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HARVARD

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INDEPENDENT

OFF THE RECORD

The student weekly since 1969



OFF THE RECORD

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

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The Harvard University Police Reports an Overall Decrease in Campus Crime

An analysis of the HUPD “2025 Annual Security Report.”

BY SARA KUMAR '27

The Harvard University Police Department released its “2025 Annual Security Report” on Oct. 1, containing data from 2022, 2023, and 2024. The institution’s Cambridge Campus saw an overall decline across violent and hate-motivated crimes since 2023.

“Together, the Department and the community can work to create an environment free from the distraction of criminal activity and disorder, for the pursuit of education and scholarship that brings people to Harvard University,” Interim Chief of Police Denis Downing wrote in the report.

Responsible for more than 19,000 students, 14,000 faculty, and 700 buildings, HUPD leverages their status as a full-service police department—consisting of a Patrol Division, Criminal Investigation Division, and Dignitary Protection Unit—to respond to any campus criminal incidents. All HUPD officers hold deputy sheriff powers, granting them authority to make arrests for campus disturbances or “breach of the peace on city streets” in Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston. Officers are permitted to enforce University, local, and state policies.

HUPD maintains a close working relationship with municipal law enforcement in Cambridge, Boston, and Somerville. Though no formal memorandum establishes it, HUPD holds primary jurisdiction over all incidents on campus—except homicide. For criminal activity immediately adjacent to campus, HUPD often coordinates with local police to ensure the most appropriate response. The Annual Security Report includes information obtained from these police departments.

“Working together is always better, as it increases communication and improves relationships, both of which are so incredibly important,” Downing continued.

The Annual Security Report is formed at the discretion of the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, which requires that all higher education institutions disclose security policies, procedures, and offense statistics relating to reported “Clery Crimes”—inclusive of transgressions like simple assaults and thefts that occur on Harvard’s land, University-affiliated spaces, or campus-adjacent public property.

According to the Report, violent crime on Harvard’s Cambridge campus decreased by approximately 52% between 2023 and 2024. Since 2022, there have been no incidents of murder or manslaughter in HUPD and peer departments’ areas of jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, on April 20, an active shooter at the Harvard Square T stop sent shockwaves through campus affiliates as HUPD issued a shelter-in-place.

Sexual offenses similarly fell since 2023. In 2024, there were seven reported instances of rape in comparison to 17 in 2023. The number of sexual offenses has fallen since 2023. In both 2024 and 2023, there were seven documented instances of fondling. And there were no incidences of statutory rape or incest in 2023 or 2024.

In 2024, the *Independent* asked students how safe they feel at Harvard. An overwhelming majority—95%—affirmed campus security and feelings of comfort. The report did not name any specific incidents of any possible sexual violations. However, a student last year told the *Independent* that a “creepy old man” attempted to lure a freshman girl into an alleyway to take pictures with him.

Aggravated assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft were some of the most common documented criminal offenses. In 2024, there were 33 total incidents of aggravated assault, 31 burglaries, and 165 motor vehicle thefts—a 56.8% decrease, 110.7% increase, and 118.7% increase from 2023, respectively. Documented cases of robbery fell from 28 in 2023 to six in 2024. There were no incidents of arson in 2024, in contrast to six total in 2023. Domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking all remained relatively uncommon, with four, four, and nine offenses reported, respectively. This is in comparison to 10, four, and four, respectively, in 2023.

Much like the report suggests, one of the most common criminal incidents students witnessed, according to interviews with the *Independent* in 2024, was motorized scooter theft outside campus buildings.

Beyond criminal offenses, concerns about hate-motivated transgressions have remained highly salient since the Trump administration alleged that antisemitism was rampant on Harvard’s campus. In 2024, five religion-motivated

offenses were reported, manifested as larceny, intimidation, and vandalism. Three of these events took place on Harvard’s campus and one inside a residential building. In 2023, HUPD reported just two acts of larceny or simple assault based on religion. These incidents occurred for the first time since 2021.

There were two reports of vandalism or aggravated assault based on sexual orientation in 2024, the same as in 2023. The 2025 Annual Report did not document any hate crimes on the grounds of race for 2024. However, in 2023, there was one act of intimidation motivated by race on campus property, three aggravated assaults, and one simple assault. Possible increases in race- or gender-motivated crime in 2025 are of particular concern, as the support once offered by the University Women’s Center and LGBTQ+ office is no longer feasible following their closing.

Formal arrests made on the Cambridge campus have remained low since 2022. In 2024, only three total arrests were made due to drug law violations on adjacent public property. In 2024, there was just one.

Disciplinary actions also hovered under 10. In 2022, there were zero reported students transgressing weapons, drug, or liquor laws. In 2023, there were three total across all categories. In 2024, there were seven.

HUPD advises anyone with questions about personal or campus welfare to stop by their headquarters at 1033 Massachusetts Ave. or to email chief@hupd.harvard.edu.

“By taking the time to familiarize yourself with our resources and by using the information provided in this report, you will be actively assisting us in maintaining a safe and secure campus for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors,” Downing concluded in his note.

SARA KUMAR '27 (SJKUMAR@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS THE NEWS EDITOR OF THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE

'29



ICE Attacks Sanctuary Policies, Leaving Immigrants Vulnerable

The day-to-day impacts of shifting immigration policies on clinics and families.

BY COURTNEY HINES '28

The ground is shifting quickly beneath the feet of immigrants, their families, and the lawyers who represent them. Since Jan. 20, 2025, immigrants in Los Angeles, Boston, and other major United States cities have faced a sharply altered law enforcement landscape as the Trump administration and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement expand interior operations and detention. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's emergency orders have narrowed relief timelines and expanded the powers of the executive branch.

Immigration attorneys and immigrant families reported to the *Harvard Independent* that ICE's presence has become invasive, with families fearing separation from their children, unfair arrest, and even leaving the house as federal lawsuits against "sanctuary" policies and a broader detention footprint reshape daily life.

"There's a sense of panic right now," a Harvard Law student who works at the Harvard Law School Immigration & Refugee Clinic said. "It's causing so much downstream distress."

Due to new orders from the Supreme Court, immigration lawyers have been forced to change their practices since the start of Trump's second term. Under the revised practice, the Court dictates whether individuals can remain with their families during their proceedings. Recent emergency orders have shortened windows and broadened enforcement

discretion. This has made litigation feel like a race against the clock, especially for clinics juggling dozens of clients across multiple courts.

"Our work has been defined by uncertainty and fear," an immigration attorney from Massachusetts who requested anonymity due to sensitive client information said. "It's very difficult for folks to wrap their heads around what's happening when everything is moving so quickly, and it kind of seems like there's a new policy to grapple with every week, if not every day."

The American Immigration Council explains how state and city sanctuary policies are rooted in "the idea that the federal government cannot force jurisdictions to take part in immigration enforcement." On the ground in Los Angeles and Boston,

legal battles are increasingly over how much power sanctuary policies hold. The United States Department of Justice sued both cities in June and September 2025, arguing that local limits on cooperation with civil immigration enforcement obstruct federal power.

California went through this same legal battle in 2018.

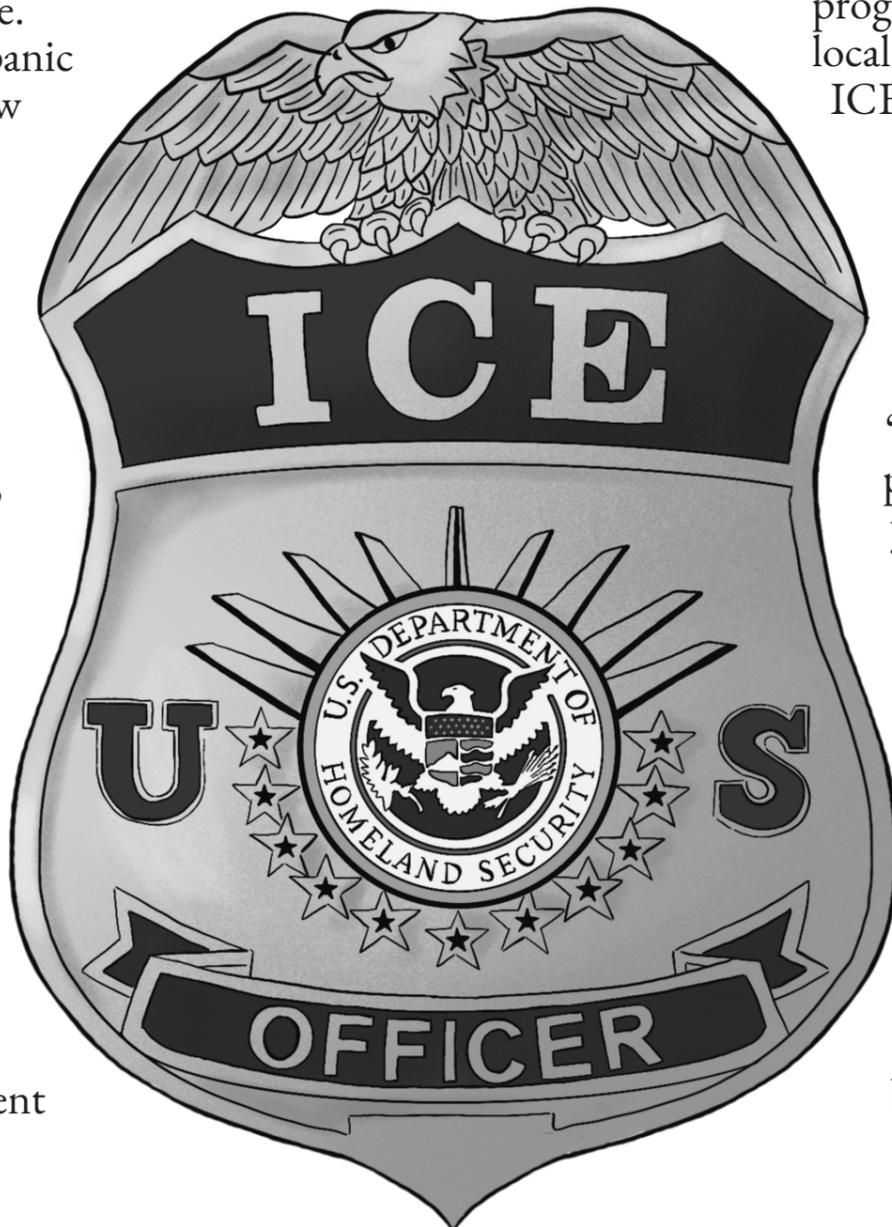
"The Trump administration has sued California already for its sanctuary policies in the first Trump administration," Professor Jean Reisz, the Co-Director of the University of Southern California Immigration Clinic and Clinical Associate Professor of Law, said. Eventually, these policies were "held by the court of appeals to not be in violation of federal law," she continued.

While legally these cases have shown that Washington D.C. can't force local officers into federal programs, they also reflect how local governments cannot obstruct ICE.

"Sanctuary is a bit of a misnomer, because you can't really protect somebody in your community who you know is subject to arrest by ICE," Reisz explained. "ICE has the ability to go into places and arrest people and you can't obstruct it, but you don't have to help, and you can make it difficult."

These policies have directly impacted Massachusetts. "ICE raids have definitely picked up in Boston a lot," the student at the HLS Clinic said.

"Massachusetts is one of the places that's been most heavily targeted



for enforcement, and that's been happening since at least May of this year," the immigration attorney added.

The effects of these operations are reflected in an increase in arrests throughout the country. As of September 2025, over 60,000 people were in ICE custody, with roughly 70% having no criminal convictions. ICE's recent annual report put the average stay at 46.9 days. Yet clinics routinely report clients held for months, some for even more than a year. These timelines impact everything from keeping separated parents from their children to halting a detained immigrant's necessary medical care while their bond request sits unheard.

"In the beginning, when the raids started happening in Los Angeles, I think that a lot of the detention facilities weren't prepared for the influx of people, and there were issues with getting medication, food, water," Reisz said.

Conditions in custody are not uniform, and that variability has become a central point of contention. Watchdog reports, lawsuits, and medical workers have described serious gaps in some facilities, such as delays in medication, shortages of clean water, sleep deprivation, and limited access to counsel.

"[Detention facilities] aren't prisons that have programming and other kinds of opportunities for inmates—which I know that sounds crazy. It's like the prisons might have better conditions than the detention facilities," Reisz said.

The picture that emerges is uneven and hard to verify, especially as people are moved among facilities or out of state with little notice to families.

"Something that's become more and more common in recent months is that when someone gets detained, often their family doesn't have any information about where they are or if they're okay for days, because the ICE online locator doesn't get updated and the person

isn't given a phone call at the ICE field office," the immigration lawyer from Massachusetts explained.

"You'll hear about people going out to work in the morning and just not coming home at the end of the day. Maybe their family finds someone who saw or heard what happened, or maybe they find the person's car on the side of the road, but apart from that, they have no information," the lawyer continued.

"It's like their loved one has just disappeared. Then, after a few days, the person pops up in the system, and they're in a detention center halfway across the country. Can you imagine that happening to your dad or your brother, or your partner? You can't put into words the devastation families are facing every day in Massachusetts."

Meanwhile, the geography of custody has stretched internationally. On Oct. 2, ICE transferred the last migrants out of a detention center in the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. The administration initially intended to hold tens of thousands of detainees at the site, drawing scrutiny from rights groups that reported abusive conditions during short-term holds before deportation. It totaled 700 migrants before they were relocated to other sites.

Venezuelan men described being sexually assaulted and forced into sexual acts after the administration sent them to El Salvador's Terrorism Confinement Center, telling NBC News they experienced physical and psychological torture. Clinic lawyers now prepare clients for a wider range of possibilities and brace families for the unexpected.

"They're often classified foreign relations information that isn't publicly available. So I can't say much about whether or not I would even call CECOT an international detention facility," Reisz said.

New policies are also changing how families engage with healthcare. In a nationally

representative Urban Institute survey, 38% of mixed-status families reported taking "protective steps" like seeking legal advice or making a detention plan because of anticipated enforcement.

Doctors are finding that people who have been assaulted, or who have serious conditions like diabetes or a high-risk pregnancy, are skipping or delaying care out of fear of ICE. In the KFF/LA Times "Survey of Immigrants," 22% of immigrant adults reported skipping or postponing care in the prior year. A parent who hears of a potential ICE raid must weigh symptoms against the possibility of being detained for weeks if something goes wrong.

For now, clinics in Los Angeles, Boston, and beyond will keep doing what they have always done under pressure. Policy debates will continue in Washington and in federal courts from California to Massachusetts. But the stakes are in the lives these lawmakers touch.

"It's really important not to look away [from] what is happening. This is something that is happening every single day," the immigration attorney said.

**COURTNEY HINES '28
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**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN
'28**

Live, Laugh, and Limit

Harvard University affiliates' respond to recent late-night comedy show cancellations.

BY CLORIS SHI '29

In just four months, the American comedy world has been shaken. On Sept. 17, ABC briefly suspended “Jimmy Kimmel Live!”, and in July 2025, CBS announced the cancellation of “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert.” These moves sparked concern among comedians worldwide about the narrowing space for political satire and the erosion of free speech.

Harvard is home to satirical magazines and a constellation of improv troupes. Here, comedy is not just entertainment, but an experiment in critique, parody, and cultural play.

Thus, the national turbulence surrounding late-night comedy raises a more local question: What does this mean for on-campus comedy?

When ABC pulled Kimmel off the air under pressure from Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr, observers grew concerned about government interference in entertainment. More than 400 celebrities, including Lin-Manuel Miranda, Meryl Streep, Natalie Portman '03, and Tom Hanks signed an ACLU letter warning of “government threats to our freedom of speech.”

“This is the moment to defend free speech across our nation,” the letter stated.

The suspension of “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” came amid a fraught moment in U.S. media politics. Conservatives had been pressuring networks over alleged bias in public media, and Carr had recently urged broadcasters to rein in “misinformation.”

After Kimmel commented on the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, several major ABC affiliates—namely those operated by Nexstar and Sinclair—pulled his show even before his official suspension, citing Carr’s explicit warnings to broadcasters.

Rebecca Tushnet '95, Frank Stanton Professor of First Amendment Law at Harvard Law School, outlined the broader threats posed by Kimmel’s suspension in an interview with the *Independent*.

“The issue isn’t corporate or affiliate pressure. Private pressure is just opinion. Private pressure exercised at the government’s behest is a First Amendment problem,” Tushnet said. “When the FCC threatens broadcasters with license revocation for speech the President doesn’t like, that’s not business discretion—that’s the government silencing critics.”

On Sept. 24, Kimmel returned to the air with a teary-eyed emotional monologue, apologizing for remarks he admitted may have misled viewers about Kirk’s death.

Just months earlier, late-night television had pulled Harvard into its cultural orbit.

In April 2025, comedians from Kimmel to Colbert rallied behind Harvard after the University defied demands from the Trump administration. “My money’s on Harvard... Harvard, unlike a lot of schools, is standing strong,” Kimmel said on his Instagram. Colbert and “The Daily Show” host Ronny Chieng joined in, satirizing the White House’s efforts to pressure Harvard.

“They’re standing up for their principles

and for everyone’s right to free speech, even if it means possible financial ruin,” Chieng said.

At this point, late-night television was not just mocking politics—it was amplifying Harvard’s defiance, placing the University at the heart of a national cultural resistance.

Indeed, defiance through a comic lens has long thrived from within the University. Harvard is a comedy incubator. Most notable among campus’s various light-hearted groups, the *Harvard Lampoon*, founded in 1876, has shaped generations of humorists who went on to dominate American comedy. Alumni include Conan O’Brien ’85, Colin Jost ’04, and B.J. Novak ’01.

But the campus comedy scene is not confined to print. The 20th century brought

“A shrinking late-night industry has certainly caused apprehension,” Burton acknowledged. Silencing late-night comedians threatens the community of comedy at large. Ratings have steadily declined, with network late-night viewership dropping 9% year-over-year in 2025, and advertising revenue halving from \$439 million in 2018 to just \$220 million by 2024.

That contraction ripples from Hollywood into Cambridge. Student publications like the *Harvard Lampoon* rely on a similar advertising-based business model, using revenue from local and national sponsors to fund print issues, pay for equipment, and sustain operations. As advertisers retreat from media spending across entertainment and satire, campus publications may struggle to attract the same sponsors or

justify similar rates. A shrinking comedy market tests the entire ecosystem, both the late-night show headliners and the next generation of satirists.

According to Tushnet, these cancellations are not just a trend in comedy alone. “It’s part of a broader Trump administration assault on free speech,” she said.

“Although it can be hard to draw lines, the present situation is not near the line. When the FCC threatens broadcasters with license revocation for broadcasting speech that the President doesn’t like, there is a First Amendment problem,” Tushnet continued.

For now, most students steer clear of politics. “People are not coming to an IGP show for political discourse—they’re coming to laugh,” Burton said. “Political humor is often used as a crutch. Nobody wants to see another bad Trump impression.” To avoid subjects that could encroach sensitive, strongly-held stances, students prefer to divert their humor to more apolitical subjects. Cancel culture, coupled with the permanence of anything and everything one says on social media, results in the decision to seek levity in more wholesome, timeless experiences.

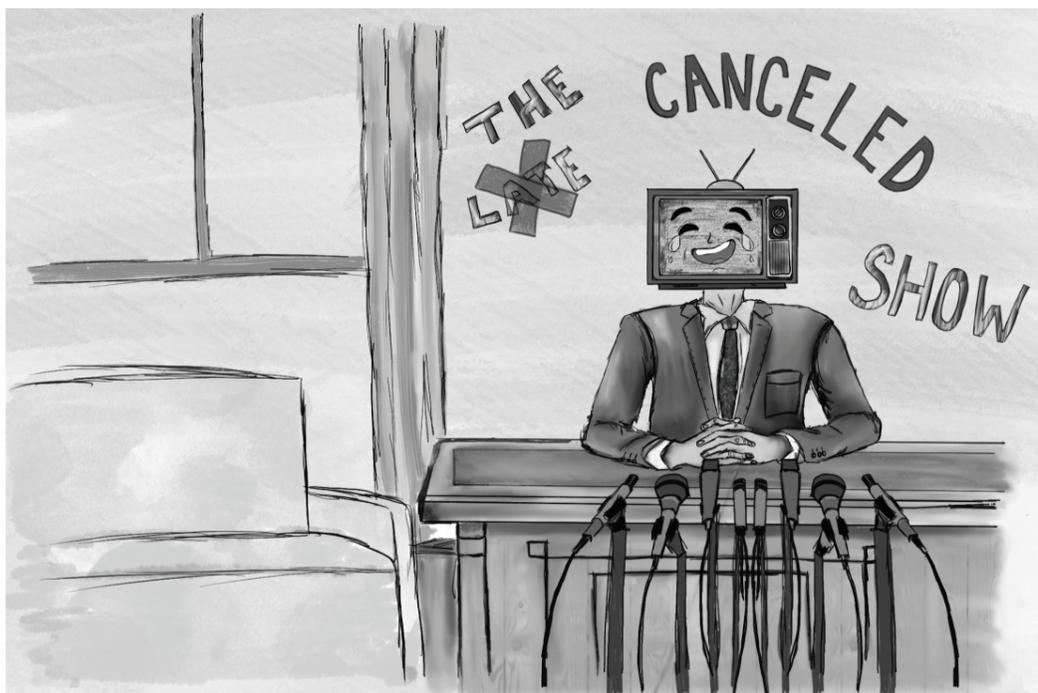
From the *Lampoon*’s Castle on Mount Auburn Street to jokes shared across the tables of d-halls, Harvard’s comic energy remains contagious. However, students are watching national headlines closely. The future of late-night may be uncertain, yet the impulse to laugh persists.

In a 2007 interview with *Parade Magazine*, Stephen Colbert said, “You can’t laugh and be afraid at the same time. If you’re laughing, I defy you to be afraid.”

In a year when laughter itself has become a test of courage, Harvard’s comedians continue to prove him right.

CLORIS SHI '29 (CLORISSHI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ENJOYS WATCHING LATE-NIGHT SHOWS AND GETTING IN A GOOD, FULL-BELLIED LAUGH EVERY DAY.

GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE ASIHENE '27



live performance through the *Immediate Gratification Players*, which was founded in 1986 as Harvard’s oldest improv troupe. Other troupes include On Thin Ice, Three Letter Acronym, and the Stand-Up Comic Society.

These groups became training grounds for voices unafraid to experiment—and sometimes to provoke. IGP sees itself as offering something distinct.

“IGP provides a unique montage-style improv comedy to Harvard’s campus, which differs from the two other troupes that focus on shorter-form games and Harolds,” IGP co-president Jack Burton '26 explained to the *Independent*. “Starting with only one word at the beginning of the show, the group focuses on refining narrative construction in an improvised performance. At the end of the day, we are building relationships with each other and the people who come to watch.”

That ethos extends to their sense of audience. “We specifically try to avoid Harvard references in our humor and stick to comedy that can be enjoyed more universally,” Burton said. Their mantra—“happy, healthy, well”—guides them away from offensive material and toward trust: between troupe members, and between troupe and audience.

“Regardless of our personal political views, we try to cater our humor to engage all audience members,” Burton continued.

In this way, IGP embodies a paradox of student comedy at Harvard. Students are both exposed and sheltered from the currents of campus tensions as well as national comedy. Nonetheless, recent volatility has spurred concerns.

FORUM

Thoughts from New Quincy: The Ring, The Mirror

Notes towards a theory of watching.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

It starts with a story. Two teenage girls in a quiet suburban house whisper about a cursed videotape—one that kills anyone who watches it seven days after viewing. They laugh, half-believing, half-scared, until one admits she's already seen it. That night, the curse keeps its promise.

I first saw “The Ring” in high school and thought it was almost tame. No jump scares, no loud music cues—just static, silence, and a screen that seemed to breathe. It didn't scare me right away. It waited.

So what made Gore Verbinski's 2002 remake of the Japanese horror film “Ringu” so hard-hitting? It's not the blood or the violence that makes it terrifying, but how it turns looking itself into a source of horror. Every death begins with an image—an image that kills those who see it, unless they make a copy of the tape.

What's striking is that we never actually see anyone die. Every death takes place off-screen, replaced by static, distortion, or the aftermath—a face frozen in shock, a body slumped on the floor. The violence happens somewhere we can't reach: inside the image itself. It's as if the movie refuses to give us what we came for, turning the act of watching into its own kind of punishment. With this, the horror isn't in what's shown, but in what's withheld.

The tape doesn't tell a story so much as it arranges sensations. A woman brushes her hair before a mirror. A horse collapses in water. A fly twitches against the glass of the screen. Then a well—dark, bottomless—and an eye that looks back.

But “The Ring” isn't just horror—

it's about technology, and the strange power of images to look back. Long before TikTok or deepfakes, Verbinski understood that the media doesn't record the world so much as remake it, feeding on our attention.

His adaptation carries over into the late '90s anxiety about broadcast intimacy and technological isolation seen in “Ringu,” but translates it into something distinctly American: a fear of surveillance, replication, even information itself—a world where being seen becomes indistinguishable from being exposed.

Into this feedback loop steps Rachel Keller (played by Naomi Watts), a journalist chasing the tape's origin. She's not a hero so much as another witness, another node in the system. When she finally watches the video, the static crawls over her face and the film begins to fold in on itself. We're watching her watch a screen that's already watching us. The story collapses into its own reflection—a mirror flickering with everything we've mistaken for clarity.

When Rachel presses play, the movie begins to roll. We don't just watch her reaction; we watch the tape, too—a

ladder, a well, an eye—the same flickering images that killed the others. For a moment, the film erases the boundary between screen and spectator. Rachel's reflection shimmers on the glass, and so does ours. The static flooding her living room spills into ours, as if the image were reaching outward, hungry for our eyes as much as hers.

Nowhere is this hunger clearer than in the hospital footage of Samara, the girl at the center of the curse. Rachel watches her psychiatric interview from behind a glass wall, but we don't see Samara directly. Instead, we see what Rachel does: a monitor on the right side of the frame, playing the recording in real time.

Samara herself is blurry, half-obscured by distance, while her image on the monitor is sharp, luminous, disturbingly alive. Then the focus flips—Samara sharpens into clarity while the monitor fades. The film keeps shifting allegiance between body and image, unsure which one is alive.

By the time her face dissolves into static, the distinction collapses entirely. The image has taken her place.

The film starts to feel suffocating. Every action involves a screen—security footage, camera recordings, monitors, reflections—and the characters can't stop handling them. They rewind, pause, zoom, copy, trying to control what they look at, but every attempt just deepens the trap. There's no direct sight anymore, only images of images. The real horror isn't in what's shown but in the realization that there's nothing outside the frame. The screen stops being a window and becomes a mirror that folds everything inward.

Watching this film, I couldn't help but think about how easily I assume the same posture Rachel takes—leaning toward the screen,



waiting for something to reveal itself. It's less curiosity than compulsion: a faith that meaning hides somewhere inside the static. The film's horror feels familiar because it mimics how we already live: searching for meaning through pixels, convinced that if we just look long enough, the image will return something.

Later, Rachel discovers these aren't random images—they're memories belonging to Samara. After her death, the images keep reproducing, detached from her body but alive in the machine. The curse isn't supernatural in any ordinary sense. It's technological. Samara doesn't haunt a house. She haunts the medium itself. Her presence is grain, distortion, playback.

Before she was a curse, she was a child—one nobody wanted to see. Samara was adopted by Anna and Richard Morgan, who lived on a remote island horse ranch. From the beginning, something was wrong: Samara could project images from her mind onto physical surfaces and into other people's thoughts.

The horses grew restless, tormented by the visions she projected into their heads, until one by one they threw themselves into the sea. Terrified, her father locked her in the barn, covering the walls with wallpaper to block out the images she couldn't control. Her mother, driven mad by the noise that never stopped, finally put a plastic bag over Samara's head and pushed her into the well.

The tape is what's left of that erasure. It isn't vengeance so much as residue—her voice encoded in static, replaying endlessly because no one would listen while she was alive.

By the time Samara dies, there's no one left to witness her. Each viewing repeats the original violence: the desperate need to be seen colliding with the terror of being looked at. In that sense, "The Ring" isn't just about the curse of visibility—it's about what happens when seeing becomes the only way a silenced body can speak.

The more the film is watched, the more she speaks, her image feeding on the attention that once destroyed her. The tape becomes a kind of living archive, a feedback loop that survives through the act of looking and reproduction. In a way, Samara is what happens when perception outlives its subject, when seeing becomes autonomous.

Rachel's investigation turns into an act of complicity. Every time she

rewinds, pauses, or zooms, she sustains the thing she's trying to escape. Even the resolution—the cure—is another form of participation: she saves herself by copying the tape, passing the curse forward. The film's horror lives in that contradiction: that understanding the image means giving it power, and that turning away is impossible once you've seen it.

Rewatching "The Ring" now feels like scrolling through a cursed feed. Every clue Rachel encounters arrives through another device: a VHS player, a surveillance monitor, a computer screen. No one witnesses anything firsthand. The world exists only in playback.

That's what makes the film feel strangely contemporary. In the early 2000s, flickering static belonged to the dying age of analog media. Two decades later, its structure feels prophetic: an image passed from screen to screen, stripped of origin, gaining power through replication. We've just swapped VHS for an Instagram algorithm.

Rewatching "The Ring" now, I realize how easily its rhythm parallels my own. The endless replay, the illusion of progress, the quiet surrender of time—it all feels familiar.

Our feeds work the same way Samara's tape does—circulating endlessly, detached from context, kept alive by the act of looking. And so, the curse has evolved: we no longer die from seeing the image; we live through it. Horror no longer hides inside the frame, but is built into the interface itself. Algorithms don't whisper "seven days," but their logic is the same: return, repeat, stay inside the loop. Each replay is a small surrender, each scroll a ritual of consent. What "The Ring" foresaw wasn't a haunted videotape—it was a system that feeds on our attention, keeping us alive only so we keep watching.

By the end of "The Ring," the question isn't what Samara wants, but what she's become. Samara and the image are one. She wants to be seen, and the image wants to be reproduced because she does. Rachel thinks she's freed Samara's spirit by recovering her body from the well, but this relief doesn't last after her child's father dies in front of her, having not reproduced the film.

That's the film's most unsettling idea: that perception itself can be violent. To look is to open a channel; to record is to let something in. Horror here isn't the supernatural, but the realization that every act of watching creates attachment. Once you've seen the image, you belong to it.

At the end of "The Ring," the screen doesn't fade to black. It waits. Rachel has already survived—she made her copy. She helps her son to make one too. Survival means participation; the only way out is to pass it on, sustaining its life.

Watching it now, on laptops and streaming platforms, feels like staring into that same static—the same soft hum of endless mediation. Our screens glow with different ghosts, but the rhythm is familiar: click, watch, share, repeat. The loop sustains itself.

Sometimes I wonder how many hours of my life have vanished into that same loop—lying on my bed in my dorm room, eyes lit by a screen, half-believing that the next image will feel different as I scroll for hours. Maybe "The Ring" endures because it names what we refuse to admit: that the real curse isn't the tape. It's our appetite for the glow.

This is what makes "The Ring" so unnerving two decades later. It isn't warning us about a haunted videotape, but showing us the shape of our own reflection—our eyes lit by a device, our lives filtered through images that keep multiplying long after we look away.

The screen no longer needs Samara to cross over. It already has us.

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GRAPHIC BY CHRISTY
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We Can't Read, and It's Not Because of that Phone

An analysis of the decline in literacy rates.

BY ELLIE GUO '29

"Do the readings."

I open Canvas to see what my assigned reading is for the week. A 35-page research paper, a chapter from a book written in 19th-century jargon, and a seemingly endless textbook excerpt on convoluted theory.

Professors, TAs, upperclassmen, even Dean Amanda Claybaugh in the freshman training modules, repeat this mantra: "Do the readings."

The temptation to skip them is admittedly very appealing. In most cases, no one—least of all your professor—will notice. Readings take hours and dry out your eyes, and your professor will likely cover most of the content in lecture anyway. Experience proves you can survive a seminar discussion armed only with SparkNotes or a ChatGPT summary.

But there's a reason the warning keeps coming up: we've gotten *bad* at reading.

A 2017 study found that only 32% of college freshmen read at a 12th-grade proficiency level. More recently, 54% of U.S. adults were found to read below a 6th-grade proficiency.

These statistics sound like they'd belong to regions with struggling education systems, not to states that house elite universities. Surely Ivy League students can read—right?

Maybe not. In *The Atlantic*, Columbia professor Nicholas Dames admits that even his students struggle to finish or comprehend books. Professors at Georgetown and UC Berkeley voiced similar concerns.

And the experts agree: it's not entirely our fault. It's not even our phones' faults. The issue isn't laziness; it's conditioning. We've been taught not to read properly.

In recent years, as the *New York Times* reports, initiatives like the Common Core have reoriented curricula toward nonfiction, based on the belief that most college and workplace reading is factual. Consequently, students now read far fewer novels than in decades past.

But cutting fiction has consequences. Fiction builds reading stamina. It demands patience, empathy, and imagination—the very muscles required for sustained engagement with any complex text, fiction, or nonfiction.

Storytelling is innate to the human experience. By emphasizing practicality over narrative, Common Core standards have denied many students a crucial part of childhood.

When students are disconnected from what they're reading, they don't just lose interest; they never build the motivation to read independently.

When children are never allowed to discover the imaginative aspect of reading, they will naturally grow to resent it. Without that motivation, students miss out on the practice and repetition required to develop reading fluency and efficiency.

Over time, reading becomes a chore, as tedious and mechanical as solving arithmetic worksheets.

Assigned texts, both fiction and nonfiction, grow more difficult to understand and slower to finish. Eventually, it just becomes much easier to give up.

This is not the first time reading instruction has failed a generation. In the late 20th century, educators clashed over the best mode to teach reading—a debate often referred to as the "reading wars."

The argument was between phonic and whole-word instruction. The traditional method emphasized phonics—teaching students to decode words by sounding them out. Whole-word instruction, which emerged in the 1980s, focused on helping students recognize words by sight and understand them through context. This method relied heavily on flash cards showing a picture and its corresponding word.

California adopted whole-word instruction in the 1980s and '90s. The results were troubling: studies of students who went through the program revealed alarmingly low literacy rates. The problem with whole-word instruction lay in its reliance on context and interactive approach. Without phonic awareness, students failed to become independent readers. They were unable to read words they had never seen before.

After the disastrous results of whole-word instruction, educators are shifting to a mixed mode of instruction. By teaching both phonics and contextual meaning, instructors hope to encourage an independent yet intuitive way of reading.

However, California still has the lowest literacy rate in the nation despite being home to some of the best-funded schools and most prestigious universities. The issue is not whether students have access to education; it's how they're being taught to read—with an emphasis on efficiency and ease instead of developing long-lasting skills.

Reading education has failed students nationwide, even within the ivy-covered walls of elite institutions. These methods have fallen short in instilling lasting reading habits or building the stamina required for higher-level comprehension.

Although we associate technology use with shorter attention spans and lowered interest in reading, it isn't the only culprit. Research shows that socioeconomic status and early reading instruction in schools have a greater impact on adult literacy than computer usage.

In fact, literacy rates started declining before the widespread usage of digital technology. Reports find that U.S. adults born between 1988 and 1996 show significantly less reading proficiency than people born just 10 years prior.

To reverse this, reading culture must make a comeback, starting with schools and state-mandated curricula. Parents continue this process by encouraging reading at home. Individual adult readers can make efforts to normalize reading in their lives and in society, making reading more accessible to everyone.

In an increasingly competitive and career-focused world, it's easy to dismiss creativity in favor of efficiency. But what is most "efficient" in the short term does not always yield the best long-term outcomes.

Creativity has always had a purpose. Fiction doesn't just help young readers build reading skills; it also teaches empathy and offers a greater understanding of human experience.

To illustrate this, I would like to share a quote from "The Swerve" by Stephen Greenblatt, which talks about the importance of books in shaping world history. He writes:

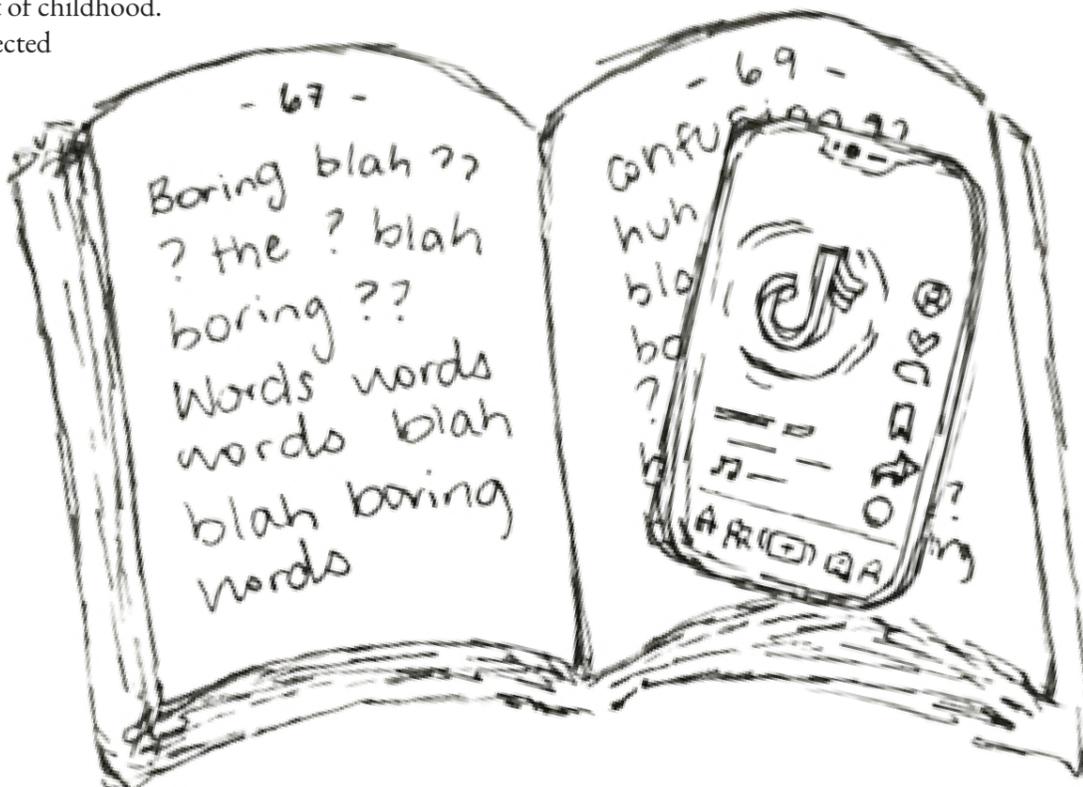
"There are moments, rare and powerful, in which a writer, long vanished from the face of the earth, seems to stand in your presence and speak to you directly, as if he bore a message meant for you above all others."

Literacy relates to more than passing a college-level class or becoming a good employee. When students are denied the opportunity to explore fiction, they are denied connection with other people across time and space. The purpose of education is to promote knowledge—not just facts, but lessons on how to coexist with other people.

Do your readings. Though our early instruction may have missed the mark, it's never too late to rediscover how to read deeply—and how to enjoy it. Read not only to succeed in your next midterm, but to take part in a centuries-old intellectual tradition.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A CLASS TAUGHT BY STEPHEN GREENBLATT.

GRAPHIC BY ANNABELLA BURTON BOONE '29







Why I Hated My Name, Until Harvard

Reclaiming my identity as a first-generation student at Harvard.

BY LAURA CREMER '29

Laura Pérez. Cremer. When I turned 14, I began to feel a visceral rejection towards my first surname: Pérez. In Spain, every citizen's ID includes both surnames—usually the father's first, the mother's second. In most cases, it is that of the mother's which is left in second place. And like most things placed second, it is often forgotten. Though my ID showed both names, I became just Laura Pérez. Plain. Insipid. Laura Pérez.

In classrooms, teachers would roll their tongues over that combination—names I despised but couldn't deny were mine. Each time "Laura" echoed, I held my breath, waiting to hear which version of me would follow. Would they say both surnames? Or stop at Pérez, a name shared by more than 777,000 others in Spain? Pérez, like *el ratoncito Pérez*, the Spanish tooth fairy—cartoonish, harmless, anonymous. Just like my surname felt to me.

A reminder of what I would never be: remembered. Loved. In the haze of my small, stifling town, Pérez whispered that I would never matter. I'd always be the girl in the corner, hiding in bathrooms, speaking only to the spirals of her mind. Everything I spoke, everything I achieved, I questioned. My ideas—like my name—felt too small, too unworthy to be heard. Pérez was everywhere. My own name erased me, just as the world did.

The enclosed and suffocating town, where even asking why my mother's surname had to come second—why hers, too, had once belonged to a man—felt like defiance. An entire system reeked of misogyny.

At 14, I tried to let go of the name that I thought erased me. I became Laura Cremer. My poems bore the second surname, the one that had been sidelined. Sometimes, I even replaced the 'C' with a 'K,' remembering how, before Franco's dictatorship and the Castilianization of names, it had been spelled that way—before it, too, was forced to conform.

I could only *dream* of being just Cremer. Still, Pérez lingered, a phantom limb. A name I tried to cut away, but it pulsed in the background. It showed up on my school exams, my credit cards, my renewed ID. *New picture. Same name.*

It followed me onto my first student VISA.

New country. Same name.

At Harvard, I finally held the power to name myself. On forms, I wrote "Preferred Name: Laura Cremer." I signed my papers with it. For the first time, I felt seen. I felt powerful.

I was Laura Cremer—smarter, cooler, more confident. Or so I thought. I was *supposed* to be that Laura Cremer when I came to Harvard, but no one warned me about *first-generation syndrome*. About the way it gnaws at you, reminding you that you are both a product of ambition and a betrayal of origin. I felt guilty for sidelining my father's side of the story—the one that smelled of cologne trapped for more

than 15 hours in his office, the one that didn't quite fit in the glossy narrative of elite colleges.

I am a first-generation college student. I come from a small town where no one leaves, where Harvard is unthinkable. Many of my international friends at Harvard had gone to American or IB schools, surrounded by peers also bound for the Ivy League. Some moved to five different countries for business trips, spent six weeks in Switzerland, or worked as an intern in Seoul. Their paths to success seemed paved. Mine wasn't. It didn't include international flights, summer programs, or polished résumés. My background was invisible in a room full of pedigrees.

"Did you go to an American school?"

"Oh no, just a normal national high school."

"Oh. So what did you do then?"

My thoughts became an ocean—waves crashing, dragging me under, dulse covering my eyes. Darkness. I could hardly breathe.

This is what it feels like to be an FGLI student from an underrepresented background—you feel like you don't belong. Everyone is more prepared, more impressive, destined for greater success. Everyone belongs at Harvard—except you. You start to believe you're not a student, but a charitable experiment.

This lie sneaks into your ears each morning, disguised as your own voice. It speaks when my classmates understand what Joyce wanted to say in chapter three of *Ulysses*, when I've spent hours trying and failing to decode the meaning behind the ink. It speaks when I nod, pretending I've understood what they've told me, because apparently my Cambridge C2 certification doesn't mean I know English. It speaks when they talk about their summer research and internships—opportunities that eluded my resources. My stomach knots, my hands sweat, and suddenly I'm 14 again, waiting for my name to be called.

But I am learning to navigate this ocean. Learning that I can carry both names not as contradiction, but as truth. Pérez, the shadow that taught me invisibility. Cremer, the fire that demands to be seen. Together, they tell the story of a girl who once hid in bathrooms becoming a woman who now stands in Harvard classrooms, her voice trembling but refusing to be silent.

I am both names. I carry my father's and my mother's, who could never dream of me being here. I carry the names of hardworking, resilient people. I hold the last names of people whose calamities have been much greater than everything I could have suffered.

Like my name, my identity doesn't have to be one thing or the other. I am both a small-town first-generation student from Spain *and* a Harvard student. I am Laura Pérez Cremer.

I speak both Spanish *and* English, and I am so proud of that.

I carry a *tilde* and a *z* in my last name.

I carry a surname that survived a dictatorship and alphabetical mutilations.

I carry two names that feel like rebellion.

I carry my accent and my history, reminders of both past and future. In a place never built for me, my very presence is an act of defiance, of claiming space where I was told I had none.

I'm still learning how to hold both names. How to accept that belonging isn't given, it's created. That maybe my name—long, complicated, doubled—isn't a burden but a banner. And so now I say my name with pride:

Pérez. Cremer. Proof I come from somewhere.

Proof I belong here.

Proof I know who I am.

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EMBRACES BOTH NAMES BUT

CHOOSES CREMER WHEN SHE

SIGNS HER ART.

GRAPHIC BY DANG LIN '29



ARTS

A Night of Mahler

The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra returns to the Sanders Theater for its first performance of the year, and first performance since suspension.

BY KATHERINE CHUNG '29

C In the evening of Oct. 4, Sanders Theater was filled with tuning notes as the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra stepped onto the stage, welcoming the buzzing crowd of students and locals eager for their first performance of the year—notably and the orchestra's first appearance since its hazing investigations. The orchestra was suspended for the rest of the fall semester after a college investigation into alleged hazing during its September retreat at Greenwood Music Camp.

The concert, titled “A Night of Mahler,” paired two of Gustav Mahler’s most famous works: “Rückert-Lieder, GMW 39-43” and “Symphony No. 4, GMW 37.” The performance was conducted by musical director Federico Cortese and was an introspective performance that marked the orchestra’s return to the stage.

To begin the night, Cortese first addressed the audience to explain the message behind the concert. Mahler’s “Rückert-Lieder” is a set of five songs written in 1901, but was left unordered by the composer, giving conductors the freedom to choose their own trajectory with the music as Cortese did.

“I decided to open with a song that is more about nature,” Cortese said. “Then the second and the third song have more to do with love... The second is some sort of argument; if you want to play it this way, ‘don’t look in my eye.’ And the third song is a very sweet love song, which he actually wrote for his wife...Alma Mahler. He’s probably thinking about himself: Do you love me because of my beauty? Do you love me because of my youth? Whatever the case, love me the way I love you forever.”

“These days have been very difficult for us and for the orchestra,” Cortese continued. “I want to say that they were absolutely wonderful in their commitment and through this focus and love for music. I must say that this is an extraordinary group of musicians and human beings, and I consider myself extremely fortunate, privileged, and proud to be their conductor.”

The audience filled the hall with applause, appreciative of the vulnerability and aware that this concert was more than just a performance; it was also a gesture of resilience amid HRO’s suspension.

As the concert unfolded, “Rückert-Lieder” opened the evening with a quiet intensity. Mezzo-soprano Maire Therese Carmack, guest soloist, carried a voice that was both grounded and delicate, with her phrasing shaped by Cortese’s deliberate pacing. In “Ich atmet’ einen linden Duft,” the orchestra’s strings moved with Carmack as though sharing breath.

Her words in the final song, “Ich bin gestorben dem Weltgetümmel” (“I am dead to the world’s tumult”), hovered for a moment before dissolving into silence.

Throughout the act, the harp added a soft glow beneath the voice, while the woodwinds enhanced the piece’s delicate texture. In “Um Mitternacht,” the oboe d’amore and Carmack’s voice expressed a yearning, taking the audience into a layer of darkness. The trumpets, trombones, and timpani grounded the sound with a thick, resonant base that intensified the piece’s emotional depth.



After intermission came “Symphony No. 4 in G Major.” The sleigh bells opened the first movement with nostalgic warmth, evoking a childlike innocence. The second movement introduced sharper, scarier, and rougher tones. As the program noted, “the third movement is the heart of the symphony... transporting the listener through words of pastorality, agony, elegance, hysteria, and sublimity.” The violin intensified the movement’s urgency.

The fourth and final movement unfolded beautifully; soprano Sarah Joyce Cooper, guest soloist, sang with an innocence and wistfulness that resolved into peace. Violinist John Kim '28 described the serenity of the closing movement and its place within the concert. “Mahler’s Fourth, the last movement is about a child ascending into heaven. It ends very peacefully, and I think the silence is really part of the music because it sets a very reflective mood in the concert hall,” Kim said. “It was just really beautiful how the audience was also part of the music by respecting the silence of the end.”

Contrabassoonist Madeline Zhang '29 shared that similar feeling of emotion. “Everyone was holding their breath, waiting for the next note,” she said to the *Independent*. “The silence was part of the music. Sometimes it’s that extra breath right before the next note starts that adds so much more nuance to the emotional experience you’re having.”

She also spoke about Cortese’s approach to conducting. “Every little thing is intentional, and it all means something,” she said. “He told us about what the music represents—how the third movement is about the end of life, and the fourth is about a child ascending into heaven. Hearing him explain that made me feel the story more deeply.”

That sense of intention was visible throughout the performance. Cortese’s gestures were minimal but precise, his musicians responsive to every shift.

For the musicians, “A Night of Mahler” marked more than the beginning of a new concert cycle. “We worked really hard for this concert,” Kim said. “Our first cycle is always the concert with the most rehearsals. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, two and a half hours each, so we put a lot of time into our first concert every year, and this one too.”

The concert was also a product of perseverance after a month of scrutiny. Following hazing allegations this September when initiating their new class, the orchestra was suspended and is restricted from hosting social gatherings or events except for rehearsals and performances.

Zhang acknowledged the tension present. “It’s important—it’s what needs to happen so that we can comply and move forward,” she said. “Normally, we’d have a party or a gathering after a concert, but this time, we didn’t. It’s a bummer, but it’s what’s needed so that we can rebuild.”

Nonetheless, the HRO is a strong, tight-knit community. “Coming back as a sophomore, it’s cool to see new underclassmen join the orchestra,” Kim said. “We’ve gotten close because we chat during breaks and get to know each other. With this new group of underclassmen, we have more of this youthful energy.”

Zhang echoed that warmth. “Being part of this organization is the biggest part of how music sits inside me,” she said. “Everyone is so supportive. Even when rehearsals are long, I sit there listening to the others play and think, wow, this music is so amazing. It reminds me why I’m here.”

Mahler’s music often expresses contradiction: joy intertwined with grief, glory laced with humility. So, too, did this concert. The Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra’s return was not triumphant in the usual sense. It was introspective, careful, and deeply human.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF KERRIE ZHU '28

Choreographing Community

Dancers in the Harvard Ballet Company explore community and belonging through their art.

BY SEYI AMOSUN '29

For dancers at the Harvard Ballet Company, their work isn't just about the artistry or showmanship: it's about community. The organization's creative energy and talents extend beyond the Harvard campus, fostering camaraderie with the dancers and expanding access to the allure of the ballet world.

Founded in 1993, HBC is a student-led organization featuring classical ballet, contemporary choreography, and modern dance. The company is composed of over 40 dancers, led by co-directors Emma Nagler '26 and Olivia Callander '26. They perform biannual productions in the spring and fall, featuring choreography from students, alumni, and guests. Harvard Ballet Company also offers weekly classes to all members. Auditions are held each semester, welcoming students from a diverse range of technical dance backgrounds.

In April, the company presented "Ephemera," which integrated themes of nostalgia, beauty, and transience of the human experience into its performance. This show, along with the rest of their repertoire, exemplifies HBC's unique approach to classical ballet; traditionally, ballet companies perform shows like the Nutcracker, Swan Lake, Giselle, and Don Quixote, which were created in the 19th century Romantic era.

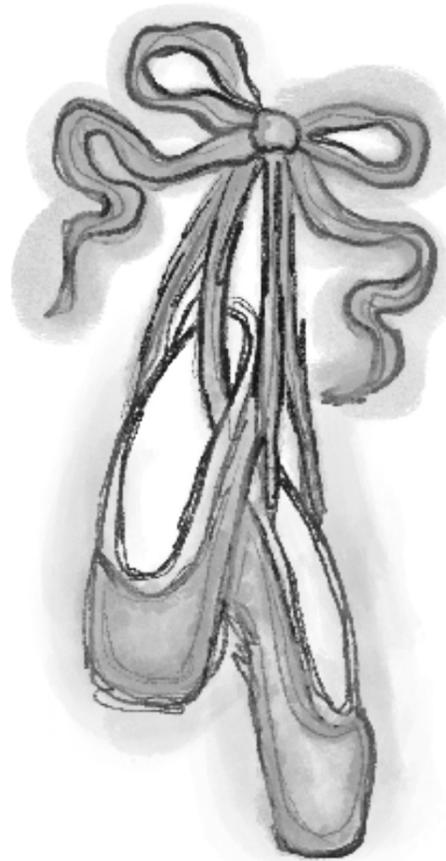
In Harvard Ballet, however, dancers are allowed to showcase their creativity onstage through original choreography. "It's a great way to build both your technical skills, but also explore a creative aspect of ballet that you might not have ever had the opportunity to choreograph a piece and put it up on the stage with some of your best friends dancing," Callander said.

With semesterly performances, the company's dancers find they grow closest with one another on stage, as Nagler and Callander reflected in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "Through learning the choreography, carrying out technique and dress rehearsal, and then culminating in a show, you grow very close with the people that you're dancing with," Callander said. The backstage experience is unlike any other. She recounted the excitement of getting ready with friends before a show and awaiting the first raise of the curtain. "All the experiences we have during show week are memories I'll have forever."

Most performers in the company have years of experience, and HBC offers them the unique opportunity to continue sharing their love for ballet with each other. "I missed it after I stopped performing, and having it back and being able to perform with all my friends every year, twice a year, is a special blessing," Callander said, reflecting on her choice to resume dancing in college.

Outside the studio, performers find supplementary ways to build strong relationships with one another. Through the Demi Grand program, HBC offers mentorship for new dancers. "Anybody that joins the company has some sort of mentor to look up to... All new members in the company get matched up with an older member," Nagler explained. Additionally, the board's social chairs, *Independent* Associate Marketing Director Clara Thiele '28 and Jacqueline Lane '28, organize bonding activities and events for company dancers to further strengthen company community.

Moreover, HBC has contributed widely to Harvard's campus as a whole, especially through partnering with other student organizations, including smaller dance groups.



"This semester, we're partnering with Candela, which is Harvard's Latin dance group," Nagler explained. "They're going to be performing their pieces in our show. Because of the size of our company and how long we've been in existence, it's really helpful that we get to foster these collaborations and make sure that all different dance styles are getting performed and shown to audiences at Harvard," Nagler said.

These partnerships aren't just limited to artistic groups, either. In their mission to bring ballet to the greater Boston community, HBC has worked with the Phillips Brooks House Association, Harvard's student-led philanthropic organization. "We provide free [show] tickets to various public schools, children, and other programs through PBHA," said Nagler.

Ballet performances tend to be expensive, with ticket prices to the Boston Ballet ranging up to over \$200. In an effort to make the art form more accessible, HBC tickets range from \$10 to \$15. "That helps bring ballet to a wide range of audiences that wouldn't

typically get to see it," Nagler reflected.

Another aspect that sets HBC apart from other campus dance groups is its membership. Dancers hail from numerous Boston schools, including Northeastern, Boston University, and even Harvard graduate students.

"It helps us expand our company to ensure that we have a very high level of dance performers to create a professional-esque experience. I think that our company rivals that of many professional companies and is abnormally talented compared to other collegiate ballet companies," Nagler said. "I think that that's really helped us in that sense, and also it helps us expand audiences by expanding to other schools outside of Harvard."

This cross-school collaboration is a significant part of the HBC experience. Each February, dancers get the chance to travel to New York City for the Ivy Ballet Exchange, hosted by Columbia Ballet Collaborative. Ballet students from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia meet for a weekend of intensives and clinics.

"We spend a whole day taking ballet class together. We have master classes from famous professional dancers in the New York City area," Nagler said. "We learn some choreography, and then at the end of the day, each of the schools performs some of their pieces from their shows, so attending those has been a really fun way to correspond with other HBC members, but also to meet other collegiate ballet dancers."

As directors, Callander and Nagler have a bright vision for the future of the Ballet Company. This semester, they plan to showcase world-renowned repertoire, including "An American in Paris" by Christopher Wheeldon, a two-time Tony Award-winning choreographer. "Having his work shown at Harvard has been very exciting—a huge occurrence for the company that I think will open future doors down the road," Nagler said.

Other guests this year will include Pemberly Ann Olson of the San Francisco Ballet Company and Abigail Simon of Joffrey Ballet Company and American Ballet Theatre.

The company's next production, "Nocturne," will feature original pieces from both student and guest choreographers. Performances will run from Nov. 6-8 at the Loeb Drama Center.

SEYI AMOSUN'S '29 (SAMOSUN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ONLY DANCE MOVE IS DODGING CAMPUS TOUR GROUPS AROUND THE YARD.

GRAPHIC BY AMEILE LIMA '27

Dirndls, Beers, and Sex Positions: A Field Study

Searching Boston and Cambridge for the best Oktoberfest celebration (the sequel).

BY WEINER, SCHWANZ, & SCHNITZEL

Boston gave us another Oktoberfest weekend, and we showed up in *dirndls*, ready to take notes. Same crew (plus Schwanz), same voice recorder, same questionable ideas. This time, our mission was simple: every beer is a sex position. By last call at Lamplighter Brewing Company, we had gathered enough material to offend at least three demographics. What follows is the least incriminating retelling.

Pregame Notes:

Weiner: 5 drinks

Schwanz: 4 drinks

Schnitzel: 4.5 drinks

Topics covered: relationships, music, and the ethics of hooking up with multiple people.

Our Uber driver deserves hazard pay.

Beer 1: Apricot Rhapsody, aka Hand Job (fifth place)

Sour, the kind of beer that promises fruit but delivers punishment. Schwanz liked it: “Tangy, citrusy, better than most.” Schnitzel, immediately: “tastes like shit.” Weiner said it was like “giving head to a woman,” but after multiple retests and an unprintable detour, the consensus landed on hand job. Specifically, the clumsy, teenage, back-of-the-movie-theater variety. Schnitzel: “If it’s all I can get, I’ll take it. But I’d never specifically request it.”

Beer 2: David S. Pumpkins, aka Doggy Style (second place)

Sweet, funky, approachable. The table declared “doggy” in under 10 seconds—unanimous agreement for the only time that night. Some truths are universal. Doggy doesn’t need a footnote.

Interlude: Relationship Philosophy

Weiner: “The best relationship stage is right before someone says ‘I love you.’”

Schnitzel: “I feel like that’s a pre-req for dating.” (debateable)

Schwanz: “No, the best moment is the pre-first-kiss tension. You both know it’s going to happen, but it hasn’t yet.”

Everyone nodded like philosophers, then Weiner pointed at Schwanz and said, “Your side profile is crazy.” A quick thanks was given. Back to beer.

Beer 3: Rabbit Rabbit, aka Lazy Missionary (fourth place)

Weiner thought it was “intimate, missionary, but on the side.” Schnitzel pushed “cuddle fuck.” Schwanz floated “six-nine” before losing conviction. Final verdict: lazy missionary, dressed up as something new. A position you pitch as “creative” but, on second inspection, is basically just lying there. Tastes like pretending to innovate.

Beer 4: Bird of a Feather (IPA), aka Standing Backshots (third place)

A bright IPA, bitter on the finish. Weiner declared it “standing, hitting it from the back.” Schnitzel immediately agreed: “So fire.” Schwanz disagreed: “Depends on height difference.” We thought back to those times when we had to adjust the dorm bed to the perfect height. The position—like the beer—depends on the right geometry, collapsing if the logistics fail. Great in theory, often disappointing in practice.



Tangent: Sex, Injuries, and Playlists

The conversation veered into unsolicited wisdom. Schnitzel, recalling a fling while nursing a broken arm, confessed: “That’s when I realized most girls are bad at cowgirl.” From there, the debate turned to sex playlists. Mac DeMarco: ironic. Lana Del Rey: acceptable. The Weeknd (Earned It): okay if she puts it on, cringe if he does. Deftones: objectively horny. Everyone agreed that laughter during sex is mandatory. Sex without humor is like beer without foam: flat, unsettling, and uncomfortably warm.

Beer 5: Oktoberfest, aka Car Sex (sixth place)

Schnitzel ordered the marquee seasonal—“as the man of the table.” Opinions swung wildly from reverse cowgirl to shower sex. Then everyone settled on car sex.

Thrilling, but not totally satisfying. A novelty more than a staple.

Beer 6: Radio Waves, aka Missionary (But Make It Controversial) (first place)

The most divisive beer. Schnitzel argued it was missionary: “down the middle, versatile.” Schwanz said it lacked intimacy: “Too sour, too tart.” Weiner: “1,000,000% neutral, it’s what you make of it.” After enough sips, the metaphor took over: missionary is sublime in love, hollow without.

Bonus Round: Stein Holding Contest

Somewhere between David S. Pumpkins and Radio Waves, the brewery announced a stein holding contest. We entered out of equal parts hubris and dirndl pride. Weiner dropped first, mug dipping and liquid splashing upon the floor. Schwanz lasted longer, but blinked, winced, and surrendered. Schnitzel held out the longest, arms trembling before gravity and physics staged a coup on arm strength. We discovered that none of us is Bavarian enough to keep six pounds of lager at shoulder height.

Final Leaderboard

Radio Waves: Missionary

David S. Pumpkins: Doggy Style

Bird of a Feather: Standing Backshots

Rabbit Rabbit: Lazy Missionary

Apricot Rhapsody: Hand Job

Oktoberfest: Car Sex

Last week, we said Boston’s Oktoberfest was about the beers you meet along the way. This week, it’s the positions. Every pint is a metaphor, every sip a confession, every tangent a therapy session we didn’t pay for. We left the brewery still in our dirndls (though it would’ve made for a more fun article if we took them off), full of beer and bad philosophy, with only one consensus worth sharing: car sex is still not worth it. *Prost.*

**WEINER, SCHWANZ, AND SCHNITZEL
LOST THEIR DIGNITY BUT GAINED
STEINS TO LAST A LIFETIME.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF WEINER,
SCHWANZ, AND SCHNITZEL**

The Ultimate Harvard First-Year Bucket List

Because every freshman year deserves a little disaster here and there.

BY ELLE HUANG '29 AND HAILEY KIM '29

A week before move-in, an upperclassman friend left us with a single piece of advice: “Make the most of freshman year.” In the moment, we brushed her advice off, caught up in the overwhelming whirlwind of settling into college. How would we know what to make the most of before freshman year even began? But by now, between tumultuous classes, inedible Berg food, and an occasional tourist mishap, we are starting to understand what she meant. Freshman year isn’t about perfection; it’s about collecting the small, absurd, and slightly tragic stories that everyone remembers long after. Ditch the traditional four “must-dos” before graduation. Instead, here are our six essential rites of passage:

Check Off the MIT Party—Then Never Again

In the midst of awkward, cookie-cutter orientation conversations comes the quintessential freshman year experience: the first MIT frat party. Each minute on the T to Kendall/MIT builds anticipation for that first step onto the suspiciously sticky frat basement floor. The overpowering smell of department store cologne samples and the thumping of a frat brother’s SoundCloud remixes amplify the cocktail of excitement and confusion.

Navigating the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd, keeping track of new friends, and sidestepping puddles becomes on par with an unofficial orientation event. By the time you’re trudging back toward the Square, shoes clinging to the pavement and phone at 3%, there’s only one logical destination: Joe’s Pizza.

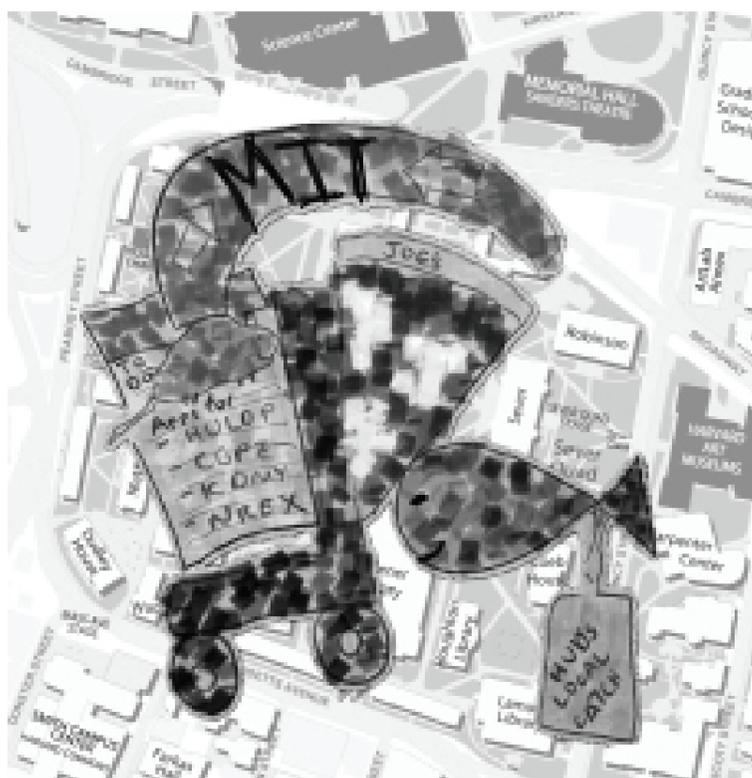
The fluorescent lights sting your eyes, the line snakes out the door, and you can’t help wondering why you’re there at 1:15 a.m., until the first bite of a greasy, \$4 slice helps it all make sense. The warmth, the crunch, the sheer relief: it’s the perfect ending to a night you’ll remember forever, even if you swear you’ll never do it again.

Take a Scooter Hit in Front of Cabot

After back-to-back classes until 4 p.m., the time has come to go back to your dorm. Your brain is fried, your backpack is leaden, and the walkway leading towards the doors of the

Science Center feels like heaven. That’s when it happens. A scooter whizzes by, catching a shoulder, grazing your ankle, sending everything slightly off balance. By the time equilibrium is reestablished, so is perspective: dodging scooters has officially earned a spot on the freshman year bucket list—a small reminder that even near-collisions help contribute to the shared rhythm of Harvard life.

Get Wrecked by Berg’s “Local Catch” Special



Somewhere between braving the lunch line and a late-afternoon Cabot lock-in session, freshmen encounter the HUDS rite of passage: the infamous “local catch.” Swimming in a mystery sauce, the smell hovers somewhere between ocean breeze and cafeteria enigma. Even with optimism and a fork in hand, glad for a break from yet another meal with chicken, the nausea inevitably sets in. By the end of the meal, the untouched “local catch” has forged nothing but a sense of traumatic camaraderie, encapsulating the absurdity of freshman year.

Apply to 20 Consulting Clubs (Spoiler: You Will Get Rejected from All of Them)

Amid back-to-back mixers at Mexican restaurants in Harvard Square and rushed walks dodging tourist crowds, freshmen try to keep up with every consulting and finance club on campus. Foreign acronyms like HUCG or HFAC pile up faster than the full names can be memorized, case slides appear with impossibly short deadlines, and just when every comp form has been submitted, another one appears.

Between awkward icebreaker conversations with upperclassmen, juggling conflicting events, and sending out countless Google Calendar invites, the mayhem becomes nearly palpable.

By the time the rejection emails start rolling in, the frenzy has already bonded the freshman class more than any icebreaker could. Comparing rejection subject lines, laughing over failed case interviews, and collectively giving up on “business casual” become their own rite of passage.

Realize BoardPlus is a Scam

“Harvard students get \$65 each semester, loaded onto their ID Card!” PAFs enthusiastically tell freshmen every year during orientation week. The promise of some “extra cash” has freshman students dreaming of matcha runs, late-night snacks, or spontaneous cravings for a molten chocolate cake at Harvard-affiliated cafes. While upperclassmen spend their BoardPlus at the SEC, Law School, or House grills, most first-years are unaware of these opportunities and are limited to soggy sandwiches and stale pastries at Lamont Café or “limited edition strawberry matcha” composed of milk with food coloring.

Play Rodent Roulette in the Yard: Rabbit or Rat?

If it’s near Canaday, it’s a rat.

A week before move-in, we didn’t know what it meant to “make the most” of freshman year. Now, somewhere between Berg fish, frat floors, and 1 a.m. Joe’s slices, we think we’re starting to figure it out.

ELLE HUANG '29 (MICHELLEHUANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WANTS A SLICE OF TIRAMISU FROM ANNENBERG. HAILEY KIM '29 (HAILEYKIM@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WANTS A COOKIE THAT ISN'T FROM ANNENBERG.

GRAPHIC BY KATHARINE WEINER '29

Taste of Fall in Harvard Square

A food guide to some of the fall-themed treats in Harvard Square.

BY AIDAN GALLAGHER '29

As fall settles over Cambridge and the air turns crisp, life slowly moves indoors. Patio dinners fade away, the days get shorter, and most importantly, the season of the best food arrives. For those of us in college, we are no longer privy to homemade apple pies and the wonderful bliss of nostalgic kitchen aromas, but that doesn't mean we have to miss out on the incredible tastes of fall. With smells of apple pies and pumpkin spice rolling through the Cambridge air, we are tempted by just one more sweet treat or cozy meal, well deserved after a hard day of classes or failing a midterm. So, if you're in the same boat as me, looking for a fall-themed snack that actually hits close to home, don't worry—I've risked adding on a couple of pounds to sample some of the most delicious fall-themed treats around Harvard Square for you.

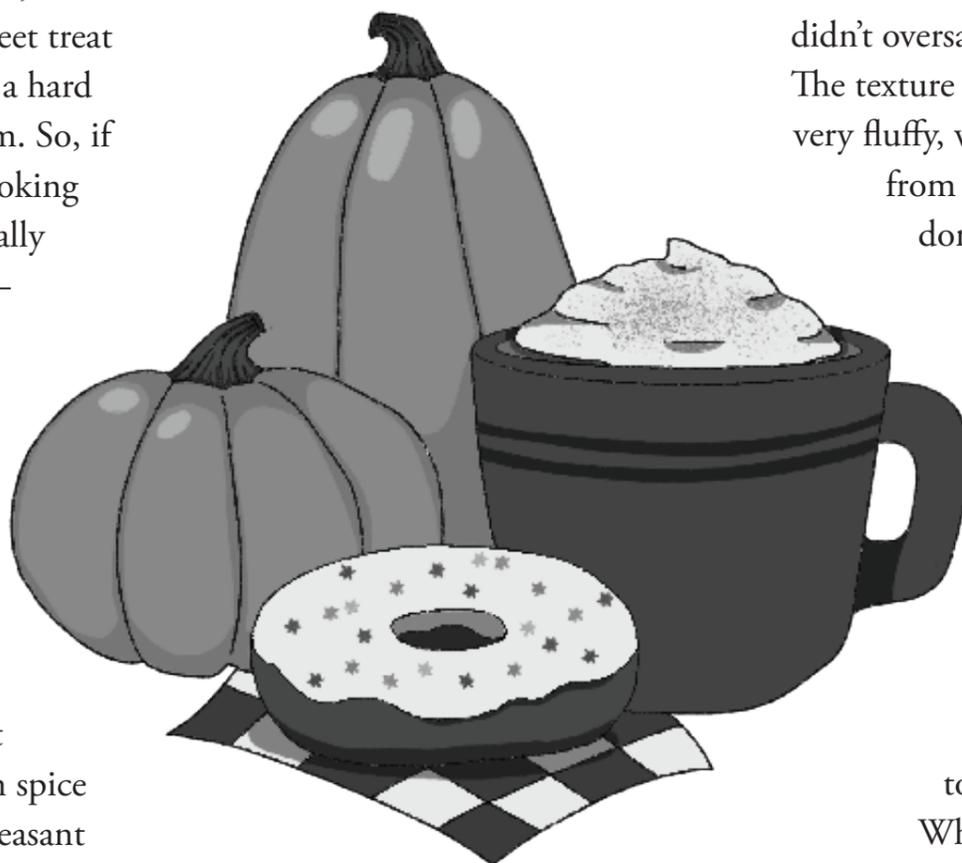
Tatte Bakery Oat Milk Pumpkin Spice Latte: 5.5/10

Of course, we have to start with the fall classic: the pumpkin spice latte. The drink arrived with a pleasant layer of soft foam and instantly gave off the unmistakable pumpkin spice smell of nutmeg and cinnamon with an undertone of oats. Overall, Tatte provides a decent latte, but the oat milk slightly overpowers the pumpkin spice flavor. The sweetness builds as you drink; it starts mild, but by the end, all you taste is pumpkin spice syrup. Maybe it was because I had it first thing in the morning, but I couldn't finish this one. That being said, the blend of oat and pumpkin works surprisingly well together. While I'm not factoring price into my ratings, \$6.25 for a 12-oz cup feels excessive, but as to be expected from Tatte.

Tatte Bakery Apple Pie: 8/10

This is what I'd call a "classic" apple pie. It's nothing revolutionary, but it doesn't need to be; it's just a

good, simple apple pie. The crust has a satisfying crispness—arguably the most important part—and the filling is nicely tart, though a touch too sweet for my taste. This, combined with the Oat Milk Pumpkin Spice Latte, would make for an extra-sugary meal, so I recommend buying each separately like I did to save yourself a trip to the dentist. \$7.50 per slice is steep, but the portion size is decent, with the slice filling the entire plate, and my stomach.



Sweetgreen Autumn Harvest Bowl: 6.5/10

Seemingly, this is the only healthy item I'm testing for you all. The Autumn Harvest Bowl hits you right away with its strong flavors: mainly goat cheese and balsamic vinaigrette. Personally, the maple-glazed Brussels sprouts are the standout ingredient. My main issue, though, is that there's just too much happening. Between the shredded kale, wild rice, roasted sweet potatoes, almonds, apples, blackened chicken, sprouts, goat cheese, and vinaigrette, it's hard to know what you're tasting at any given moment. Still, the cheese/vinaigrette combo complements each other very well, adding a pungent yet pleasant flavor to the bowl. While I still favor CAVA over Sweetgreen, the bowl

is a solid menu item. At \$13.25, it's a moderate price for a filling meal.

Union Square Donuts Pumpkin Spice Latte Donut: 7/10

The pumpkin flavor of this donut itself is excellent, having every spice you would look for in a pumpkin-flavored treat. The glaze, while sweet, has a nice balance of coffee and pumpkin flavorings that complement rather than overwhelm the donut itself. While the donut slightly crossed my personal threshold for sweetness, which is quite low, it still didn't oversaturate my tongue with sugar. The texture is doughy, dense, yet still very fluffy, which is exactly what I need from a donut. It's a large, satisfying donut that, if you were feeling peckish, could be shared

with a friend, justifying the \$4.25 price tag. Fall in Harvard Square tastes like comfort: sweet, spiced, and a little overpriced. From pumpkin spice lattes to apple pie slices, there's no shortage of seasonal treats to indulge in between classes.

While not every item blew me away, there's something about sitting in a café as the leaves change and the air cools that makes every bite taste a little better. Whether you're after a cozy drink, a nostalgic dessert, or a hearty salad that makes you feel slightly less guilty, Harvard Square has your fall cravings covered.

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GRAPHIC BY CAMERON BERNIER '29

SPORTS

A Look Into the Harvard Field Hockey Team's Season

Undefeated with a record of 10-0, Harvard Field Hockey stands on top of the Ivy League and among the nation's best.

BY KATHERINE CHUNG '29

The Harvard women's field hockey team has opened the season with remarkable momentum, undefeated at 10-0 overall and 3-0 in Ivy League play, winning over nationally ranked opponents such as Princeton (6), University of Connecticut (11), and Stanford (25) with a perfect 1.000 winning percentage.

In an interview with the *Harvard Independent*, captain Fiene Oerlemans '26 credited the team's success to its consistency and resilience. "It's always hard being an Ivy League team because we don't get as much preparation before the season starts as some of our opponents," she said.

"Being undefeated and beating four ranked opponents so far just shows how much discipline and resilience this group has," she added.

"It's not about talent; it's just about our consistency," Oerlemans said. "We have so much depth on our team and on our bench, which has been a huge part of our success... Someone can have an off day, and someone else will pick up their slack."

"Our coach has done a really good job of recruiting," captain Kitty Chapple '26 said. "We're playing really nice, gelled hockey."

Despite the graduation of nine senior team members last spring and the induction of seven first-years, the adjustment has been seamless, according to the team's leadership. "It's a completely new team," Oerlemans said. "We all gelled very quickly... We all became super close and felt like we've been playing together for years." The captains credit the team's culture for that smooth transition. "It doesn't feel like there's a hierarchy between grades," she continued. "Every grade is kind of just best friends. So I think that also makes it easy for freshmen to come into."

Both captains repeatedly used the word "gelled," perfectly capturing the core of Harvard field hockey's success this season. "We genuinely love playing with each other and I think that really

shows on the field," Oerlemans said, emphasizing how trust and camaraderie are valued by the team.

For Oerlemans, who began her Harvard career on the bench, leadership this season carries a personal meaning. "I know what it's like to be there and sometimes it can be hard," she said. "No one thinks selfishly about their playing time, which has been great. I think that the team wouldn't be able to perform as well on the field if we didn't have that support coming from the side."

That team-first mindset has enabled the team to persevere through some of the most challenging matchups. On Sept. 26, Harvard defeated Princeton 3-1, one of their biggest rivalries and a victory that both Oerlemans and Chapple described as a defining moment of the season. "It's always a really fun game to play—great competition," Chapple said. "We executed our plan really well as a team and were really clinical on the chances we got."

The Harvard women's field hockey team currently holds the top spot in the Ivy League and ranks fourth nationally in the NCAA's Rating Percentage Index.

Despite the winning streak, the captains insist on keeping perspective. "We shouldn't get too caught up in rankings," Oerlemans said. The "one-game-at-a-time" mentality has become a cornerstone of the field hockey team's preparation. After each match, the team holds a reflection session to assess what worked and what needs improvement.

"Every game, there are areas you can get better," Chapple said. "It's important to recognize that so you can grow."

Still, the captains acknowledge the pressure that comes with the success. "All the titles and being undefeated put a target on our back," Oerlemans said. "But if we trust what we can do, believe in each other, and keep taking it game by game, we will be flying forward."



"The locker room before games is a party, always... We do a great job of channeling high energy in the locker room to the fields," Oerlemans laughed. "Everyone loves to dance and sing... We sing 'Shots' before every game... It's a great song and we have fun."

As the field hockey team prepares for upcoming games against Cornell on Oct. 11 and Brown on Oct. 17, both captains hope to see more fans in the stands. "It's always more exciting when you're at home and your friends are watching," Oerlemans said. "We've been doing so good, and I feel like with that support from Harvard and the students we could just make game days even more fun and exciting."

Chapple agreed: "Any support on the sidelines really means a lot to us."

"We're proud of what we've done so far," Oerlemans said. "But the next game is always the most important one."

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GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29

Fantasy Roundup: Week 5

A recap of the notable games from the NFL this past week.

BY TYLER DANG '28



It was a week of upsets. Only one team remains winless as the Titans and Saints both picked up their first victories, leaving the lowly Jets as the last man standing. Even more surprising, no team remains undefeated after the Eagles fell to Bo Nix's Broncos and the Patriots stunned the Bills. In other news, Geno Smith struggled mightily as the Raiders fell to the Colts, while the Lamar-less Ravens were blown out by the Texans. Finally, in one of the week's most entertaining matchups, Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers edged out Sam Darnold's Seahawks by a field goal. For full team rosters, see Week 0's issue.

First and Lowell (2-2) vs Pfirst Down (3-1):

124.64-145.3

Top performers: Jake Ferguson (23.9) | Jonathan Taylor (31.6)

Underperformers: Tetairoa McMillan (13.3) | Quentin Johnston (6.9)

The Ball Currier (1-3) vs Bring it Dome (3-1):

120.22-152.72

Top performers: Kyren Williams (31.1) | Ja'Marr Chase (29)

Underperformers: George Pickens (13.7) | James Cook (4.9)

Kirkland Cousins (1-3) vs The Inn-Zone (2-2):

147.32-131.08

Top performers: Stefon Diggs (24.6) | Sam LaPorta (20.2)

Underperformers: Vikings D/ST (3.0) | Derrick Henry (9.3)

Standout Games:

49ers @ Rams: 26-23

Thursday night's game strengthened Kyle Shanahan's case for Coach of the Year. The 49ers, with backup quarterback Mac Jones, looked dangerous despite a long list of offensive talent on injured reserve. Christian McCaffrey seemed unstoppable, with the Rams requiring several defenders to successfully tackle him. 49ers receiver Kendrick Bourne had a career game with 142 yards on 10 receptions. As for the Rams, Matthew Stafford was a bright spot, racking up 389 yards and three touchdowns. However, two costly fumbles (including one by Kyren Williams at the goal line) gave the 49ers a late fourth-quarter lead. Even worse, the Rams' kicker squandered the game, missing a 53-yard field goal and crucial extra point that would have sealed the win. Instead, the California matchup headed to overtime. On 4th and 1 at the San Francisco 11, the Rams chose to run the ball instead of finishing with a tie via field goal; however, Kyren Williams failed to convert the first down and the 49ers walked away with the win.

Titans @ Cardinals: 22-21

The Cardinals started strong, scoring early and taking command of the game. Tennessee, meanwhile, found themselves down 21-3 early in the second quarter. Quarterback Cam Ward showed off his arm strength, but accuracy issues continued to plague him—and without a reliable group of receivers, the offense struggled to find rhythm. Defensively, the Titans fared marginally better—a strong defensive line gave Kyler Murray little time in the pocket. Still the pass protection was abysmal, allowing Marvin Harrison to have four receptions for 98 yards. These woes allowed Arizona to take a 23-6 lead at the end of the first half. However, the Cardinals collapsed in the second: a miscommunication caused a shotgun snap to bounce off of Murray's helmet, fumbling the ball for a Tennessee recovery. To start the fourth quarter, running back Emari Demercado broke free for a 52-yard rushing touchdown but celebrated too soon and dropped the ball just before entering the end zone. Finally, Cam Ward threw an interception deep in Cardinals territory, which was then fumbled and recovered by Tyler Lockett in the end zone for a Tennessee touchdown. The No. 1 overall pick finished the game by driving the Titans into field goal territory to seal their first win.

Patriots @ Bills: 23-20

This game began chaotically, with both teams trading fumbles in the first quarter—Buffalo coughing it up twice and New England once. Someone put points on the board at the end of the first quarter after a 30-yard field goal by New England. Drake Maye played well, completing 22 of 30 total attempted throws for a total of 273 yards; however, his four sacks are a blemish on

an otherwise good night. Stefon Diggs, the ex-Bills receiver, had a revenge game; he picked up 146 yards on just 10 receptions in his first return to Orange Park since being traded two seasons ago. Offensively, the Bills were just not clicking. Josh Allen added to his turnover count with an interception at the New England 10-yard line and a fumble off a running back's leg. Meanwhile, the Patriots' defense held running back James Cook to only 49 yards on 15 carries. Hopefully, the Bills will regain their momentum against Atlanta.

Looking Ahead:

Next week, only two teams sit out as the Vikings and Texans get a breather. The matchups look exciting, starting with the Seahawks traveling across the country to Jacksonville as Sam Darnold hopes to continue his hot start (SEA -1.5). Later, the Titans will face the Raiders (LV -6.5) in a match up between 1-4 teams. The 49ers will head to Florida to face Baker Mayfield's Buccaneers (TB -2.5), with both teams coming off narrow wins.

It will be interesting to see how well Christian McCaffrey plays next weekend. The running back has been the main force driving the success of San Francisco's offense, but Tampa's defense was very successful in stopping the run game when playing against Saquon Barkley last week. Atlanta's Bijan Robinson is also projected to have a good game. The running back will play the Bills, who have allowed the fourth-most rushing touchdowns and the fourth-most yards per carry.

As for the few games you'd be excused for missing, the Eagles-Giants game heavily favors Philadelphia (PHI -6.5), as Jaxson Dart is still getting accustomed to the NFL. Meanwhile, the Rams-Ravens (LAR -7.5) showdown leans toward Los Angeles, as the Ravens struggled immensely without Lamar Jackson this past week.

**TYLER DANG '28
(TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WILL
CELEBRATE THE TITANS'
FIRST WIN OF THE SEASON.**

**GRAPHIC BY NUALA
MERNIN '29**



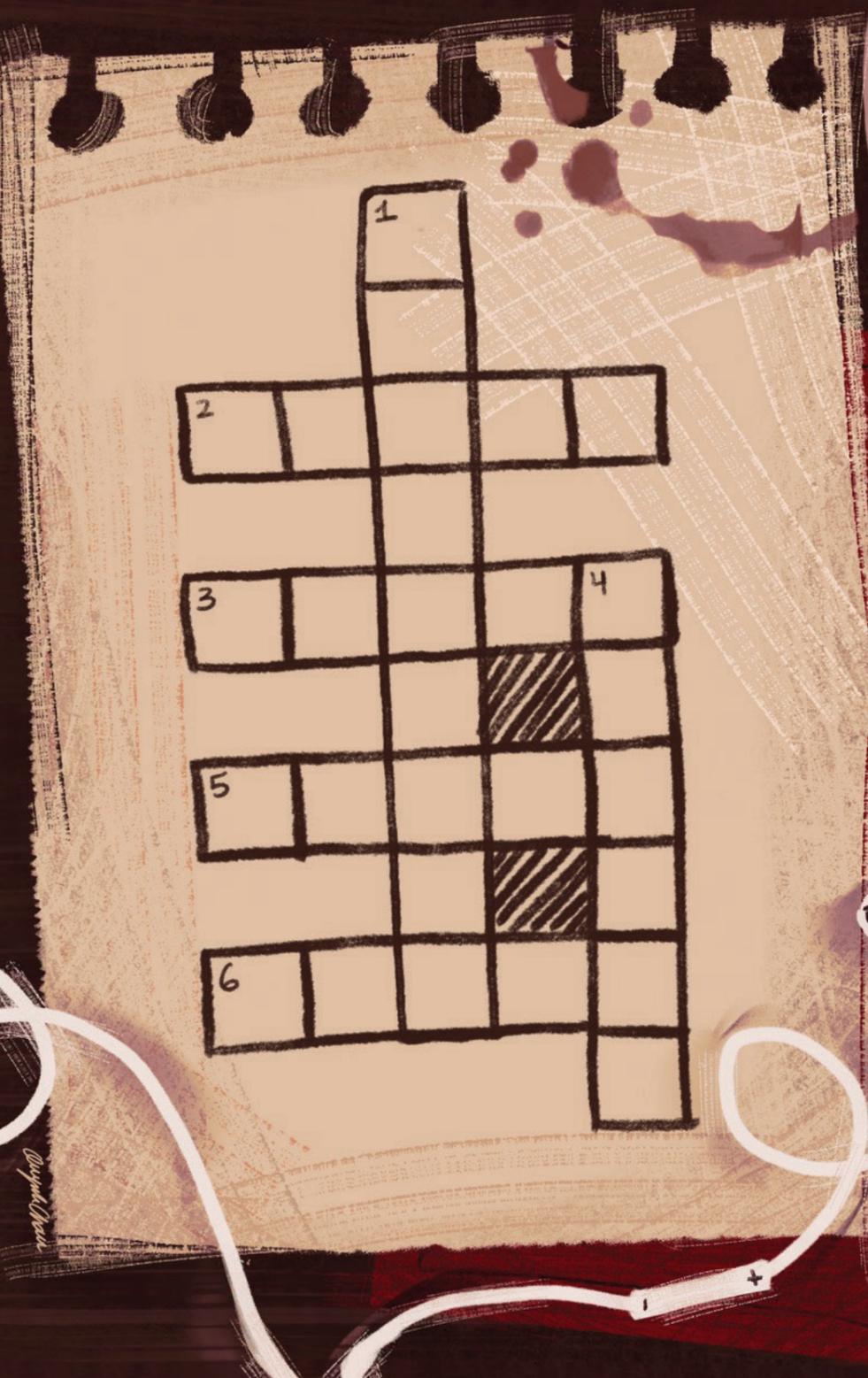


ACROSS

- 2. Have Nothing To Do
- 3. — On A True Story
- 5. Run The Bases while The Pitcher Pitches
- 6. Record Material

DOWN

- 1. Woodward Counterpart
- 4. Slang for delusional



GROGGED OFF

Latia Merriam *Kayla Le* *Angie Li*

COVER ART BY LUCIE STEFANONI '27
LAYOUT BY KAYLA LE '28 AND ANGIE LI '28

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