while Goudros took home sixth in the pentathlon.

This relay squad has more than individual success in each leg of the race.

There is a unique synergy among them that has made all the difference. "I think having a good culture and good environment helped us get to Nationals," Gorriaran said.

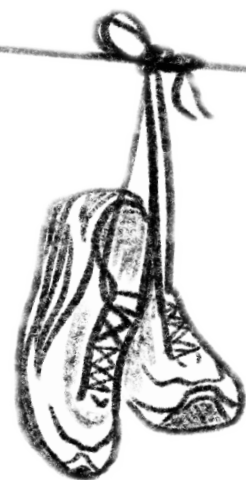
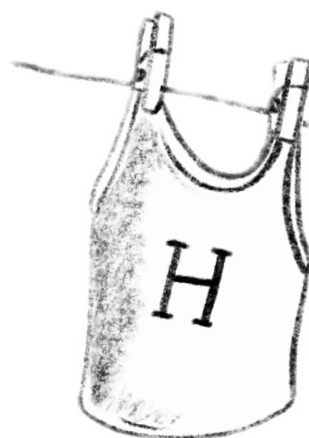
Part of that positive environment was the overwhelming support within the team this year, which likely played a key role in their ability to compete against teams composed of all 400-meter specialists. "It definitely was a little weird to look around and see other teams that have strictly [400-meter] runners competing against us, but I think we got over that pretty well," said Fair.

The team's collective success went beyond just the four relay runners as they placed 11th at the NCAA Indoor Championships, the best finish at this meet in program history. Additionally, the women's team took home 11 out of the 12 All-American First-Team Honors earned by Ivy League Women, the most earned by any women's team in the nation this year. "Our successes indoors just really go beyond the four of us. I think our team showed out at the Ivy Championships and then at Nationals in a way that we've never seen before. And I'm really proud of that," said Fair.

A pivotal moment for the team came at the Terrier Distance Medley Relay Challenge. "[When] our 4x400 [team] had not quite qualified for nationals yet, we had a last chance meet that we were going to run at," Fair said. "We were going to run [the relay] pretty much alone, so we were incredibly nervous."

Running without opponents is a challenge—there's no one else to compete against, so it's all about racing against the clock. Despite this, the relay team secured their qualifying time, setting a new school record for the fourth and final time this season. Fair, who anchored the relay, crossed the line as the clock read 3:30.28.

Despite the pressure, the team drew strength from their teammates rallying



behind them. "A bus full of people showed up and followed around the whole track. And so the whole way around, there was someone yelling at us, and it was just so incredible to see that level of support," Fair said. Fueled by their team's support, they came out of this meet ranked eighth in the nation and secured their place at the NCAA Indoor Championships.

As the relay team members move into the outdoor season, they have tangible goals in mind. "We're looking to get the outdoor school record," Fair said. "We're looking to get that this year, hopefully in the next meet or two, and I think we're just going to see continued success in [the 4x400-meter relay]."

The team hopes to see even more support from the Harvard community, encouraging students to come out and cheer them on. "We're hoping to get a fan bus ready," Fair said about the Ivy League Championships at Yale on May 10 and 11. "We're coming to take that title."

This meet in New Haven will be the only outdoor meet within a reasonable distance of Harvard—just about two hours by public transport. Most big outdoor meets are in the South, so if you want to watch this team challenge Harvard's outdoor school record in the 4x400, this is your chance.

With a history of success, a solid team culture, and high aspirations for the outdoor season, the Harvard women's 4x400 relay team is poised to continue its dominance on the track.

OLIVIA LUNSETH '28 (OLIVIALUNSETH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CANNOT WAIT TO SEE WHAT THIS RELAY TEAM CAN DO DURING THE OUTDOOR SEASON.

GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26

Sports Spotlight: Mason Langenbrunner and Joe Miller

Harvard men's ice hockey has two new leaders.

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

Last week, Harvard men's ice hockey announced that Mason Langenbrunner '26 and Joe Miller '26 will be taking over for Ian Moore '25, Jack Bar '25, and Zakary Karpa '25 as captains of the Crimson next season. Both players were voted to wear the 'C' by their teammates and are eager to take on the new responsibility.

Miller and Langenbrunner have been all-star members of men's ice hockey during their time at Harvard. As the team continues to rebuild following the departure of eight seniors after the 2022-2023 season, Langenbrunner and Miller have proven themselves dedicated, resilient, and able to perform despite team-wide struggles during their tenures.

Langenbrunner had a career season this past season, netting six goals and adding four assists for 10 points in 33 games. A fifth-round Boston Bruins draft pick in 2020, he scored twice at TD Garden against Northeastern in the Beanpot and was a two-time ECAC Defenseman of the Week. With 99 career games played, Langenbrunner is set to become the 43rd defenseman in the last 45 seasons to reach 100 career games when he leads the Crimson next season. The Minnesota native has recorded seven goals and nine assists throughout his Harvard career. This year, Langenbrunner also earned the Donald Angier Hockey Trophy, awarded to the Harvard player who shows the greatest overall improvement during the season.



Miller has been an offensive force for the Crimson, racking up 31 goals and 47 assists for a total of 77 points over 93 career games; he is just the tenth Crimson forward in the last decade to surpass 75 career points. Named Ivy League Rookie of the Year in 2022-23, Miller earned All-Ivy First Team and ECAC Third Team honors as a sophomore, finishing with 13 goals and 14 assists in 32 games. He was selected in the sixth round of the NHL Draft by the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2020.

"It's an honor to be named a captain here at Harvard. The history of this program alone makes it special, but the fact that I get to help lead a great hockey team as well makes it an amazing opportunity," Langenbrunner said in an interview

with the *Independent*.

For both players, being chosen by their teammates to become the team's next leaders is a monumental moment. "It means a lot to be voted a captain by our teammates. Having the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of previous Harvard hockey leaders is such a unique opportunity that I'm excited to experience," Miller shared.

For both players, hockey is a fundamental part of their lives. Lagenbrunner's father, Jamie Langenbrunner, was a legendary NHL player, winning two Stanley Cups with the 1999 Dallas Stars, the team's first championship, and the 2003 New Jersey Devils. Langenbrunner also served as captain of the United States Olympic Hockey Team in 2010 for their silver medal finish.

"I was fortunate enough to grow up around the game with my dad having a long and successful NHL career. He was my role model and the person I learned from," Langenbrunner said. "Now, I look at guys around the National Hockey League, but I've always found that watching and focusing on myself has been the best way for me to learn what I need to be adding."

Miller has been able to find similar inspiration from multiple places in hockey. "I feel like I've had a lot of role models throughout my hockey career. Whether it's NHL players like Mitch Marner or Patrick Kane, or former teammates like Sean Farrell and Erik Middendorf, I've learned so much not just on the ice, but off the ice from these guys," he said.

Harvard men's ice hockey has had a rocky record the last two years, going 7-19-6 in 2023-2024 and 13-17-3 in 2024-2025; however, the new captains are optimistic about the coming season. "I'm hoping our team can achieve some big goals next year," said Miller.

"I'm hoping that we can have a fast start next season. We have a lot of guys returning and good first-years coming in so a strong start would make for an optimistic season," Langenbrunner added.

When Miller and Langenbrunner return in the fall, they'll be the latest in a line of well respected leaders that have helped prepare them for the transition. "Joe and I have both been blessed with fantastic leadership over our three years from guys that wore the 'C' and guys that didn't," said Langenbrunner.

"Obviously, being at Harvard you're surrounded by so many different people who have such unique experiences. I think interacting with these individuals and learning their experiences and how they operate can be applied to being a

leader within a team," echoed Miller.

As for specific lessons they will be bringing into their new roles, the two new captains were adamant about the importance of being strategically articulated on and off the ice.



"Learning how to balance different preferences, playing styles and personalities is something that I'm looking forward to. The current captains have also taught me how to manage these things. They've done a great job at leading by example while also being vocal when necessary," said Miller.

"The biggest thing I've learned is to just be yourself and be a voice of reason," Langenbrunner added.

Harvard will lose eight players next season, a significant departure of talent for the squad. Searching for a silver lining, both Miller and Langenbrunner see this as a major opportunity for growth, individually and as a cohesive unit. "With those losses, I'm excited to watch other guys step up into bigger roles. We have so many great hockey players on this team and a new season presents everyone with the opportunity to grow their game," said Miller.

"Losing those guys is hard. They are great players, friends, and leaders of our program. These guys leaving mean we have big shoes to fill so that's where we need guys to have big offseasons to put themselves in the best positions to fill those roles," continued Langenbrunner.

Everyone from fans to coaches to the players themselves knows what has to happen for this team to be successful in the years to come. Big jumps are needed from everyone to turn Harvard from the underdog into a competitive hockey program. Miller and Langenbrunner seem eager to take those jumps and lead by example.

JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27 (JWASSERBERGER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD LIKE TO FINALLY WRITE A STRING OF ARTICLES ABOUT HOW GOOD THINGS ARE GOING FOR THE MEN'S ICE HOCKEY TEAM.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

ACROSS

- 1. Roald Dahl's "Big Friendly _____"
- 3. Makes Your Stomach Growl
- 4. Where You Cook Your Pot
- 5. Milk Dispensers
- 8. Spanish Uncle
- 9. Goes With Scratchy In The Simpsons
- 10. Straight To The Point, or Not Sharp
- 11. Constrictor Snake
- 12. "The Only Thing We Have To Fear ___ Fear Itself"
- 14. Opposite of 12 Across
- 15. F*** It, We'll Do It _____
- 17. 1st Blank In Willie Nelson's "_____ Me Up And _____ Me When I Die"
- 18. Response To A Good Proposal
- 20. _____ Of Worms
- 21. Shorthand For A Good Boxing Victory
- 22. Deep Chasm
- 23. 2nd Blank In Willie Nelson's "_____ Me Up And _____ Me When I Die"
- 24. Fast Feline, Academically Dishonest Student To A Bostonian

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

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

DOWN

- 1. When Eating Becomes A Deadly Sin
- 2. To Point To, Sounds Like A Strain Of Weed
- 6. Cry From Homer
- 7. Kissing = Two People Swapping Their _____
- 9. Crohn's Sister, Abbr.
- 13. Austen Wrote About This And Sensibility
- 14. Something You Get When Your Crush Chases a Ping Pong Ball
- 16. How To Describe Slippery Roads In A Cold Winter
- 19. See-_____, Fun On The Playground!



By FRED KLEIN '28

Join
cerca
Here:
#AD



Katie Merriam Layla Chaoani

THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT PUBLISHES
EVERY WEEK DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR
BY THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT, INC.
12 ARROW STREET CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

Design by CLARA LAKE '27