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DOWN BY THE RIVER



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Every Name Represents a Universe: Harvard Affiliates Gather to Honor Gaza's Victims

Students, faculty, and Cambridge community members reclaim Palestinians' humanity from statistics.

BY ZAID AL-ISSISS '28

On the morning of Oct. 8, Harvard University affiliates gathered with markers in hand and heavy hearts at the Science Center Plaza to fill blank canvases with the names of Palestinian casualties in Gaza from the past two years. The Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee organized this event for the second year in a row, inviting students, faculty, and members of the wider Cambridge community to come together and grieve those killed.

Upon arrival, attendees were provided with sheets of paper containing the names and ages of Gazans killed by the IDF since 2023. PSC organizers invited attendees to whisper the names as they were being written to honor their lives after death. Some students wrote down a few names when stopping at the Plaza between classes, while others stayed for several hours, mourning with peers. By the final day of the event on Oct. 11, the canvas spanned dozens of meters long and contained thousands of names of Palestinians killed between ages zero-85 years old.

The following student interviewees requested anonymity due to past on-campus doxxing scandals relating to speaking out about Gaza.

“What we’re doing here is just trying to keep people’s memories alive... We’re trying to honor them,” explained a female sophomore at the College to the *Harvard Independent*. “There’s a physical act of actually writing the name... It just really makes you think about how these were people with hopes and with dreams and with aspirations and with goals and with entire lives that they were planning on living and who have been cut short because of the Israeli state.”

The intense emotions of grief and sadness associated with the magnitude of death were a key part of the name-writing event. “The immensity of the violence and the dehumanization—words cannot do justice to it. That’s why the name writing is so important,” she reflected. “It’s a list that’s too long.”

Echoing her words, an organizer from the PSC confirmed to the *Independent* that the event intended to illustrate that the Gazans who died are more than just numbers; each Palestinian is an entire universe worth memorializing.

“We see these big numbers in the headlines and news and media, and they’re a lot of times to dehumanize or desensitize the numbers of mass casualties,” the organizer said. “We believe that attaching these names shows how every martyr has a name, has a story, has an age, and has a life taken away by Israel.”

The event was held in conjunction with a vigil held on Oct. 8, where Harvard affiliates, including undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty, gathered to grieve in a candlelight vigil. “When you see scrolls of names stretching out so far along the Memorial Church steps during the vigil, that display moves people to understand this must be reckoned with,” the PSC organizer emphasized.

The event also coincided with a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which was announced on Oct. 9. This is the second ceasefire that was declared since the start of the conflict; the first was proclaimed in January 2025 but was violated in March by Israel. On Oct. 14, Israel announced it would be cutting in half the number of aid trucks allowed to enter Gaza due to Hamas’ delay in delivering the hostages’ bodies. Hamas explained that the delay resulted from the difficult conditions caused by the destruction of the sites where the bodies were being held.

airstrikes with your own eyes—you see that with your own eyes, and hear racist and hateful rhetoric by Israel towards Palestinians with your own ears—it’s easy to assess that there’s intentionality there, that it’s a genocide.”

The PSC has maintained that Israel’s actions in Gaza are genocidal and that its blockade of aid—which even prior to the conflict was necessary for the survival of Palestinians in Gaza—amounts to collective punishment, a war crime.

Both sophomores emphasized feeling relieved after the ceasefire was announced, but also shared concerns over the reality of the situation.

“I have to hope that there is an end [to the violence], but at the same time, that hope is not dampened, but it’s certainly restrained a bit by the knowledge of the fact that the people who are orchestrating this deal are originally real estate brokers who don’t care about human lives—they care about making money,” the female sophomore said. “These are the same people who months ago were joking about turning Gaza into a resort...to displace them even further.”

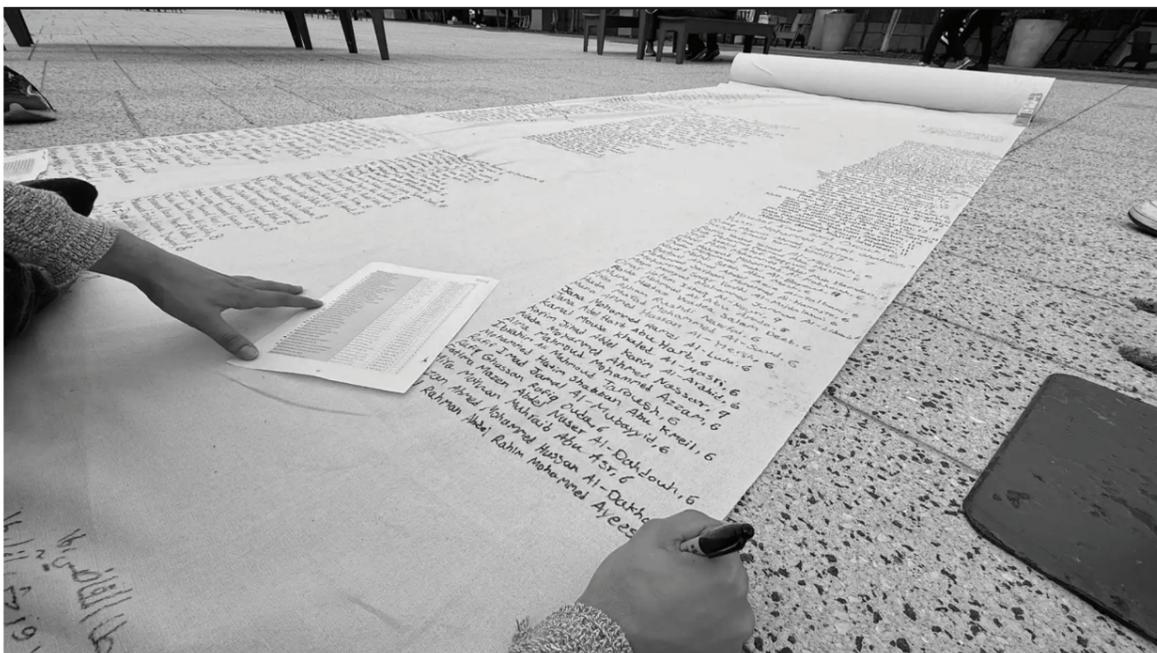
“We’ve seen Israel violate the [January 2025] ceasefire hundreds of times in both Gaza and Lebanon, which are still being bombed to this day, as well as other ceasefires historically,” the male sophomore undergraduate continued. “Besides, this ceasefire doesn’t address the issue of Israeli apartheid since 1948; we must continue to demand justice and an end to the occupation.”

The PSC will continue regular programming, both on Gaza and about Palestine as a whole. The organization, which has been a registered student organization for over 20 years, has long provided space for discourse about Palestine. “We’ve been able to actually foster a lot of conversations around Palestine that this University has silenced in such unimaginable ways,” the PSC organizer said. “We have a platform to be advocating for people in Gaza, to be demanding justice and an end to the occupation and this genocide.”

The PSC’s Apartheid Wall installation is a major upcoming event that will be installed in the coming weeks. The wall, which was not displayed in 2025 because the PSC was put on probation in April, is typically an annual installation that aims to bring awareness to the struggles of Palestinians living in the West Bank.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF WALLACE SELPH '29



There is a divide in choosing to label Israel’s killing of Palestinians in Gaza as genocidal or not. Human rights organizations such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, Amnesty International, B’Tselem, and Human Rights Watch have concluded that the scale of the violence and the intentional creation of unlivable conditions in Gaza mean Israel is committing genocide according to the United Nations’ 1948 Genocide Convention.

Other organizations, however, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, as well as countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, have stated that Israel is retaliating to the Oct. 7 attacks with legitimate military actions and that, despite the immense death toll and destruction, its actions do not constitute genocide. However, the organizations labeling it as a genocide argue that Israel’s military objectives and its genocidal intent are not mutually exclusive.

“The violence is large and indiscriminate, and numbers cannot do justice to that,” a male sophomore at the College explained to the *Independent* regarding this divide. “When you see Palestinian children starving due to Israel’s blockade on Gaza and families being blown up by precision

When Empires Decline: Singapore's Former Minister George Yeo Reflects on U.S. Power and China's Rise to Global Influence

A closer look at growing American isolationism amid China's emergence as a global power.

BY NASHLA TURCIOS '28

On Oct. 8, Harvard Kennedy School's John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum hosted the 2025 S.T. Lee Lecture featuring George Yeo—Singapore's former Minister for Information and the Arts, Health, Trade and Industry, and Foreign Affairs—in conversation with moderator Anthony Saich. Drawing on his experience steering Singapore's foreign policy, Yeo explored the prospect of a U.S. decline in global influence and engagement, describing how America's international relations have grown more inward-looking and confrontational as China continues its steady geopolitical ascent on the world stage.

The S.T. Lee Lecture, endowed by Singaporean philanthropist Seng Tee Lee, brings distinguished voices to Harvard to reflect on pressing global issues. This year's speaker, Yeo, previously served as a brigadier general in the Singapore Armed Forces and remains one of Asia's most respected voices in diplomacy and governance. Anthony Saich is the Daewoo Professor of International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School and director of the Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia.

Yeo began the lecture with a reflective monologue, sharing his perspective on America's shifting place in the world.

"When I was in Cambridge, I remember [there was] Alistair Cooke's series [America: A Personal History] on the BBC... I bought the book and lived through it with pleasure. America

inspired many generations of us in Asia. The American dream became the Asian Dream."

That sense of admiration, Yeo noted, has since given way to uncertainty. "A few months ago, I was across the river for my 40th class reunion at the Business School, and two of my classmates saddled up to me to ask, 'Do you think we're in a decline?'" he said.

"It is a question asked all over Asia today. Is the U.S. in decline?"

Over the past decade, the U.S. has repeatedly stepped back from pillars of the post-Cold War order—pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, announcing plans to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement that same year and again in 2020, and halting World Health Organization funding and initiating a withdrawal in 2020. Public sentiment reflects the drift: surveys find Americans increasingly say U.S. influence is weakening and show less enthusiasm for an active global role.

"Trump has been very hard on Asian countries, threatening them, beating them, bullying them," he said. "If you're a small country like Singapore, you'd rather be in the shadows and not attract too much attention. But if you're China, you have no choice but to stand firm."

Yet, Yeo added, the trend extends beyond any one administration. Even before 2017, bipartisan skepticism toward large trade deals was rising. Moreover, both parties have embraced industrial policy and selective protectionism.

"It's not just Trump," he said. "Because even if there's a rebound after Trump, there is a ratcheting downward movement—a sense that the U.S. is feeling more insecure about itself and will no longer waste time on nice words about the globalist agenda and will insist on its own prerogatives." As Yeo emphasizes, American attitudes toward Asia and globalization have shifted

in recent years. He cautioned that as great powers weaken, global order tends to unravel. "When big empires go into decline, when America starts shutting down military bases—800 of them maintaining peace and stability and local equilibria in different parts of the world—then the pieces will begin to move again, and everyone will begin to make alternative arrangements and regional hegemony will start throwing their weight around," Yeo said.

Some analysts frame this risk through the "Kindleberger Trap," which describes how global order unravels when a declining power cannot or will not provide key public goods, and the rising power fails to step in. The theory draws parallels to the 1930s, when Britain was unable and the U.S. unwilling to stabilize the global system. Commentators now use this idea to explain U.S.-China tensions, warning that if neither country takes the lead, the world could grow more unstable even without a major war.

Nonetheless, Yeo noted what appears to be a contradiction in America's global posture—an apparent retreat from globalization alongside ambitions that still project power outward. Since returning to office, Trump has repeatedly suggested making Canada the "51st state," and revived talks of annexing Greenland. At the same time, naval deployments by the U.S. have surged off Venezuela in an attempt to patrol the Caribbean.

"Watching [Trump's] moves, even if they are not consciously thought about, he's sliding down paths of lower resistance," Yeo said. "In Asia, all of us accept that China will be a rising power."

He warned, however, that a U.S. retreat from its international role could have destabilizing effects. Following World War II, the U.S. positioned itself as the principal architect of a rules-based global order and the engine of postwar globalization—building institutions and norms that promoted open markets and security cooperation. Washington led the creation of Bretton Woods institutions like the IMF and World Bank, backed the dollar as the world's reserve



currency, and launched the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. For decades, these efforts positioned the U.S. as the leader of global stability and economic integration.

“If the U.S. retreats, there will be a transitional period where the imbalance may become very unsettling.”

The discussion then shifted to what Yeo described as “the nature of China,” reflecting on its long history in the region. “In Southeast Asia, we have seen China in all its previous incarnations,” he said. “During the Tang, it created Srivijaya. It’s a lucrative trade—so lucrative that the local kingdoms were vying with one another for a share of the trade.”

He went on to reference the Ming Dynasty as another example of China’s enduring influence beyond its borders. “In the Ming Dynasty, we’re all familiar with how, after Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming in 1368, by 1405, the first great fleet sailed and reached Africa.”

His point underscored how China’s historical reach often came through commerce and diplomacy rather than conquest.

“It’s always been defensive because it’s homogeneous,” Yeo said. “And you often get the feeling in China that even if the rest of the world were to disappear, China will carry on because it’s big enough. It’s vertically integrated enough.”

After outlining China’s enduring tendencies, Yeo turned to what this means for the rest of the world. He offered practical advice for how nations should navigate relations with Beijing. “So what do we do first?” he asked. “Don’t have it as an enemy. Don’t get too close. Be nice. You’ll get a lot of advantages. If they push too hard, lean the other way and get your friends around.”

Pausing for a moment, he posed the question that holds great relevance for global diplomacy today: “Can such a China coexist with the U.S.?”

Yeo rejected the notion that conflict between the two powers is inevitable. “If China were the Soviet Union, with the same missionary zeal as the U.S., thinking of the Mahan strategy of naval power, then a class is inevitable,” he said. “But I don’t think China’s nature is like that.”

To illustrate his point, Yeo turned again to history. “Why would dynasty after dynasty invest such vast resources



into the construction of a Great Wall? Because it is defensive in nature,” he said. “China can only be governed if it’s homogeneous. And if it starts absorbing large numbers of foreigners and is not able to digest them, it cannot be governed in the old way.”

Following Yeo’s remarks, the discussion shifted into a Q&A format led by Saich. It began with Saich asking about China’s growing dominance in technology and infrastructure across Asia. “What I see increasingly across parts of Asia is that China is beginning to dominate supply chains in the region,” Saich said. “Will [that] undermine the U.S.-dominated security order in Asia?”

Yeo acknowledged that China’s ambitions are strategic but argued they are more rooted in statecraft than aggression. “Does China seek to control the global supply chains? Well, the Belt and Road Initiative is very important,” he said.

“They know that it’s a way of regulating and growing the economy and using it as part of statecraft,” Yeo explained. “Their thinking is this, and it goes back to Sun Tzu’s ‘Art of War:’ you have to prepare yourself militarily and you have to deploy to deter, but be very careful about actually going to war because war yields uncertain outcomes and wars are expensive.”

Nonetheless, Yeo emphasized that while China prepares for war, it views conflict as a last resort, relying instead on economic leverage to achieve its aims. “Why do we need to fight?” he asked. “If I can use bananas and pineapples and sugar to influence your behavior, that’s what they do. And it is a statecraft honed

and perfected over centuries.”

He added that China’s approach is pragmatic and deeply calculated.

“They say, ‘Oh, China is unpredictable.’ It’s completely predictable,” Yeo said. “When they were angry with Australia, what did they do? Your lobsters, your wine—they buy them from America to make a point to Australia. Now they don’t buy soybeans from America; they buy them from Argentina... That’s what they do. And they’re very good at this.”

To conclude the discussion, Saich asked whether China’s rise in a new technological era would differ from its past dominance over trade goods like silk.

Yeo responded by pointing to artificial intelligence as a defining example of how China’s modern strategy departs from historical monopolies. “When they made DeepSeek open-source—whether the decision was made by Liang [Wenfeng] or by the center—the result was open source,” he said. “And all other AI developments in China are open source. To me, that is China’s biggest contribution to global public goods.”

“It’s a revolution, because AI is not just apps that we download to draft speeches and to do PowerPoints—it’s how AI is married to automation and robotics to make lives better.”

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INDEPENDENT.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF
MARTHA STEWART**

Gold Coast, Re-Gilded: A Look into the Renewed Adams House

A historic house reopened with new life and old spirit.

BY TAYLOR THORNE '28

After a more than five-year renewal process, Adams House reopened this August, marking a major milestone in the University's sweeping House Renewal Program. Adams House, one of Harvard College's 12 residential dormitories, is known for its distinctive architecture and vibrant arts culture. Now, the House blends modernized facilities with historic features that have long defined its community.

Located in River Central, Adams House was founded in 1931 and is made up of five buildings: Apthorp House, Westmorly Court, Claverly Hall, Randolph Hall, and Russell Hall.

"Each of the buildings of Adams House was built at a different time by a different architect," Adams House resident tutor Santiago Pardo-Sanchez '16 said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. Each architect had individual visions, leading to a mixture of architectural styles in Adams.

The renewal project for the "Gold Coast" House was more than just renovating outdated buildings; it was about finding a balance between accessibility, modernity, and historic preservation. Unlike other houses, Adams's renewal stretched across over five years, nearly double the time of the College's other house renovations. Although work began in June 2019, the pandemic added delays, as did the challenge of renovating four separate buildings.

This extended timeline affected student living, forcing many into "swing housing." Resident tutor Alex Reed noted that while these on-campus residential accommodations still allowed House traditions to continue, they never quite matched the spirit of having the community together. "I think that being spread out like we were before was so detrimental to the community," he said in an interview with the *Independent*. "There are a lot of students that I never saw because they were just going to Lowell or Quincy to eat."

Reuniting a distant community was not the only thing that the finished construction accomplished. Before Adams's renovation, accessibility was a significant issue. Without elevators, students with accessibility needs could only enter and reside in a handful of House spaces, and some areas, like the library, remained impossible to reach. "If you used a wheelchair, you could go into the dining hall and into the Gold Room, but that was the only common space you were able to go into," said Pardo-Sanchez.

Now, with the addition of elevators and ramps, Adams is fully accessible. This change has been celebrated not just as an architectural improvement but as a cultural shift, as the House is now open to all its



students. "It's fantastic. You can finally access the library without having someone carry you up the stairs," Reed said.

Equally important was the preservation of Adams's historic character. Some of the focal features include the grand spiral staircase at the entrance of Claverly Hall and the portico adjoining the dining hall. As a resident tutor, Reed had the opportunity to speak with several of the restoration workers about how they preserved the architectural elements that make the House so unique.

"In the Upper Common Room, for instance, they had peeled off the different layers of paint and found that there were design schemes in that room that we didn't even really know about before because they had just been painted over," Reed said.

In the Adams dining hall, contractors took care to maintain the original woodwork. "All the wood that you see in Adams is still kind of the original. They took it down and essentially cleaned it and shined it," said Pardo-Sanchez. "Those trees are over 100 years old—you don't have those anymore."

Some of the most striking changes from the renewal appear in Adams's common spaces. The Pool Theater, a hallmark of the House, has been transformed into a fully functional performance space. Once literally a drained swimming pool with makeshift seating, it is now a purpose-built theater. "It has a green room, a makeup room, the stage, and the floor of the pool can go up and down, meaning that you can do a kind of theater in the rounds," explained Pardo-Sanchez.

Stories of the Pool Theater often center on its role as a "space for personal expression and liberation," especially for those who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. While the Pool Theater is not open yet, it is expected to be unveiled by the end of the fall 2025 semester.

Its opening marks the return of not only another space for student groups to perform but also a historic haven for minority groups.

Another notable relic of Adams House is Franklin Delano Roosevelt's '03 600-square-foot suite from the early 1900s in Westmorly Court. With four rooms, 14-foot ceilings, and a bathroom extraordinarily modern for the time, the FDR suite has now been restored with its original period furniture and antiques. The University proclaims this as "the only existing memorial to the former President at Harvard, as well as a living museum of daily College life at the turn of the twentieth century."

The suite acts as more than just a memorial. "They raised half a million dollars from the alumni of the House, and so we were able to both renovate the suite and then use a lot of that money to support undergraduate research, to support Adams students, and people from around the College," Reed said. "It goes beyond just the suite itself."

Meanwhile, the Gold Room next to the House dining hall remains an iconic display of Adams's character. With its golden walls and richly painted ceiling, it is both a gathering space and a reminder of the house's gilded reputation. "If you're sitting on one of the couches in the Gold Room, and you just look up, you can see the ceiling," she said. "It has a lot of intricate designs. It's a royal blue color with gold and everything," Aghader Yassen '27 said.

When the decision was made to move students fully back into Adams this fall, even before every final detail was complete, it was met with relief. "I'm glad that they moved everybody in, even though it wasn't fully complete," said Yassen. Finishing touches continue in bursts, but residents say it has not significantly disrupted their day-to-day lives. "It's usually something I don't notice," she added.

Now that Adams residents are back in their historic home, there is a renewed sense of unity. The dining hall has once again become the center of daily life, with students gathering not just for meals but also for studying and casual conversations. "You come to the dining hall, and more people are just hanging out because it's more central," Reed said.

Similarly, Yassen shared her experience of casual conversations in the dining hall. "I just go out for brain break and I just see friends talking, and then I sit down and we have a nice little chat," she said.

Events have also gained momentum, with more students attending House traditions and weekly gatherings. "There's more buy-in to events, just coming to Carpes and things," said Reed. "Carpes" refers to the weekly Carpe Noctem events hosted by the Adams House Committee for students to enjoy food, drinks, and a chance to mingle with their House community.

The physical renewal may be complete, but the cultural renewal of Adams House is just beginning. As students settle into their new spaces, they will define what it means to live in Adams in the decades ahead.

"It's the nicest dorm in America," said Pardo-Sanchez.

**TAYLOR THORNE '28
(TAYLORTHORNE@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) IS FOREVER
THANKFUL TO THE HOUSING
GODS FOR HER PLACEMENT
INTO ADAMS.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALEX
MULLEN '29**



When Being Present Is Not Enough: Harvard Students and the Struggle to Engage

Exploring the digital, cultural, and structural forces that are reshaping Harvard College's classroom experience.

BY ELLE HUANG '29

Across Harvard classrooms this fall, a shift is underway. Professors report fewer faces in lecture hall seats, fewer questions being asked, and fewer sparks of intellectual presence, as the nation's top students navigate Harvard's campus teeming with opportunity. The trend mirrors national reports: the New York Times recently highlighted a surge in chronic absences among undergraduates, raising questions about how elite institutions sustain attention and conceptual leaps—the stakes are particularly high at Harvard.

Harvard students balance rigorous academics with a dense environment of extracurriculars, pre-professional recruitment, and social commitments. From an external perspective, the result is that even motivated students sometimes struggle to fully engage in their classrooms. However, affiliated undergraduates reveal an academic culture increasingly at odds with itself. They paint the picture not of lazy students, but of a tension between digital distraction, shifting post-pandemic habits, and the unrelenting pressure to do everything at once.

Screens, Distraction, and Divided Attention

A leading culprit is the omnipresence of devices. "I think one of the biggest challenges right now is just the presence of cell phones and computers. Even when students aren't actively using them, the devices are there to split their attention," Harvard Mathematics lecturer Philip Wood explained in an interview with the *Independent*. This results in lectures losing to the allure of distraction.

While some professors point to technology as a key source of distraction, students describe a more nuanced reality. "Laptops and phones definitely make people less engaged because it's so easy to be doing something else. iPads and similar electronic devices are okay because of the associated academic connotations," Kathlynn Yao '29 said.

Lecture format also often determines how engaged students feel. "People are less engaged in lecture, less willing to respond to questions... group collaboration keeps students engaged because you're applying concepts to the problems," Yao noted.

"[Devices] are incredibly attractive, sometimes even addictive, and that really interferes with collaboration and engagement with the material," Wood similarly observed.

"Some of the classes I'm taking have recorded lectures, so a lot of my classmates feel like there's no need to attend lecture especially when they can watch the lecture back on 2x speed, especially since we didn't have that option before, so there's less emphasis on attending lecture, but I personally feel that there is value to attending lecture," Carissa Chen '29 said. Together, their experiences suggest that when instruction becomes more mediated by slides, screens, or recordings, students may begin to treat learning as passive observation rather than active exchange.

Compounding this challenge are habits carried over from remote learning. During remote

instruction, students lost out on in-person dialogues and grew accustomed to multitasking.

For many, those patterns have quietly persisted even in physical classrooms. "People got used to zoning out during online classes by being present without really being there," a sophomore at the College who requested anonymity told the *Independent*. What began as a coping mechanism for an isolating educational experience has now become second nature, making engagement harder to rebuild. At the same time, habits such as fast feedback, hyperlinked browsing, or swiping and scrolling clash with the purposeful deliberation of proofs, arguments, and dense texts.

According to these University affiliates, the result is a classroom where attention is fragmented and cognitive energy is stretched thin, even for students who want to engage deeply.

Grades, Risk, and the Shrinking Intellectual Margin

Another tension arises from how grading shapes behavior. When every assignment or exam feels high-stakes, students may opt for safe routes around uncertainty: avoid ambiguity, avoid shame, and avoid risk. "Many students still see the usefulness of that kind of learning, but the system doesn't always reward it," Wood said. In such environments, class participation and intellectual experimentation can decline, as students focus on outcomes over process. The result is a shift from exploratory engagement toward performance-oriented learning.

Yet, this dynamic is not universal. Yao, for her part, emphasizes that some classrooms do manage to strike a healthier balance. "I feel pretty comfortable contributing, especially in small groups or sections because everyone is really accepting of ideas and mistakes," she said.

Yao's experience reflects a classroom environment where students feel comfortable contributing ideas without fear of judgment. Wood similarly noted that engagement improves when participation is viewed as integral to learning rather than as a graded performance. In these settings, questions and mistakes become part of the process, supporting a more open and interactive learning atmosphere.

Extracurricular Overload

Beyond the classroom, many students describe a growing imbalance between academic engagement and extracurricular demands. Harvard's culture of ambition—fueled by student organizations, pre-professional recruiting, and leadership roles—often redirects students'

attention away from lectures and sections.

"I think there's a big focus on extracurriculars," Chen said. "From what I've heard, especially from upperclassmen, there seems to be more of a focus on extracurricular involvement versus class."

This divide underscores a broader tension: students must constantly choose between depth and breadth. For some, that means moderating their course load to explore other activities. "Going into creating my schedule as a freshman," Chen explained, "I wanted my schedule to be a little lighter so I could prioritize and explore different extracurricular activities I wanted to join, as opposed to cranking out concentration requirements."

When Learning Feels Alive

Despite the challenges of distraction and competing demands, students consistently highlight moments when classroom engagement truly clicks, often in settings that encourage active participation rather than passive listening.

For Yao, engagement is less about the topic itself and more about how the learning is structured. When students interact with one another and apply concepts in real time, abstract ideas become tangible, and the energy in the room rises. "It's more engaging than just being talked at," she said.

"A lot of my classes this semester are very lecture-heavy. In smaller classes, it feels like your contributions are more valued. I think adding more space for participation during the lecture would be helpful," Chen said.

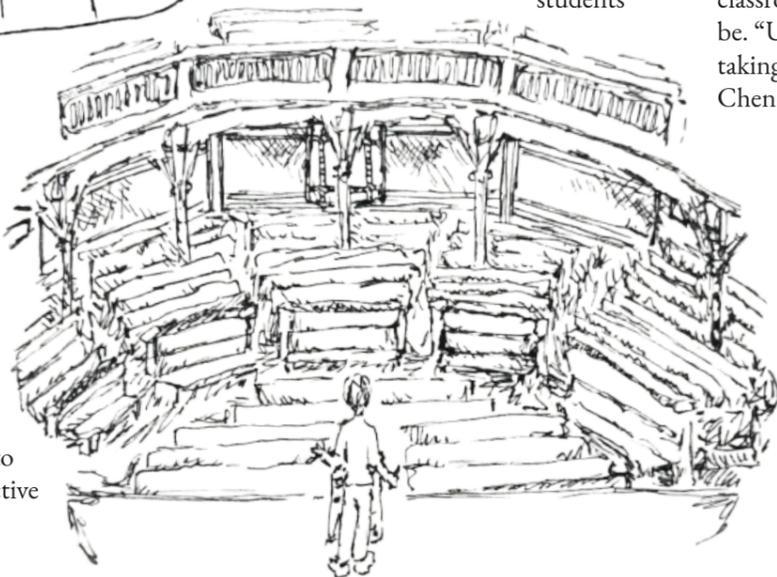
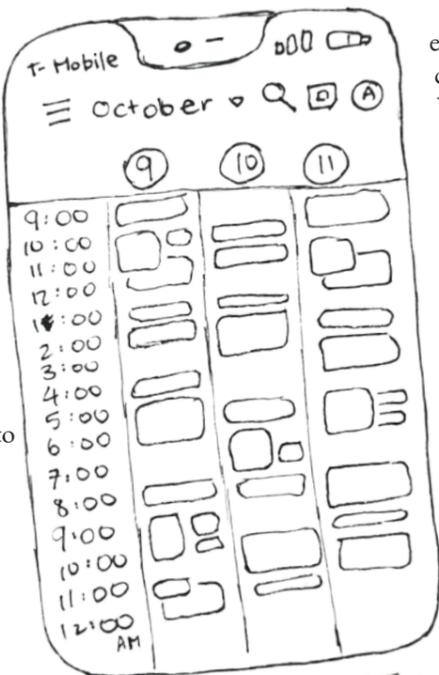
Her comments point to how engagement often depends on social dynamics and opportunities for dialogue. Chen and Yao's observations suggest that interaction, rather than format alone, plays a central role in sustaining attention. When classrooms facilitate collaboration and exchange, students are more likely to remain attentive and involved.

A Quiet Reckoning for Higher Education

Today, Harvard sits at a crossroads. Students raised amid digital immediacy are learning, and relearning, how to inhabit slower modes of thought, community, and focus. To stay true to the promise of a Harvard education, faculty and students alike must rediscover a shared contract of being and remaining present.

Efforts to address the recent upward trend in absence focus less on enforcement and more on fostering engagement. Students express a continued desire to learn, but note that participation feels most natural when classes encourage interaction and connection.

Harvard's challenge, then, is not simply to fill seats, but to renew a sense of presence—making the classroom a space where students feel it's worthwhile to be. "Ultimately we want to learn from the classes we are taking... It's important to be present in your learning," Chen said.



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GRAPHICS BY
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FORUM

Ponderings on Pace

How your walking speed points to your priorities.

BY FRANCES CONNORS '26

One of my closest friends recently experienced a Harvard student's worst nightmare: a mid-semester concussion. What shocked me more than her text sharing the news was *how* it happened: a walking accident. My dear friend was speed-walking to class when she collided with another student, leaving her encounter with a new head injury.

While this incident wasn't the exact catalyst that made me reconsider my walking speed, it reminded me of the dangers that this constant rushing poses to our well-being. Though I've long taken pride in my fast pace, this fall I've begun to reconsider the way I walk—and what it reveals about my broader approach to life.

This past summer, I developed something of a superiority complex about my stride. As I hurried past tourists in Times Square on the way to my internship, I relished the fact that I had important places to be, that the high value of my time warranted my brisk pace compared to people meandering from the Red Lobster to the M&M's Store.

This opportunity cost of my time sat at the heart of that mindset. As an Applied Math concentrator, one of my favorite courses at Harvard has been APMTH 121: "Introduction to Optimization: Models and Methods." The class taught me to build models to find a solution for any problem. Given a set of inputs—such as material costs, prices, or distances—and a few constraints, I could determine how to allocate resources to optimize output, whether that means maximizing profit or minimizing delivery time. The application areas were endless; we modeled everything from what products a business should sell, to where fire stations should be built, to what laser strength should be used in cancer treatments. Beyond equations and models, though, the class reshaped how I viewed the world: I could frame everything as an optimization problem, including life itself.

In that framework, my objective function or output became the maximization of life satisfaction, the sum of benefits I gained from what I did, subject to constraints like time and money. Optimization often works quite well on a micro-level; it's useful for planning out your day or how to divide your work time between tasks. But on the macro-level, this overquantifying impulse can fail to capture the soft stuff: joy, or human connection.

For a long time, I believed that optimizing my life primarily meant optimizing my time. We all have 24 hours in a day, so I wanted to make the most out of every second. Speed-walking seemed the perfect solution. Whatever event I was rushing to—whether class, a meeting, or a meal with friends—surely held more value than the commute. By minimizing walking time, I could increase time spent on more enjoyable or "important" things. Each quickened step brought me closer to my goals, and the rush could be translated into a feeling of excitement and ambition for what lay ahead. Those who walk fast are often described as "walking with purpose," an admirable title at a place like Harvard, which places particular value on hard work and having a defined meaning or passion.

But lately, I've started reconsidering the value of the commute itself—not just what it conveys.

A friend once told me that he rarely stopped to talk because I always seemed like I was in a rush: "I wouldn't want to hold you up," he said. Another person admitted they'd never approached me for the same reason—I just looked too busy. I realized that, in constantly running between campus commitments, I was sending the message that I didn't have time for anyone. And what could be a worse use of time than missing a chance to connect with people I care about?

Since then, I've made a conscious effort to give myself more time to get places, adopting a more leisurely pace. I've started stopping for real conversations instead of tossing a quick "Hi—sorry, I have to run!" And in doing so, I've rediscovered something that I didn't know I'd lost: joy in the in-between moments.

The other day, while walking down Linden Street, I noticed a new sophomore in my House across the street. Instead of waving and walking past, I purposely crossed over to say hello. We ended up chatting for a few minutes before going our separate

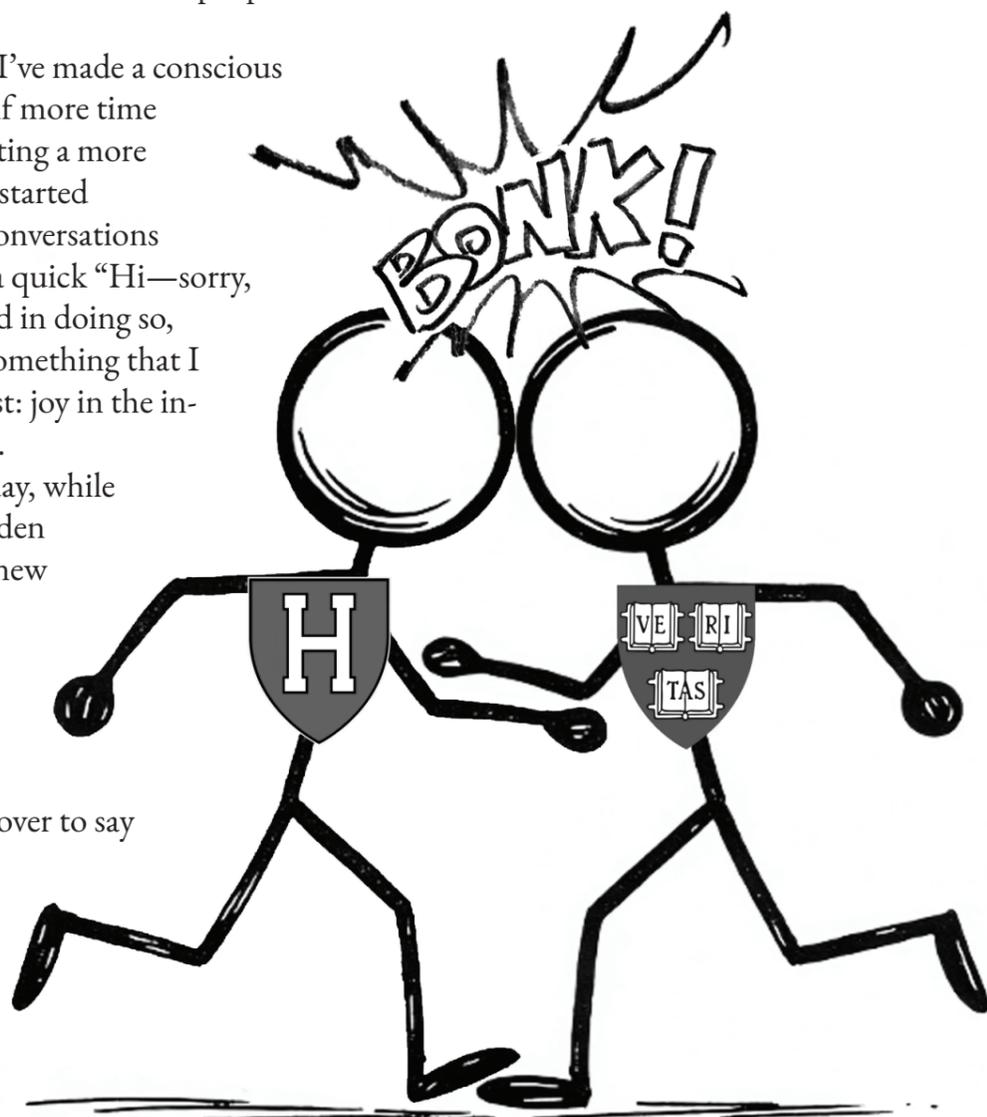
ways, and I left with a smile and a stronger love for the Eliot community.

Slowing down has helped me cherish Harvard and its people and take pride in the four years I've spent here. Every person I've met feels like a square in the patchwork quilt of my college experience. Every conversation, no matter how brief, reinforces the stitches that hold that quilt together. When I used to rush past people, I was unknowingly letting those threads fray, and now I've committed to patching them back up.

In life, it's good to have purpose and passion and all those things that make you feel like you should be rushing around to get to everything. It's exciting to be busy, but it's important to put your schedule in perspective. Leaving a work session three minutes early won't make or break an assignment, but it could be just the time you need to make a new friend on your walk.

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READERS WILL STOP TO SAY HI
WHEN THEY SEE HER WALKING!**

**GRAPHIC BY
AMELIE LIMA '27**



“I Think”

Linguistics show a lack of confidence in the classroom.

BY PAIGE CORNELIUS '28



think Confucius would critique Menzi's emphasis on rewards and punishments.”

“I think men have a higher social dominance orientation than women.”

“I think the limbic system and prefrontal cortex are in a tug of war.”

At Harvard, no class statement seems complete without an “*I think*.” It slips out unconsciously, often going unnoticed by both speaker and audience. But this preface is more than just two words. It's a verbal buffer between the student and the risks of participation.

Harvard students use “I think” as a softener, reflecting self-doubt and social pressure.

“I think” is a verbal hedge. It undermines the assertiveness of a statement, allowing students to contribute their ideas while leaving room for correction. It signals engagement without full accountability for interpretation. In a classroom where intellectual certainty is expected but arrogance is condemned, “I think” becomes a linguistic safety net.

Hedging is not unique to Harvard. It's a universal speech habit used to sound polite, express uncertainty, or soften claims. Phrases like “maybe” or “I guess” serve the same purpose: making statements less direct. Hedging can express humility or open-mindedness. It can demonstrate emotional intelligence and invite extensive conversation rather than appearing to be a final judgment.

However, hedging becomes problematic when it shifts from

consideration to reflex. It shapes not only how we speak but how we think. It blurs the line between humility and self-doubt. It can inadvertently breed distrust in ourselves and our ideas. Language meant to soften a claim can end up softening conviction itself.

So why do some of the brightest students in the world cushion their enriching ideas with uncertainty?

At Harvard, hedging is a tool in a classroom survival kit. In an environment where students are accustomed to being right, “I think” acts as emotional armor. Each comment in lecture, or even in section, feels like a test graded by peers, TAs, and professors alike. Fear of being labeled as arrogant or a “try-hard” on Sidechat makes hedging a way to sound modest while still contributing.

The result? A classroom full of students who may very well know the right answers but are too afraid to sound like they do. Lecture halls become choruses of self-conscious voices, eager to be heard, yet scared to speak with certainty. Harvard exhibits the paradox of praising intellectual risk but socially punishing students who sound “too confident.”

Past studies have found that women tend to hedge more than men, expressing hesitation where males project confidence. Robin Lakoff, an American linguist, introduced the concept of “women's language,” which reflects the idea that women speak with politeness and accommodation due to socialization.

Recent research, however, has complicated this 1975 gender-normative view. While the overall amount of hedging between genders may not differ as drastically anymore, the *purpose* still does. A UC Davis study found that sex-based variation in hedging is minimal for gender-neutral topics, like the weather. Instead, men tend to hedge when discussing “feminine” subjects, distancing themselves from topics they perceive as socially risky, and women do so to maintain empathy and connection.

This behavior likely stems from larger institutional hierarchies, which explains the diversity in how different groups use hedges.

The repercussions of living in a society that originally established white males as the dominant group show up in speech. International students, women, and minority groups subconsciously adhere to the hierarchy by trying to make their contributions to the discussion as agreeable as possible.

I have heard my own peers express discomfort with approaching a TA of a different gender for this very linguistic barrier. Ideas are shared in assorted ways, problems are explained with varying levels of sympathy, and questions are answered in differing tones.

This gender dynamic is exemplified through women's inability to be taken seriously in male-dominated fields. In a STEM classroom, it can be terrifying to take a stance while standing out from the majority. These experiences are what perpetuate the use of hedging.

For both men and women, however, hedging reflects broader societal expectations played out in the classroom. This linguistic restraint reveals a shared anxiety about perception. Culturally, we care about what people think of us. It creates a paradoxical loop, where in a space meant for intellectual curiosity and boldness, students learn to disguise their thoughts through hesitancy.

This phenomenon is likely exacerbated through the introduction of cancel culture, where words are easily misconstrued to fit a narrative. Speaking slightly out of place can lead to someone's social ostracism, spiraling into a lonely college experience. With such consequences, it seems inevitable that students hedge to keep their names out of group chats or social media posts.

The “I think” habit, accompanied by “I could be wrong” and “This might not be what you're looking for,” has become more than politeness. It mirrors the self-doubt bred by societal pressure and academic perfectionism.

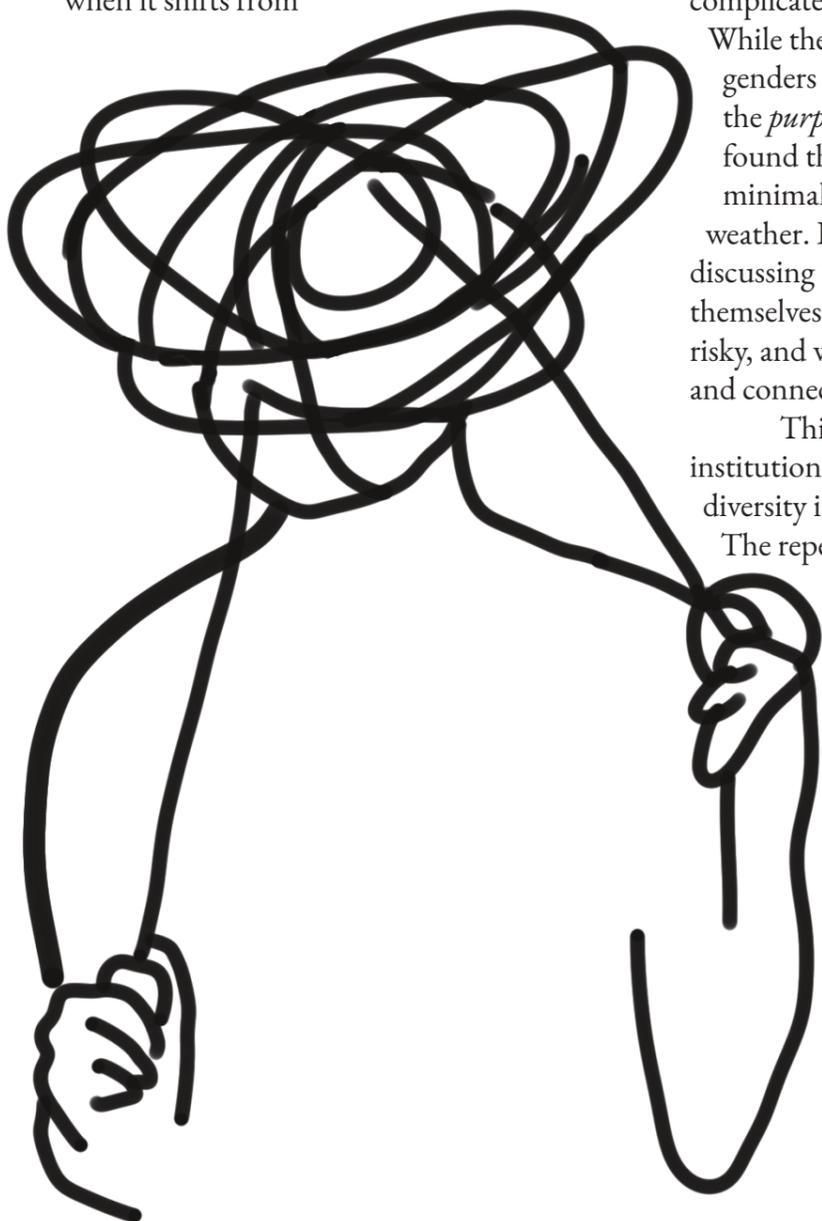
The consequence is a generation of brilliant thinkers afraid to sound like they know something. A University that prides itself on *Veritas* cannot thrive on verbal disclaimers.

Confidence must be reframed. Bold statements are not arrogant; they exhibit clarity. Professors can validate assertive participation and ensure that being wrong is not shameful, but necessary for growth and learning. Students, in turn, can challenge themselves to speak without softeners and hopefully find that they aren't viewed any differently. The goal is not to eliminate “I think” entirely, but to use it with intentionality.

From now on, “I think” needs to signal true thoughtfulness, not fear.

**PAIGE CORNELIUS '28
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PARTICIPATE IN LECTURE ONCE
BEFORE GRADUATION.**

**GRAPHIC BY
JOYE WINGARD '28**



Point: Against Mandatory Attendance

A discussion about the usefulness of mandatory class attendance.

BY TYLER DANG '28

The classroom has evolved throughout the years. Handwritten notes and chalkboards have slowly changed to Google Doc tabs and PowerPoint slides. Lengthy textbooks are now available online and in condensed formats. And technologies like AI allow students to rapidly consume information. With the add/drop period behind us, most students have already learned which of their lectures are worth attending and which can be skipped. To counter increasing absences, some larger courses incorporate attendance as part of a student's final grade.

Recently, the New York Times covered a supposed "problem" on campus: the rise of class-cutting. The author, Anemona Hartocollis '77, argued that a classroom environment hostile to minority opinions and rampant grade inflation has led to disengagement among students.

While discomfort in class discussions or grade inflation may play a role, mandatory attendance in large lectures ultimately does not benefit students. Instead, it restricts their ability to manage their own time, forcing them to abide by schedules that may not align with their needs or learning styles.

To understand why, it helps first to clarify the purpose of college. Although there is no universal definition, most institutions emphasize preparing students for their careers, building critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and encouraging intellectual exploration. In fact, a 2021 survey of 3,000 college graduates found that more than 80% believed their education helped them qualify for better jobs, gain essential skills, and advance professionally.

Some may argue that mandatory attendance mimics the structure of a workforce. However, college is not meant to replicate a 9-to-5 job; it's meant to teach students how to manage their time and responsibilities independently.

A 2020 study underscored the importance of perceived agency: people who *feel* in control of a situation, even if they choose not to act, become more risk-tolerant, patient, and future-oriented. Mandatory attendance removes this sense of agency by dictating how students must spend their time. College should allow students to design their own schedules and learn what works best for them. This process of self-understanding is critical to personal growth, something that rigid attendance actively hinders.

Beyond restricting personal development, mandatory lecture attendance limits students' ability to engage in other meaningful activities. With 42 Division I sports and 450 student organizations, there are countless opportunities for involvement outside the classroom. According to Harvard's Student Employment Office, over 80% of students also work part-time during their studies. Each of these activities, with varying levels of time commitment, alongside compulsory lecture blocks, can easily become overwhelming.

And why should students endure that stress when so many lectures are recorded and slides are available? A disciplined student can watch recordings, absorb key points, and engage with the material without being physically present.

Critics might argue that this method eliminates the discussion and debate that make lectures valuable. As Patton Oswalt's character in "22 Jump Street" quips, "The professor gets into a lively conversation with the student; friction creates fire, and that leads to lessons learned." Indeed, dialogue and debate are vital for intellectual engagement. Smaller seminars analyzing a text within a mindset or discussion-based courses naturally require students to be present to benefit, so required attendance is understandable. However, large lectures rarely provide that environment. They typically focus on distilling the facts, rather than fostering argument.

attendance requirements, was still thoroughly engaging and had students consistently interacting with presented material. Weekly discussion sections also ensured interaction while allowing students to choose times that suit their schedules. Because of this course's structure and Sandel's engaging lecture style—rather than the attendance requirement—students felt compelled to attend.

Finally, mandatory attendance restricts the possible areas of study that students can explore. With a large catalog of courses offered at the College, some of which are not offered every year, students must choose between fulfilling their concentration requirement or exploring a different field that interests them. Without mandatory attendance, students can take both courses provided they are up to the task. A class like Econ 10A: "Principles of Economics (Microeconomics)," which is offered asynchronously with recorded lectures, enables students to begin their economics journey and still take other courses.

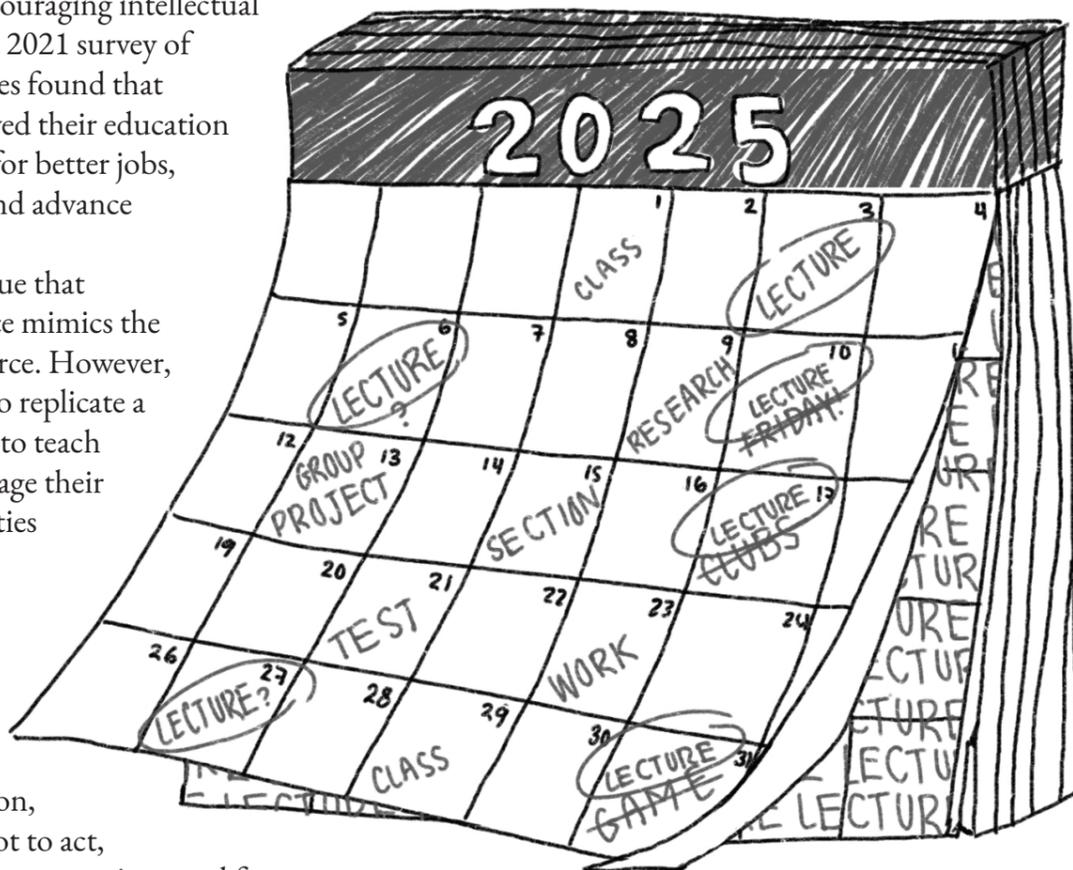
Of course, some guidance is necessary, especially for first-years adjusting from the regimented environment of high school. But mandatory attendance doesn't instill independence; it stunts it.

Well-intentioned as they may be, attendance requirements for large lectures do more harm than good. They undermine students' autonomy, limit their personal growth, and constrain their ability to explore the full range of college opportunities. If the purpose of higher education is to cultivate critical thinking, independence, and readiness for the real world, then students must be trusted to decide how they engage with their coursework.

Rather than relying on compulsory attendance to enforce engagement, instructors should focus on creating courses that students attend out of genuine interest—not by obligation. After all, true learning isn't about sitting in a seat, it's about showing up with intention and engaging deeply with the material.

**TYLER DANG '28
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MISSED ONE CLASS
THIS SEMESTER.**

**GRAPHIC BY
CAMERON BERNIER '29**



Even when a course does center on discussion, attendance should not be mandatory. The responsibility lies with instructors to make classes so compelling that students *want* to attend. Last fall, Michael Sandel's course Gen Ed 1200: "Justice," a 9:45 a.m., two-hour lecture, comparing different theories of social justice, despite having

Counterpoint: Defending Mandatory Attendance

A discussion about the usefulness of mandatory class attendance.

BY JULIA BOUCHUT '29

At 10:30 a.m. last Wednesday, I turned to my friend and noticed that nearly half the usual students were missing from our linguistics lecture.

"Where did everyone go?" I asked. As I later learned, most had gone home for the long weekend—it was, after all, 'no big deal' to skip an optional-attendance class.

Since starting college, my friends understandably have skipped some of their lectures, arguing that professors spend too much time posing questions to the class and that it's more efficient to sleep in and catch up later—at double speed. By the end of high school, I was used to this phenomenon—my friends mysteriously plagued with a chronic case of "senioritis." Nonetheless, I was surprised to see it continue in my first year in college. In fairness, we all worked hard in high school, and many view college as the reward for four grueling years. Still, we are here to learn—and it's surprising that the University maintains such a lenient attendance policy.

This leniency undermines Harvard's stated mission to educate "the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society...beginning in the classroom with exposure to new ideas." Optional attendance turns lectures into a means to a grade, rather than a space to cultivate intellectual curiosity. While it is easy to assume we already know what interests us, skipping class denies us the opportunity for genuine exploration. The University should implement a form of mandatory attendance, or some abridged version of one. Optional attendance encourages minimum effort, stifles enthusiasm for learning, and removes critical structure from students' daily lives.

If a student is capable of studying alone, they might argue there's no tangible benefit to attending class. These students are wrong. Here at Harvard, we are taught by experts in their fields, leaders of groundbreaking research—fifty-two Nobel laureates among our former and current faculty and countless other distinguished scholars. Who are we, then, to assume we know better than professors do on how their courses should be taught? By only attending lectures when grades depend on it, we reject what these experts have deemed essential and most interesting for us to know.

We also close ourselves off to subjects we might have loved. College exists to expose us to the unexpected, to disciplines and ideas we never even knew existed. When we

reduce learning to completing p-sets and cramming for tests, we set ourselves up for failure. We trade depth for efficiency, curiosity for compliance.

For example, a couple of weeks ago, I opted not to attend my linguistics lecture, prioritizing sleep after a late night of working on a p-set. When I was reviewing the slides and notes from a friend, I realized that the lecture covered a linguist I had extensively researched in high school. I immediately regretted missing the opportunity to learn about him from a Harvard professor and not being able to engage with the rest of the class on a subject I was so passionate about. Even though this lecture was unrecorded, had I had the opportunity to watch it back, my engagement would still be limited. I wouldn't be able to raise my hand, and instead of sitting in the lecture hall forced to be present, I would treat the video more as a chore to quickly complete. I had assumed I knew what was best for me, and in doing so, I was confronted with what I had missed only after it was too late.

Harvard has a responsibility to give students a full liberal arts education, one that demands active engagement, not passive consumption. With recorded lectures, it's easy to fall behind, bingeing several in one night without truly absorbing the material. And we all know that test performance rarely reflects mastery; students memorize for hours only to forget the material the second the exam is over. Harvard should want students to learn lessons from their courses beyond the best test-taking strategies. They should process and employ key takeaways outside the classroom. While p-sets might attempt to measure understanding, consistent presence in lecture is what ensures true learning.

Some argue that college is primarily a pre-professional endeavor, and that grades alone should not matter. But that's not the purpose of a liberal arts education. Harvard requires General Education and distributional courses not to restrict students, but to ensure a comprehensive intellectual experience. If the University believes that STEM students should study ethics and humanities students quantitative reasoning, the same logic applies to attendance. To experience the liberal arts fully, students must actually show up.

There are instances when students should not show up to a lecture, such as due to illness and mental health issues. Still, a more relaxed policy

exacerbates problems when students cannot come; in smaller seminar-style classes, when a student is unable to attend for these reasons, the student works with a TF or professor to make up the material they missed. While it is important for students to show up to a seminar in particular since a smaller class impacts learning for all members, their mandatory attendance importantly keeps students accountable. With optional attendance, we make reaching out less accessible and don't allow students to fall back on the support structures that Harvard prides itself on.

The University already gives students ample flexibility. Of the 32 courses required for graduation, only about 12 are core requirements, allowing wide freedom in scheduling. While students understandably want to prioritize sleep, homework, or clubs, the added structure of mandatory attendance is a net positive. Most lectures meet only twice a week for about an hour and fifteen minutes and one discussion section. The time "saved" by skipping is negligible compared to the loss in engagement. Regular attendance discourages the mindset of 'just this once,' a habit that easily slips into indifference. Students should absolutely manage their own schedules, but also learn to plan around fixed commitments.

This is not to say balancing time is easy. I've struggled too—in high school and at Harvard—to juggle academics, social life, and extracurriculars. I'm not perfect with my time, but if I had to attend every lecture, I'd spend less of it on TikTok and other distractions that add little value to my day. If Harvard makes attendance mandatory, the only thing we'll all lose is the time we already waste. And while I'm sure the students who skipped class last Wednesday appreciated the extra day home, they missed out on an amazing lecture about the linguistic processes behind word memorization.

JULIA BOUCHUT '29 (JULIA_BOUCHUT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) EMBRACES MANDATORY ATTENDANCE, THOUGH SHE APPRECIATES THE OCCASIONAL SLEEPING IN.

GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29



Midterms Misery

If grade inflation is so rampant on Harvard's campus, why do we spend so much time agonizing over midterms?

BY EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29

At Harvard, midterm season sees students celebrating a 48% because it's above the class average. Yes, Stat 110, I'm looking at you. Every semester, these midterm scores bring about an onslaught of headlines from news outlets that haven't written about Gen Z's "academic decline" in a while. It's nothing new. But the question remains: is there any real merit to these concerns?

When midterms roll around, STEM students in particular appear to suffer most. Physics 16, Math 55, Chem 30, LS 50, and seemingly all other science- or math-related courses, hand out despair-inducing tests that few escape from unscathed. Those who do survive make sure to tell the tale, recounting their experiences on Sidechat or lamenting to anyone who will listen.

These outwardly abysmal midterm scores raise some eyebrows: most students are failing at face value, and yet 60% of grades given are still A's, according to Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh. Doesn't that contradict everything we're told about grade inflation? Or, perhaps more importantly, what are grades actually supposed to reflect? Harvard's intensive midterm culture reveals that the real issue isn't grade inflation; it's how we misunderstand the purpose of grading.

If transcript grades are meant to measure the percentage of material a student understands, then yes—grade inflation must be running wild. But that definition is outdated. Although the phrase "A for effort" usually sounds condescending, it carries a nugget of truth.

In fall 2024, Stat 110's course evaluation report stated that students spent an average of 12.07 hours per week on coursework outside of class, Math 55 students reported over 20 hours per week in fall 2024, and in spring 2025, LS 50B students averaged 13.5 hours. These aren't outliers—spending hours per day on these classes is the norm.

This isn't to say that STEM classes are more difficult than humanities or social sciences. Where STEM has problem sets, other disciplines have readings and papers, just as time-consuming. But we don't hear widespread complaints about English or Government midterms; that misery belongs to the math and science fanatics. So, what is it about STEM that makes midterm season so brutal?

There's an atmosphere of competition in these courses that's less present elsewhere. The STEM culture of publishing the minimum, mean, and maximum scores further fuels the race to be the "best" in the class. There's a burning sense of shame that comes with underperforming—checking your exam score in the privacy of your own dorm, not knowing whether to laugh or cry when you see a score well under a failing grade, only to see a Canvas announcement stating that you have the lowest grade. It's difficult to keep such private information when the statistics are made so publicly available.

Another reason for this competitiveness may lie in the hierarchical culture of STEM courses. Some are explicitly harder than others—Physics 16, for instance, is notoriously difficult, so only the bold enroll. Other departments rarely rank courses so visibly, aside from the

occasional Econ or Gov course. That might reflect Harvard's emphasis on STEM, but that dynamic also derives from the competitive design of STEM assessments themselves.

To blame grade inflation is to miss the point. Grades don't define our value; our work and persistence do. Even if every student were guaranteed an A, most would still strive for excellence. That drive is part of who we are as Harvard students, and it's a major reason many get admitted in the first place. Of course, effort alone doesn't guarantee understanding, but it's a truer marker of learning than a single test score.

Much of Harvard's unique atmosphere revolves around the need to be the best, even when grades don't demand it. This is shown in the wholly voluntary extracurricular activities that students immerse themselves in, which do not rely on grading to ensure participant excellence. While this intensity, both within and outside of the classroom, can strain students, it's also where many thrive.

This is where the label of "grade inflation" falls flat. Merriam-Webster defines grade inflation as "the assigning of grades higher than previously assigned for given levels of achievement." Critics fixate on Harvard specifically because of the perceived value that the institution's education carries; grade inflation on campus comes with the concern that attending an Ivy League institution will eventually become meaningless.

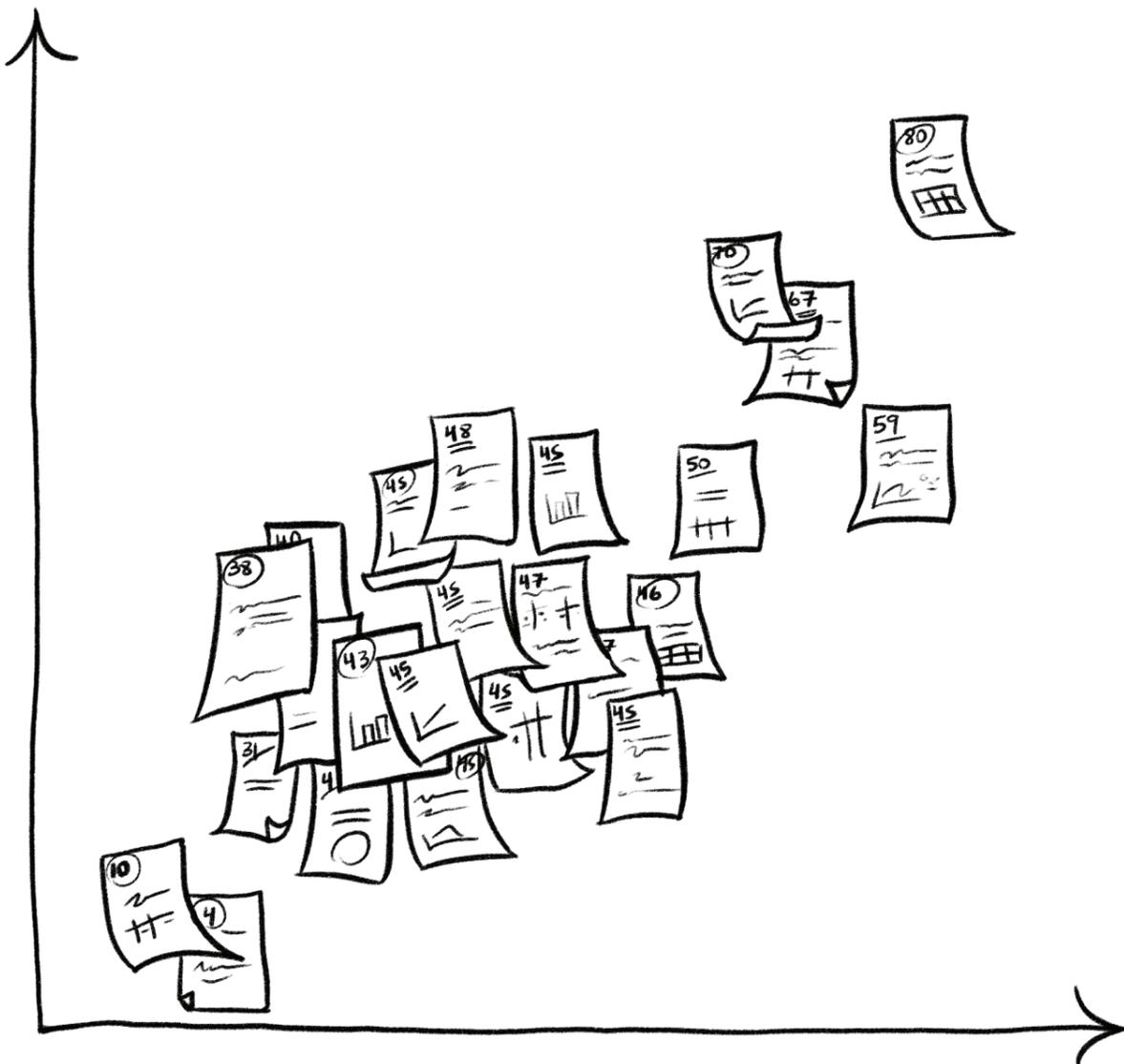
So, when midterm season rolls around, students work. They study, collaborate, and try to prove something, whether that be to themselves or their peers. They walk into each exam hoping that their hours of effort pay off. Even if they get a 48% on the Stat 110 midterm, they know they've done the best they could.

That is what a student's grades should reflect at the end of a course.

Grades are just numbers. They don't, and can't, define anyone, even when we may want them to. That's why the so-called "grade inflation crisis" is overblown. Professors aren't handing out A's to avoid bad course evaluations—they're acknowledging the growth and effort students demonstrate over the semester. At the end of the day, learning is about making mistakes and growing from them, and students thrive wherever they are allowed room to do so, especially within courses where midterms form an overwhelming share of a student's grade. Maybe "grade inflation" just captures the true spirit of learning: education free from fear.

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IS A SCARED HUMANITIES
MAJOR WHO WANTS TO HURRY
UP AND FINISH HER MATH
REQUIREMENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY
CHAU NGUYEN '29**



We Do Not Need to Generate a New Reality

As OpenAI's Sora redefines what's "real," society must reckon with the consequences of its creations.

BY PHILIPPOS ALEBACHEW '29

Michael Jackson moonwalking away after pilfering your KFC order. SpongeBob SquarePants getting pulled over by highway patrol. Peter Griffin duking it out with anime characters.

These absurd scenarios, once confined to dreams or fanfiction, can now be conjured in seconds through OpenAI's new video-generation model, Sora 2. All it takes is a few keystrokes and enough electricity to keep a microwave running for an hour. With growing reliance on input-output algorithms to imagine new worlds full of exciting possibilities, tasks formerly handed off to writers and artists, the question arises: what broader implications will this technology have on creative fields?

Generative AI video is stripping away the creativity that makes us human. If we keep chasing artificial worlds, we risk losing touch with the beautiful one that we already inhabit.

Gone are the days of laughing at a poorly rendered Will Smith scarfing down spaghetti. In just two short years, generative video technology has evolved from blurry, low-frame rate oddities to photorealistic clips with synchronized sound that are nearly indiscernible from reality. Ever since Modelscope's text2video debut in 2023, the aptly named "Will Smith Eating Spaghetti Test" has become the unofficial benchmark for measuring progress in AI video.

OpenAI now presents Sora 2 as almost a TikTok for synthetic media. With an invitation code, users can swipe through millions of AI-generated clips or create their own, remixing and reinterpreting prompts from others. It's a feed custom-tailored to human curiosity and boredom alike.

But the consequences aren't confined to entertainment. During the 2024 election cycle, Russian-linked networks used AI to flood social media with fabricated videos targeting Democratic candidate Kamala Harris's campaign. Intelligence reports later tied the operation to John Mark Dougan—a former U.S. deputy sheriff working with Russian military intelligence—whose fake news sites spread deepfakes of Harris and other Democrats to millions of viewers. One video falsely showed former President Barack Obama suggesting Democrats ordered the assassination attempt on President Donald Trump; another smeared Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, the Democratic vice-presidential nominee. While deepfakes and other AI tools may not have played a significant part in swaying the results of this past election, the meteoric growth of AI in the past year—both in users and generative capabilities—practically guarantees the technology will embed itself come 2028.

Beyond these political horrors lies an equally unsettling artistic dilemma. Critics have coined a fitting term for this flood of machine-made media: AI slop, a slurry of haphazardly thrown-together concoctions of aesthetic noise, stitched together from the creative labor of others. Hollywood executives are already jumping aboard. OpenAI's upcoming studio project "Criterz" is reportedly being billed as the first fully generative animated feature—a "revolutionary" new way to make animated films while sidestepping pesky costs like paying animators. The story will reportedly follow forest creatures who go on an adventure after their village is disrupted by a stranger, a plot brimming with irony given how prompt-generated art is currently upsetting creative industries.

If completed, it would set a disastrous precedent. Once Hollywood embraces synthetic creativity, every other corner of media will follow

suit. A shift like this would put the employment for the over 1.2 million people already working in the performing and creative arts fields in this country at risk. AI art becoming the standard would further pose broader threats to human expression as a principle, for generations to come.

When creation loses effort, it stops feeling human. Art isn't just output—it's how we make meaning out of existence, how we wrestle with the absurdity of being alive and leave something behind that says "*I was here.*" If we rely on AI to do that instantly, without struggle or soul, imagination, as defined by hundreds of thousands of years of human history, will cease to exist.

The more decisions we hand over to algorithms, the less we seem to trust ourselves to choose. Reclaiming that sense of human choice, deciding what should be made, not just what can be, might be the only way to stop this from becoming a system that builds itself faster than we can understand it. Before we perfect image generation down to the last pixel or teach algorithms to mimic emotion, we should be asking what kind of world we're actually building in the process.

Of course, I understand the monetary incentive. A public-facing video model has an enormous potential market—it's no coincidence that OpenAI became the most valuable private company just days after Sora 2's launch.

And to be clear, I'm not anti-AI. What I protest is how tech leaders and governments have come to view it: a weapon in a new technological arms race. The United States and China treat artificial intelligence like the atomic bomb of the twenty-first century, a means of global dominance. That's why there are so few meaningful regulations, and why the greatest resources are poured into the most addictive, profitable models.

However, when it's regulated, developed cooperatively between nations, and used to lift human burdens—whether in hard labor, economic modeling, or medical diagnostics—it can be beautiful. It could build a world where our needs are met and our time is freed for creating, writing, exploring, *living* itself. That's the dream.

But it's hard to stay optimistic when the people steering this technological epoch seem driven more by profit than progress. We hold in our hands a tool powerful enough to reshape civilization, yet it's being wielded to only generate engagement. It's strange to think that something capable of freeing humanity might be the very thing that enslaves it—to convenience, to passivity, to endless content.

This leap isn't the same as the shift from brush to stylus or pen to keyboard. It's creating something out of nothing, out of words instead of work.

It reflects the gluttonous appendage of human nature that compels us to constantly attempt to live better than we need, despite what we have (see: every billionaire ever). Instantaneous,

synthetic art erases the joy of struggle, the trial and error that gives art its soul. I'll always love

the human-made games, films, and stories born from imagination, but I don't want to live in a "Ready Player One" world where the only escape from reality is scrolling through endless, empty simulations.

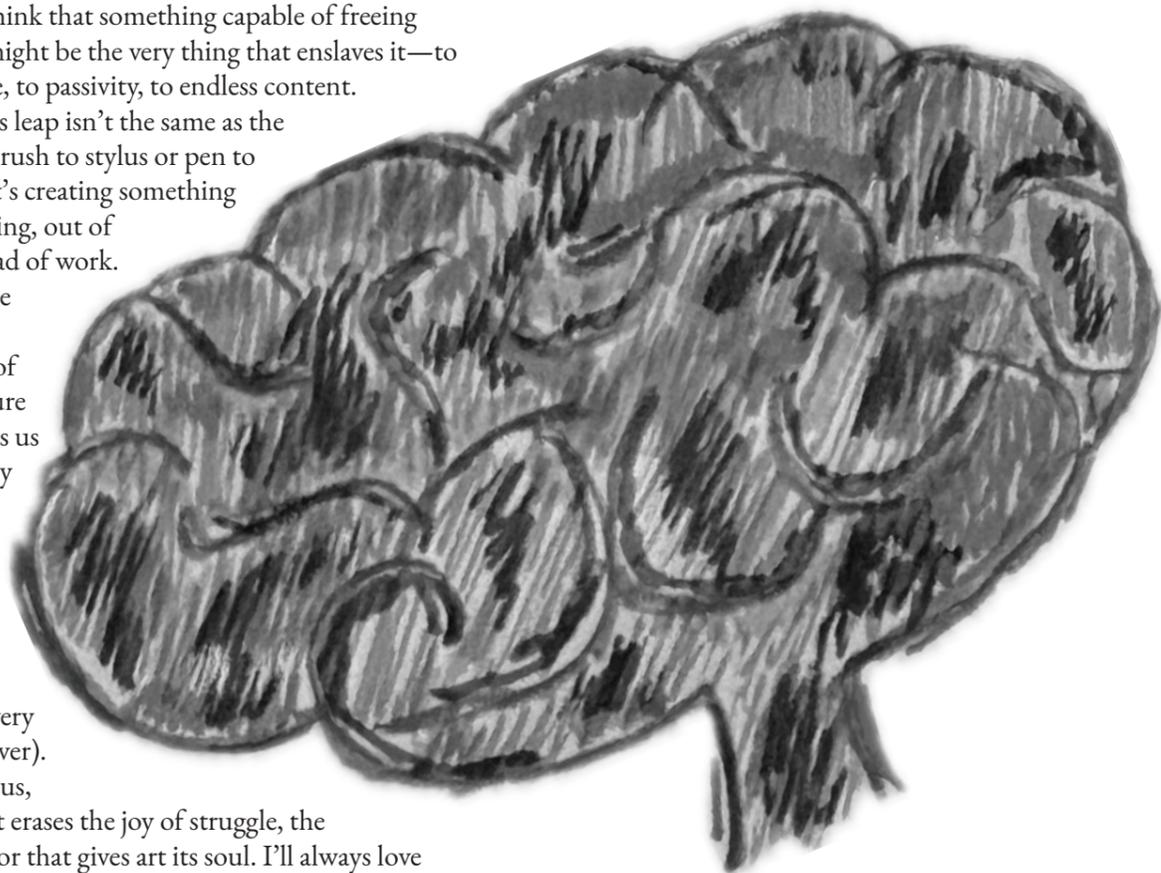
These generations are only as good as their data. If we chase the quick buck now, we risk eroding creativity altogether. When AI saturates the mainstream, there will be no space left for human projects to grow. Once people tire of what's already been generated, nothing new will follow—just an endless cycle of recycled ideas, a mirror reflecting itself into static.

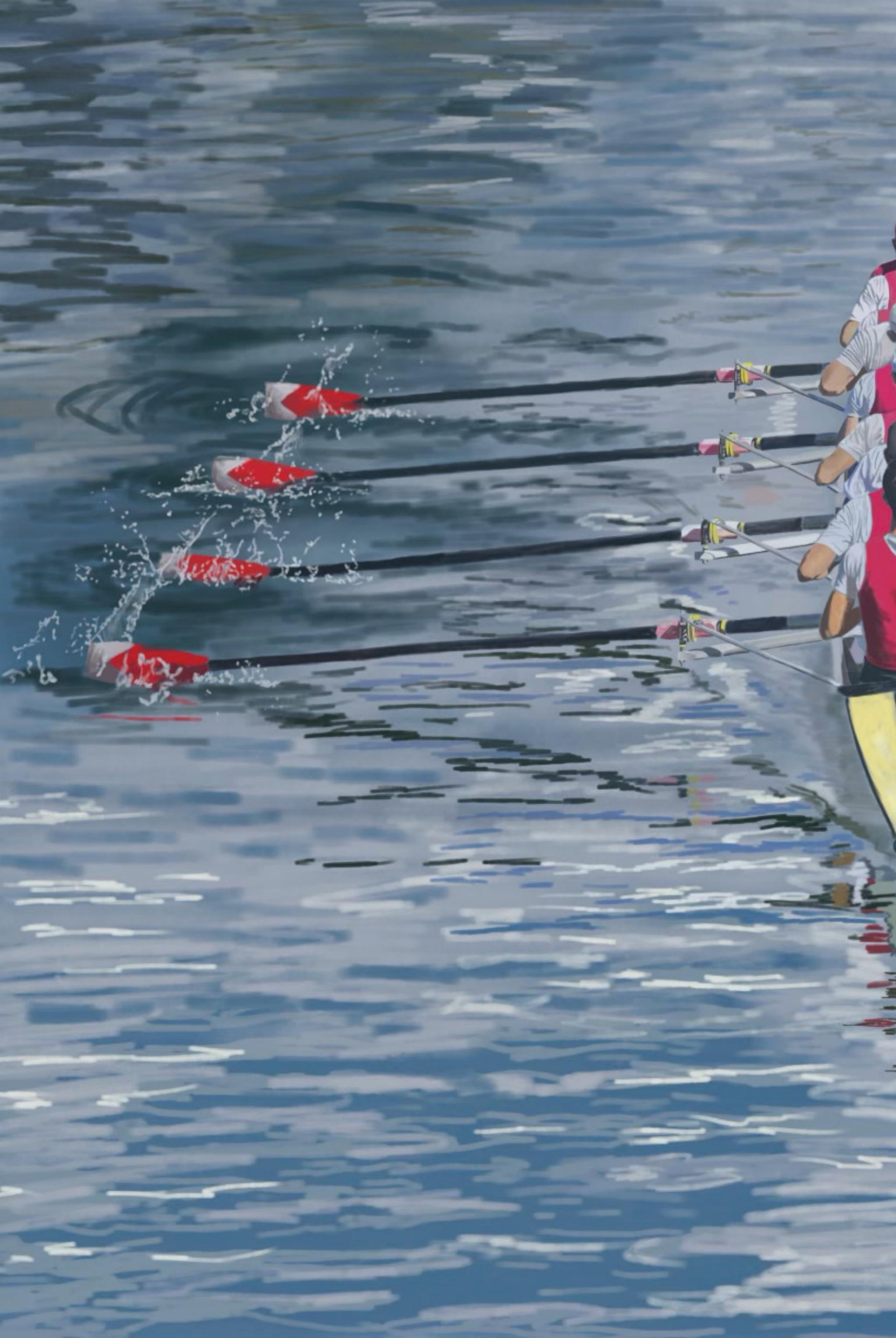
I am an optimist by nature. My roommate might even tell you that I live in a land of sunshine and rainbows. Maybe that's why I still believe in AI's potential to shoulder burdens, plan smarter economies, and free us to live more fully. But optimism has limits. It's hard to stay bright-eyed when the same tools that could end poverty are used to spread misinformation and churn out lifeless content.

Still, I don't think we need to invent new worlds to feel wonder. This messy, imperfect reality we share can be enough, if we choose to make it so. We don't need machines to manufacture awe when we're already surrounded by it. You don't need to generate a girlfriend; go outside and ask someone out. You don't need to simulate adventure; take a train somewhere you've never been. You don't need AI to create meaning when so much of it is still within reach. The things we try to generate are often the very things we could live, if we only remembered how. Staying in touch with the beauty of this world is harder than typing a prompt—but it's also the only thing that still makes us human.

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WANTS TO GO TO AN ART
MUSEUM NOW.**

**GRAPHIC BY
KATHARINE WEINER '29**







Thoughts from New Quincy: Two-Headed Boy

Over the sea.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

The beach stretches endlessly into the dark. It's the early season, still too cold to go in the water. I can see boats with their lights on far in the distance. I scan across the water's edge, catching glimpses of buoys bobbing up and down.

The air pulls tight against my skin, cold enough that every exhale feels counted.

The horizon has folded in on itself; the sky and the water have agreed to blur. The only distinction left is movement—the slow collapse of waves, breathing in a rhythm I can't follow.

I come here to clear my head, to feel my thoughts fall into step with the waves. I walk the line where the tide reaches and retreats, almost letting it catch my shoes. Every few steps, the sand gives way and I sink half an inch, then rise again. My legs remember this path before I do. The rhythm feels like something to hold onto, even if it doesn't lead anywhere.

I keep walking anyway, afraid of what the quiet might say if I stopped.

Far down the shore, an empty lifeguard chair glows white in the moonlight. A flag hangs from it, stiff with salt, edges hardened by days of wind. I think of the people who used to sit there—how they watched the waves for signs of life, or loss, or something that might break the surface. The wind presses against my mouth until I can taste the sea.

The water keeps moving, indifferent—as if it never promised to remember anyone at all.

The waves come in unevenly. They've forgotten their own pattern. One reaches farther than the rest, erasing half my footprints before retreating, leaving the job unfinished.

The air smells like iron and brine. When the wind changes, it brings something sweeter—decaying kelp, the ghost of sunscreen, the warmth of people who are no longer here. I close my eyes and for a second, I am fourteen again—still waiting for summer to begin. The illusion feels merciful. I let it hold me longer than it should.

I stop near the rocks where the sand turns rough. Shells crack under my feet, tiny breakings that barely register. The tide slides between the stones and pulls back, leaving bubbles that shine like eyes. I look at them until they burst.

The air hangs close, heavy with salt and static. I think back to my room—shut windows, stale light, a bed too neatly

made. Out here, the world shifts just enough to convince me I haven't stopped moving.

A breeze scatters the moon's reflection. For a moment, it looks like the sky is breaking apart, and I feel the familiar panic—the sense that I'm missing something irreversible, that I should have done more when everything still felt infinite.

When I was younger, I believed that time built toward something—that all the waiting and wanting would one day make sense. But standing here, I can't find the thread. Everything is motion now, an endless undoing. The waves don't move



forward or back; they just repeat, until even the shoreline can't tell the difference.

A lone gull passes overhead, its dry cry slicing through the silence. It sounds like a door closing far away. I glance up too late to see it. It has escaped into the darkness, leaving only its echo behind.

I kneel and touch the water. It's warmer than I expected. My fingers come away shining. For a moment, I think about how this same water has touched other people, other nights, other versions of me—and somehow, it's all still one thing.

I know I'll leave soon. I always do. But for now, the beach feels like a room without walls—a place where the world can see me, and I can almost bear to look back. It feels like forgiveness, though I couldn't say for what.

The waves return, closer this time, washing away the mark where I sat. The ocean smooths itself over. The water doesn't stay with me.

...

A month later, heat has learned to linger. The day is almost over, the sky already tilting toward gold. From the balcony, the water looks close enough to touch.

I slide the door open until the latch gives up its voice. The handle is warm from the day, and the metal railing still holds heat, as if the afternoon got trapped there and never left. The air is syrupy, slow. When I touch the rail, my skin sticks for a second before letting go.

Across the narrow gap between houses, porch lights burn through the haze. One hums like it's thinking. Another flickers in time with a TV somewhere behind it—shapes of color I can't make out. The air ripples between the slabs of wood, bending the light until it wavers.

Somewhere down the street, a grill pops. A man laughs. The sound fades as it travels. It's summer laughter—full of possession. The kind that fills a night without meaning to. For a moment, I almost join in.

The sky above the roofs is still bleeding light. The ocean flashes between gaps in the houses—a sliver of brightness. The air smells like something once alive, the kind of sweetness that pretends it isn't fading. I breathe it all in.

I rest my arms on the railing. Sweat beads along them, catching the glow from the porch light and turning it to static. Somewhere above, a mosquito finds my wrist and doesn't hesitate to bite. I brush it away too late, the skin already rising around the mark.

For a long time, I stand there. The world ticks its small routines: the fridge cycling on, the AC clicking, a car engine rolling down the street like a distant wave. It should feel alive. Instead, it feels practiced—even the air has learned to rehearse its stillness.

I keep realizing how easily repetition starts to feel like peace.

When the silence finally shifts, it's

small but unmistakable: a thinning of sound, the air holding its breath.

Then they appear—shadows cutting clean lines through the sky, wings beating hard enough to move the temperature. The summer birds. Not flying away yet, just tracing the coastline. I always forget how heavy they sound, how unromantic. It's not grace—it's effort, wings beating like breath run out. The sound is all strain and distance, movement that barely hides their exhaustion.

I tilt my head back until the sky starts to blur. For a moment, I imagine following them—not north, not south, just somewhere else. But the thought evaporates before I can finish it.

Everyone else's house receives the moment without interest. A screen door opens and closes. A windchime rings once, then doesn't bother again. The moth that's been beating against my neighbor's light finally stops trying.

When the noise fades, the air still holds the outline of their passing. My hands return to the railing. It's cooler now, almost kind.

I look around and start counting what's still moving: a drip from the gutter, the soft motor of a fan, the low tide rearranging itself below the sound of the houses. Then what's still: my breath, the railing, the outline of the sun against the window's reflection. I can't tell which list I belong to. Some days, I worry I've become scenery in my own life.

I think about how every summer day feels like it's teaching me to hold still a little longer.

Inside, I hear the clatter of my friends downstairs. I trace the railing's warmth with my thumb, leaving a faint print that fades before I pull away. The metal forgets faster than I do. I envy it.

I close the door softly, but the sound still startles me. In the glass, my reflection looks blurred, like something trying to remember its shape.

Outside, the moth starts up again, wings brushing against the light.

...

When I return, the light feels wrong—brighter, but colder. The beach looks smaller.

The tide has dragged the shoreline back a few feet, carving ledges into the sand where the water used to rest.

The air smells sharper—salt without sweetness. A storm must have passed recently; the dunes are bruised with reeds, driftwood, and bits of shell that won't shine no matter how the light tries.

I walk the same stretch I always do, but it feels borrowed now. Each footprint fills immediately, water finding any shape willing to hold it. Maybe that's all I am—something held for a moment. The thought should scare me, but instead it steadies me.

The horizon is pale, washed out like a photograph that's been looked at too many times. I can't remember if it always felt this far away.

Someone's taken the flag down from the lifeguard stand. I touch the wood. It's damp, colder than it should be. There's still a shape on the seat—an outline, or maybe residue.

The waves arrive heavier now, but are already falling apart. They collapse early, like they've begun to doubt



themselves. Beneath them, I can hear pebbles tumbling, the sand resettling—the quiet sound of things undoing themselves.

When I close my eyes, I still see the birds from that afternoon—their black bodies carving the sky into pieces. The noise they made is gone, but the pattern lingers somewhere just out of reach. I wonder if they ever think about where they've been, or if instinct frees them from reflection. I wonder what it would feel like to leave without ever imagining a return.

The wind sharpens. I pull my jacket tighter, but the cold finds the gaps anyway. The sand keeps shifting under my feet, erasing what it touches, rewriting what it misses.

Across the beach, a few children run close to the waterline, their laughter high and bright. It carries farther than I expect, and I'm surprised I can even hear them. For a second, I think they're calling to me, but they aren't. Their voices break apart in the wind. Maybe that's what time really is—

the distance between a sound and the moment it stops belonging to you. I test the air, half expecting my own name to echo back and prove I'm still part of it.

I keep walking. The sand squeaks under my shoes, a tired sound, like friction pretending to be progress. The sky opens at the horizon; the light returns for a breath, silver and thin—the color of something you'd wish on but not expect to get back. It flickers across the surface of the water and vanishes.

I kneel and press my hands into the sand. It's cold and coarse, damp enough to shape but too loose to hold. The next wave creeps forward and touches my ankles. I let it. The cold sharpens everything.

Above the water, the wind changes, carrying the faint scent of rain. The air feels hollow, as if the season itself is exhaling. I wonder when summer ended—or if it ever really does, only fading slowly enough to make you

believe it's still there.

When I stand, the horizon is gone again, folded into shades of gray. The sea has softened the edges of my footprints, leaving only faint shadows of where I stood.

I turn toward the dunes. The

wind presses at my back. It could be guidance, or it could just be the world reminding me I'm still moving.

For a moment, I can't tell if that's proof of staying or of leaving.

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**GRAPHICS BY CALEB BOYCE
'29**

The Charles Knows Too Much

A love letter to my favorite overthinking spot.

BY KAYLA LE '28

Late at night, I get the urge to ponder. It's like my version of the munchies, but rather than drug-induced, it's born from a degree of sobriety that's almost painful. Instead of my mouth watering for a \$2 smashburger or a slice from Joe's Pizza, I crave meaning—hot, fresh, and preferably delivered in under 30 minutes. It's just as greasy and just as likely to fill me with regret the next morning, anyway. So, I do what any self-respecting overthinker would: I walk to Weeks Bridge.

Bridges, I think, attract ponderers. They invite drama. Just as there are different types of drunks, I've deduced that there are different types of ponderers. Romantic ponderers overanalyze the duration of eye contact to the millisecond. Existential ponderers question why they bother keeping the receipt from CVS. Sentimental ponderers yearn for the same euphoria of a moment that seemed unimportant at the time, the type of joy that refuses to repeat itself.

I've been each at least once. Sometimes all three on the same night.

It's odd how I need scenery to validate my introspection—that I can't simply stop to think anywhere. In the chaotic pace of campus life, pausing isn't just counterproductive; it can be fatal. Gazing over the side of Weeks Bridge grants me the rare permission to be so present that I can share with someone a conversation or moment that the universe decreed to stay private. The wind carries sound away, and the water seems to cleanse my soul. The only ones to hear my inner ruminations are the Charles and the athletes gliding past me on their scooters.

I feel both deeply known and anonymous—grounded in the world and unseen within it.

German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, once wrote that a bridge doesn't just connect two sides of a river; rather, it "gathers" the world and becomes a place itself. Maybe that's why I keep returning. Weeks Bridge doesn't just lead me somewhere. It's where I stop "becoming" for a moment. It's where I'm reminded that life's most formative moments don't happen in a rush, but instead during the pauses between.

Weeks Bridge was built to extend steam tunnels, its hollowed interior just large enough to carry pipes across the water, and occasionally a handyman. Its purpose was invisible. The bridge's meaning wasn't in its design, but in what slowly gathered around it. The people who stopped, stayed, and looked out over the Charles are what turned the bridge from a place of function to a place of pause. That's what I love about it.

To me, the other bridges get people somewhere. Weeks let them stop.

My first week of college, I stopped at the bridge for a Mid-Autumn celebration where I would meet the people who would



become my roommates. Over one-eighth of a mooncake and a half-cup of Calpico, we found that we shared the same affinity for "your mom" jokes and took a series of disposable photos where, miraculously, all three of us but Audrey dodged the mid-blink curse. Maybe Heidegger was onto something when he said that the bridge gathers. It gathered us, even if not photogenically.

Then, in January, I didn't just come back to an entropic work-life balance. I returned to blankets of white. Each step in the snow sank deep. Dislodging my feet from shoe-shaped pits felt like fighting my own inertia—the quiet fear of being left behind as everyone forged ahead, finding their place and purpose.

There were days when I didn't want to lift my foot out of the snow, not out of laziness but because I wasn't sure which way was forward. Snow isn't contiguous like ice. It doesn't hold the same way. It crumbles under pressure, glides with the wind, and doesn't resist its own undoing. Standing

on Weeks Bridge, I felt like the stonework beneath understood, quietly, with ice below and snow above—that stability and change could coexist.

Do I continue seeking what I love, or commit to what I'm mildly good at and call that fulfillment?

Is it truly enough to be pleasant to be around, or should I at least have a niche talent like juggling?

Do I actually like chemistry, or am I just in too deep to admit I've been seduced by the hexagons?

Maybe it was just easier to embrace the frostbite and let Earth hold me in place.

One night, I found myself back at the bridge again. I must have looked especially broody because a stranger asked if I was okay. I felt, for the first time in a while, the will to take a step out of the snow. After hearing my anxieties, he grinned and proposed a snowball fight. It was a small thing, but once again, the bridge gathered something warm out of the cold.

No one but us, the wind, the ice—just enough to remind me that slowing down isn't the same as falling behind.

Most of the time, modern life pulls us away from dwelling. We hurry, we cross, we use places as means to an end. But every so often, we stumble upon a space that lets us simply be.

I keep pondering at Weeks Bridge, not in the pursuit of answers, but for the pause. In a world that worships constant motion, I'm reminded to have faith in stillness, to believe that being here is already enough.

Maybe Heidegger, too, just needed somewhere to think too hard by the river.

KAYLA LE '28 (KAYLALE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS PROBABLY—YOU GUESSED IT—PONDERING AT WEEKS BRIDGE.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

Ode to a Dying Art: In Defense of Hazing

Satire: an argument for the continuation of team-bonding.

BY THAYER J. Y. GAULDIN

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, much of Europe fell into a period of cultural and intellectual stagnation named the “Dark Ages.” For hundreds of years, European nations saw a decline in the production of literature and science—a production that had once been customary. This intellectual catastrophe in history has robbed modern generations of countless classics and innovations.

Today, we find ourselves in our own modern “Dark Ages,” not because of any political strife or conflicts, but due to the unwarranted attack on initiation rituals—formally acknowledged as hazing.

The practice of hazing on campus represents the quintessential way to welcome new members into an organization. How else would audacious and shameless first-years learn the social hierarchy that chains them to the bottom of the campus caste system? Without hazing, they saunter around the Yard with chests puffed out as though they have accomplished something. Did they forget that we all also got into Harvard? They’re not special. The absence of hazing prevents these first-years from learning who’s really in charge on campus.

Given the many organizations with member counts in the hundreds and comp classes containing students from around the world, how are new members expected to bond, if not for hazing? How could the piccolo players meet the trombone section when their every hour is spent locked in the basement music rooms? How might first-years, hoping to enter consulting, learn each other’s names when they struggle for hours on work that others get paid thousands to do? The solution to this problem: mandatory bonding!

Imagine: you’re studying for your LS1A midterm when suddenly, a phone buzzes. It’s your mandatory comp assignment of the week—you and three other compers must record a TikTok of the latest trends. You drop everything, rush to create a group chat with your fellow compers, and put on your game face. After performing the most humiliating rendition

of the KATSEYE GAP ad, you publish the video for the whole world to see.

These initiation rituals give preexisting members (and even fellow compers) a great laugh at your expense—and what’s so wrong with that? It is healthy to laugh at ourselves, so hazing is actually good for you! And for all the government majors who believe that maintaining a clean public image is necessary to succeed in politics, Justin Trudeau’s costume choice of the past has proven otherwise.

Hazing is healthy too, providing a safe environment for compers to find their limits. How can we be expected to know the exact number of drinks necessary to reach a

alcohol in their life can be very dangerous come river-run. So, you’re welcome, Harvard, for protecting your bathrooms from puke and your students from hospitals.

Most important of all: hazing builds character. When I was younger and watched the first Harry Potter movie, I was inspired by the tragic story: How dare they drop this random baby boy at the Dursleys’ door! There are drastic financial tolls that one must consider when having to feed another mouth. But the Dursleys showed strength despite the setbacks. They grew from the challenges put against them and were eventually able to succeed in ditching that loser Harry. Without adversity, would the Dursleys have become the functioning members of society that we love? Hazing provides the necessary push that many need to blossom in this world.

This campus has gone soft. First, it was our take-out boxes; now the campus administration is after hazing—that’s where I draw the line. What happened to the campus I love! Since when was exorbitant consumption of alcohol an issue? Clearly, the University staff can’t hang.

Harvard hopes that we will relinquish our right to bully and harass others while calling it “community building.” But I say no. I won’t allow for this indispensable part of campus—no—human life to be lost to future generations. We cannot let this tyrannical University administration take away our self-evident rights. As a great president once said on the sixth of the first month, “We fight like hell. And if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a [campus-life] anymore!”

THAYER J. Y. GAULDIN WOULD DEFINITELY REPORT ANY INSTANCE OF HAZING.

GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE ASIHENE '27



buzz without trying it for ourselves? Are we to just blindly trust some graphic that the school shows us in the mandatory alcohol training?

Any good scientist or statistician would tell you about the importance of experiments to understand the accuracy of a claim. If someone claims that they can fit up to five marshmallows in their mouth, they must actually fit those marshmallows in their mouth before I believe them. In the same way, hazing allows us to find the maximum number of marshmallows they can fit. There’s no better way to discover how many drinks they can consume than being forced to take shot after shot of hard liquor! A first-year that has never had

How to Experience the Head of the Charles Regatta

Explore the various vendors and booths that line the Head of the Charles Regatta this weekend.

BY ABBY LI '29

The Head of the Charles Regatta is the world's largest three-day rowing competition, held annually on the Charles River. This year, the regatta celebrates its 60th anniversary. Though centered on commemorating the sport of rowing, the HO CR weekend has evolved into a lively festival that blends spectating a traditional competition with enjoying many other perks of campus and city life.

The regatta course spans three miles, beginning at the Boston University DeWolfe Boathouse, passing Riverbend Park along Mt. Auburn Street, and ending at Herter Park. Along the route, there are multiple stations set up to entertain spectators. Reunion Village, more commonly known now as “the Riverbender,” is located at the very next stop following Weeks Footbridge, right about the one-and-a-half-mile point. Riverbender includes a beer garden with lounge seating, DJ performances, drinks, lawn games, and an incredible view of the race. The Riverbender offers one of the most lively spots for spectators. It is where crowds gather to cheer, watch rowers navigate sharp turns, and enjoy the music and vibrant atmosphere.

Further down the race course, the Weld Exhibition is a popular destination where visitors can sample food and beverages and explore a variety of vendors during the regatta. About half a mile away from the finish line is the Eliot Bridge Enclosure, an upscale way of enjoying the HO CR. The Enclosure is commonly known for its luxury, unbeatable race views, and an elegant atmosphere. The exclusive hospitality tent serves locally sourced breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and access to an open bar just upstream of the Eliot Bridge and less than half a mile away from the finish line. Tickets can be bought in advance on the official HO CR website.

Spectators can find information on event dates, viewing locations, accommodations, and other logistics through Meet Boston—a premier sponsor that serves as the primary marketing and visitor services organization for both the city and the Head of the Charles Regatta. As Meet Boston helps share the HO CR with the world, there is an extensive list of sponsors and premiers that form the backbone of the HO CR's liveliness beyond the races.

One of the most notable is Vineyard Vines, which will be celebrating its fifth year as the Official Style of the HO CR. The lifestyle brand is best known for its smiling pink whale logo and ‘Every day should feel this good’ motto, offering a range of preppy to casual shirts for men and

women. HO CR x Vineyard Vines apparel is now available at select locations along the approximate three-mile race course and can also be accessed online. An iconic symbol of the HO CR experience, Vineyard Vines typically has an easily recognizable tent for spectators to purchase clothes and gear available along the river. 776BC also stands out as the official rowing apparel sponsor of HO CR, welcoming rowers, alumni, and spectators to explore lightweight racing suits, base layers, and outerwear designed for high-performance training.

The HO CR weekend is not complete without experiencing the different vendors along the Charles. This year's spread highlights Harvard fan favorites,



featuring campus staples and local legends, including El Jefe's Tacqueria, Flour Bakery & Café, Playa Bowls, Dunkin', Heineken, Long Drink, and Reign Storm Clean Energy. El Jefe's build-your-own burritos and tacos cater to many Harvard students' comfort foods, perfect for the colder autumn weather. Flour Bakery & Café is another favorite, founded by James Beard Award-winning pastry chef and Harvard alum Joanne Chang '91, that offers buttery breakfast pastries, soft and chewy cookies, luscious pies, soups, and salad. Breakfast foods are also plentiful at Mike & Patty's, a beloved breakfast sandwich spot founded in 2008 which serves a signature combo, the “Fancy”—a perfect grab-and-go for spectators looking to walk the course.

With a variety of 50 different imported and domestic confections from Sweden, Spain, New England, and beyond, Madeleine Candy Shop's stand at the Charles is a perfect place to pick up a small treat. The HO CR is deeply committed to neighborhood partners and small family-owned businesses, like Madeleine's. The HO CR also has official national sponsors, with Delta Airlines as this year's official airline sponsor and Reign Storm, launched by Monster Energy in March 2023, as the official energy drink.

Finally, one of the main highlights is the Finish Area Launch Site Bar, located near the finish line adjacent to the Registration and Awards Tent at Attager Row, which offers an unbeatable view of crews racing. Guests who are 21+ have the option to purchase a selection of alcoholic beverages. Drinks sponsors include Long Drink, Casamigos, and Heineken. The Long Drink is a canned gin and grapefruit cocktail, while Casamigos is a popular premium tequila. Heineken boasts its Heineken 0.0, offering fans “the same refreshing flavor and uncompromising quality without the alcohol allowing fans to enjoy Heineken anytime, anywhere,” according to the sponsor website.

HO CR also serves as a platform for community impact. Its official Charity Program partners include Community Rowing, Inc., Cambridge Community Foundation, West End House, and the Charles River Watershed Foundation. The only public access rowing organization on the Charles, Community Rowing, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to make rowing accessible to everyone. Founded in 1985 on the banks of the Charles, it opens the sport to individuals, giving access to stepping into a boat. CRI also has a boathouse named after Harry Parker, Harvard men's heavyweight crew head coach.

Their partnership with the HO CR Regatta illuminates a shared commitment to community and the spirit the regatta brings to Cambridge and Harvard each year.

One of the best ways to experience HO CR is by walking or biking along the river. The course is lined with public viewing spots and tents where spectators can do more than watch—connect with friends, enjoy food and drinks, and shop exclusive regatta merch.

From more traditional and committed partnerships to various newcomers, the HO CR captures the energy of the regatta through a network of sponsors and supporters who help make possible the largest rowing spectator event in the world—a race whose scale, spirit, and hospitality remain unmatched. The 2025 HO CR takes place on Friday, Oct. 17, through Sunday, Oct. 19, with racing typically running from 7:45 a.m. to around 5 p.m. each day.

ABBY LI '29 (ABBYLI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EXCITED TO WATCH HER FAVORITE ROWERS AT THE HO CR.

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Popping in to PopUp

PopUp Bagels makes its debut in Harvard Square.

BY CLAIRE CHUNG '29

It's 9:30 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 10, and the Square is bustling with people proudly holding distinctive brown bags and sporting hats that read, "Not Famous, But Known." Music pulses from speakers, mixing with the chatter of Harvard students and curious passersby who turn their heads to get a glimpse of the unfamiliar storefront. A DJ bops his head up and down to the beat as he mixes, smiling behind his set. The smell of freshly baked bagels floats through the air, an open invitation on the brisk fall morning.

I move towards the door as eager as every other customer to get my hands on a freshly baked and controversially unsliced bagel. The occasion? Grip, Rip and Dip®. PopUp Bagels, the bagel and schmear shop that has gone viral for its menu and branding, has made its new home right here in Harvard Square and received a warm welcome.

PopUp Bagels is unique for its weekly rotating menu and style of serving bagels. Rather than having the same selection of schmears, PopUp Bagels introduces new, limited-edition flavors every week, creating a small, focused menu. PopUp Bagels are also meant to be eaten in a nontraditional way: instead of being toasted or cut as part of sandwiches, they are served hot and whole. Customers rip into them and dip them into the schmears, butters, or cream cheese.

Located at 1440 Massachusetts Ave., the PopUp Bagels Harvard Square location is the 15th store in the franchise, and its opening has been highly anticipated by locals and students. "Cambridge is such a vibrant community with so much to do, and being home to Harvard University didn't hurt either," Boston franchisee Brian Harrington said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*.

"We think PopUp Bagels is a perfect addition to the neighborhood."

Harrington's focus on community reflects one of the brand's core values. PopUp Bagels started as a way for founder Adam Goldberg to keep a Connecticut neighborhood together in 2020, a time when people were forced to be apart. Goldberg opened the first official store in Westport, Conn. Since then, the brand has spread across the East Coast, from New York to Massachusetts, gaining popularity through its focus on quality and its clever marketing techniques.

"The product always comes first," Harrington said. "We focus on making incredible bagels and schmears, and the social

moments around the store. The space was brightly lit and playfully decorated. A large "HARVARD SQUARE" sign reaches across one wall, and a collage of customer photos adorns another. Right by the window, a display of PopUp Bagels merchandise invites customers to represent the brand. White hats and t-shirts that sport their famous slogan lined the shelves.

"We took the traditional PopUp decor and added a few Harvard and Cambridge elements," Harrington explained. "It's cool, clean, and we think it turned out great."

After taking in the decor of the store, I turned to the menu, which is simple and straightforward. PopUp Bagels offers a choice of five bagels: plain, sesame, salt, poppyseed, and everything. The shop has a selection of limited-edition butters and cream cheeses, as well as three classic cream cheeses they always stock: scallion, plain, and vegan scallion. Rather than ordering a single bagel, customers must order in packs of three, six, or 12, though each bagel is still full-sized. By setting up the menu this way, PopUp Bagels seems to encourage its customers to share and connect over food. In a place like Harvard, where it's hard to find time between classes and extracurriculars, this Rip-and-Dip ritual could force students to slow down and take time to catch up over a meal.

That Friday morning, my friend and I ordered a three-pack with truffle butter, choosing plain, sesame, and everything as our bagel options. That week's schmears were Kraft Mac & Cream Cheese, truffle butter, plain, and scallion. Ready to Rip-and-Dip, we opened the bag and found an extra bagel nestled in the bottom, a warm opening-day surprise. That morning, we broke bagels together over coffee and conversation, a comforting start to the long weekend that reflected the familiarity of connection between friends.

Personally, I've always been a fan of a bagel sandwich or a classic lox and cream cheese (with extra capers, of course), but PopUp won me over by promising something simple and new. So, although I'll never give up a bagel sandwich, PopUp seems to be here to stay if I ever want a change of pace.

PopUp Bagels is open daily from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**CLAIRE CHUNG '29
(CLAIRECHUNG@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) LIKES THE
EVERYTHING BAGEL FROM
POPUP.**

**GRAPHIC BY NESHAMA RYMAN
'28**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA
SENKIVISKYY '29**



buzz naturally follows because people love sharing what they enjoy."

There's no shortage of buzz surrounding the brand. PopUp Bagels boasts a fan base of celebrities such as actor Paul Rudd and former All-Pro NFL defensive end J.J. Watt. Its marketing leans into the brand's social media presence, with opportunities for photographs in every part of the store, from their menu to their slogan, "Not Famous, But Known," plastered across a mirror that customers can take selfies in.

PopUp Bagels also embraces partnerships with other companies to bring limited-edition schmears to their stores—this month, they dropped a "Kraft Mac & Cream Cheese" schmear. These limited-edition "drops" generate hype and exclusivity surrounding the brand, making customers desperate to try PopUp's newest concoction before the schmear is taken off the market. The brand's attention to marketing is as clear in person as it is in its online presence.

The moment I stepped inside the Cambridge location, I found myself surrounded by the countless photographable



Riverside Row-Mance

A guide to the best dates along the Charles.

BY AUDREY WU '29

While the Square has a variety of traditional dinner-date spots, there are also ways to get creative with more unconventional spots, including my personal favorite: the Charles River. Having grown up in the Cambridge area, some of my favorite memories were made along the Charles River and I've made it a goal of mine to make time for these moments even throughout my busy days as a Harvard student. Whether it's going on a solo stroll in the morning, chatting on one of the benches with a friend, or having a river-side picnic with a significant other, the Charles River has helped me appreciate "the art" of going on dates. From solo or friend outings to romantic dates, here are some of the best options along the river to spend time with the people you love.

Picnicking

Fall is the perfect time to have a picnic along the river, right before the weather becomes too cold. With a blanket and some snacks, there are many different ways to enjoy this easy



date. Whether it's chatting together while watching the sun go down, painting, or playing spikeball, this date allows for versatility.

One of my favorite spots to picnic is right by the Anderson Memorial Bridge, where you can sit on a bench

or people-watch from the stairs leading up to the bridge. If you're feeling particularly adventurous, you can bike along the Charles to picnic at the Charles River Esplanade, a quick 20-minute ride from Harvard Yard. The Esplanade is particularly pretty when you're able to see the seasons transition, with fall leaves, winter snow, and spring blossoms. It is also a popular place to go for those who enjoy time outdoors—you can bring a picnic basket or a hammock and get creative.

Canoeing & Kayaking

Canoeing or kayaking along the river is another immersive way to not only get to know someone better, but also, to experience a tour of Boston while getting your cardio in. Kayak and canoe rental services are available throughout the river and often offer discounts on a student season pass. Canoe and kayak rental prices vary depending on the service, but typically fall between \$15 and \$35 dollars for an hour, while season passes may be on the pricier side. Boston University's Sailing Pavilion near their campus charges \$25 for a day pass, while the downtown outlet Paddle Boston charges \$35 for an hour and a half. Perhaps a more active and adventurous date than picnicking, kayaking or canoeing together allows you to bond with your partner.

Being out on the water is also a great chance to unplug from devices, say hello to ducks in the river, and admire the Boston skyline. Depending on which rental service you decide to use, you can also stop in the nearby areas for lunch or explore the surrounding stores. If you end up near Boston University, you could stop for boba at LimeRed Teahouse or even a late-night show by Paradise Rock Club or Brighton Music Hall.

Paddle Boston offers nearby attractions as well, such as Kendall Square for the Cambridge location and the Museum of Science for the Boston one. Kayaking is an easy and fun way to reconnect with nature, as well as with your partner or friend after a stressful week. As winter approaches and the days get colder, it is still possible to kayak and canoe along the

river—but don't forget to layer up with hats, gloves, and jackets!

Late Nights Along Weeks Bridge

One of my favorite hidden gems is the pedestrianized walkway on Weeks Bridge. This spot is especially lovely when it's dark out and the city's lights, the moon, and the buildings around the river are reflected on the water. And, after a night out, it's the best spot to go with a significant other or friend to unwind, have hour-long conversations, or just laugh and listen to music.

I recommend picking up a late-night meal, whether a Felipe's burrito or a slice of Joe's, and walking down to Weeks Bridge as a spontaneous but nevertheless charming date. In the yellow-tinged lamplight of the walkway, you'll fall into natural conversation and linger for hours while overlooking the city. As you sit on the bridge, you can choose whether to face Boston and see the lights of the office towers or towards Harvard and admire how magical the Dunster tower looks in the evening glow. The quiet of the city at night creates a sense of intimacy and magic that is perfect for a date.

This weekend, as the campus prepares to cheer on Harvard's rowing teams at the Head of the Charles, I urge you to return to the river. Each time you do, you will fall more and more in love—with yourself, with someone else, and with the Charles.

AUDREY WU '29 (AUDREYWU@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY CHRISTY ZEMBROWSKI '29

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SPORTS

Head of the Charles: A Preview of the 60th Anniversary of the Regatta

Six decades of rowing excellence, growth, and the uniting of athletes and spectators from around the world.

BY KATHERINE CHUNG '29

This weekend, Oct. 17-19, marks the 60th anniversary of the Head of the Charles Regatta. Founded in 1965 by the Cambridge Boat Club, the event has grown from a local experiment into a global showcase of athleticism, tradition, and community. Each fall, the regatta draws thousands of athletes and spectators to the Charles River. Harvard men's and women's heavyweight and lightweight rowing teams will compete against other collegiate programs, alongside rowers of all ages from around the world.

The regatta was founded by D'Arcy MacMahon, Howard McIntyre, and Jack Vincent of the Cambridge Boat Club, after Harvard sculling instructor Ernest Arlett proposed a "head of the river" race similar to those held in England. The inaugural race took place on Oct. 16, 1965, drawing local crews to the Charles River. The regatta offered rowers something to train for and compete in, at a time when not many rowing races were held in the United States. As a result, the event quickly grew into a large-scale spectacle, now featuring more than 12,000 athletes across 74 races and thousands of spectators lining the bridges and banks of the Charles.

"It's really phenomenal energy—you get a lot of friends and family, old Harvard alumni that flood the Newell Boathouse dock," Harvard men's heavyweight rower Ben Scott '26 said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "It's great to see old Harvard alumni from decades and decades of Harvard rowing that still turn up for the event, clap us out as we're going on the water, and are there when we're racing."

During the 1970s and 1980s, however, the regatta became more of a social event than a competitive one. College students turned the weekend into a party, passing alcohol to rowers and burying kegs along the riverbanks. After several years, the Metropolitan District Police imposed stricter regulations, and by the mid-1990s, the event had evolved into a respected, world-class competition. The Head of the Charles is now known not just for its atmosphere, but for the demanding course that challenges even the most experienced rowers.

Among the thousands of competitors returning to Boston for the 60th Head of the Charles is Philip Price (parent of Sarah Price '29), a former collegiate rower at Brown University who first raced the Charles in the early 1990s. This year, he will compete in the Men's Grand Master Eights [50+] event alongside friends he has rowed with since his college days.

"It was a ton of fun," Philip Price said, recalling his first race. "I was rowing with some of my best friends...and it was absolute chaos... The shell itself weighs about 200 pounds, and you put eight people in it, each weighing about 200 pounds. So, you have a ton moving down the course, and the Charles is winding. So you have multiple boats, and I just remember sharp turns in the course and oars clashing."

For Philip Price, the Head of the Charles stands apart from other regattas because of its unique course and competitive density. "The Charles is narrower and more windy, and everybody wants to row in it. So, you have more competitors in a narrow, winding river."

Now, decades later, the regatta remains more about camaraderie than competition. "I'm expecting to do a lot of laughing with my old friends," Philip Price said. "These are guys that I've known since I was a teenager... More than anything, it's a chance to see people I care about."

From seasoned rowers returning to the Charles to students racing it for the first time, the regatta unites generations through a shared river.



In an interview with the *Independent*, Harvard women's heavyweight rower Erin Hanrahan '26 recalled the first time watching the Head of the Charles as a high school novice, speaking to the excitement of competing at such a young age at the same regatta as professionals. "I just remember thinking it was such a big deal," Hanrahan shared. "You already knew the meaning of the Charles from a novice who had just joined the program—that it was something special."

Hanrahan competed in the regatta for the first time as a high school junior. "It was actually the most surreal thing ever. Rowing it's not a very spectator sport, and not a lot of people come out to watch it, but it was absolutely crazy to see how many people were there... It being in Boston was crazy," Hanrahan said.

This fall, the Harvard-Radcliffe heavyweight rowing team has been preparing through a weekly series known as the Radcliffe Rumble, where rowers train in smaller four-person boats and race timed segments of the course. "You learn a lot just because you're 25% of the crew, you learn how you impact the crew... We are kind of ranked like that, and ultimately, the Charles lineups are...based on this Radcliffe Rumble," Hanrahan added. The team practices directly on the Charles every Saturday and tests on indoor rowing machines each Friday.

"It's so exciting... I feel like all of my old high school friends are here with their college teams. So much family comes and so many people watch on the live streams... It's really fun to have everyone here supporting you," Hanrahan shared. "I think, obviously, it's so hard—you're still racing and you kind of need to make sure you don't get too overwhelmed with everything that's going on. But... I'm excited for it."

Scott will row his final Head of the Charles this year as a collegiate student. Originally from Perth, Australia, Scott first learned of the regatta long before coming to Harvard. "The Head of the Charles is the biggest spectator rowing event in the world," Scott said. "People fly in from all over the world. Australia, the UK, Europe, and yeah, you get a whole bunch of different colleges and even national teams that turn up."

The men's heavyweight rowing team won the collegiate event last year, earning the title of fastest college crew on the river. "We beat Yale in 2024 for the first time in ten years.... Now we're not just looking to beat other colleges but also international crews like Cambridge and the U.S. national team," he said.

Training for the regatta begins in early September, with the summer devoted to international competitions. Several Harvard rowers competed in the World Rowing Under-23 Championships in Poland, representing Great Britain and Australia. Once the full team returned to campus, practices focused on synchronization and

technical precision. "At this point, it's not about getting fitter," Scott said. "It's about refining technique and getting used to the course."

Through all of its changes over the years, the Head of the Charles has stayed true to its original purpose: to give rowers the chance to test themselves on a challenging course and, above all, enjoy the race. Its impact on both the rowing world and greater Boston community continues to be felt, uniting athletes and spectators in a shared excitement each October. See what the excitement is all about and head down to the river this weekend.

**KATHERINE CHUNG '29
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HARVARD.EDU) WRITES SPORTS
FOR THE INDEPENDENT.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF GIULIA
VIACAVA '29**

Fantasy Roundup: Week 6

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

BY TYLER DANG '28

With a third of the NFL regular season complete, the standings look nothing like preseason predictions. The Colts—led by Daniel Jones—have emerged as a dominant force alongside the Bills and Buccaneers. Meanwhile, several presumed playoffs contenders have already lost hope. The Ravens and Bengals are 1-5 and 2-4, respectively, plagued by injured quarterbacks and lackluster defenses. Only one team remains winless: the New York Jets, anchored at the bottom of the standings. For full team rosters, see Week 0's issue.

First and Lowell (2-3) vs Kirkland Cousins (2-3): 150.94-100.72

Top performers: Drake London (31.8) | Josh Jacobs (32.0)

Underperformers: Saquon Barkley (8.7) | Justin Fields (4.9)

The Inn-Zone (2-3) vs Bring it Dome (4-1): 129.18-105.3

Top performers: Bijan Robinson (35.8) | Jaxon Smith-Njigba (30.2)

Underperformers: Jaylen Warren (8.3) | Javonte Williams (8.4)

The Ball Carrier (1-4) vs Pfirst Down (4-1): 174.08-132.02

Top performers: George Pickens (31.8) | Christian McCaffrey (24.1)

Underperformers: Lions D/ST (1.0) | Devonte Adams (7.9)

Standout Games:

Eagles @ Giants: 17-34

Heading into this week's games, the Eagles-Giants matchup seemed straightforward: the 4-1 Eagles, despite a recent loss to the 2-2 Broncos, still boasted a strong offense lineup compared to the 1-4 Giants, who lost to the Saints the week prior. And while the game was clear-cut, it was in favor of the Giants. Jaxson Dart played exceptionally as he was shifty, rushing for a total of 58 yards. Even when the pocket collapsed, he continuously found his way

out, making the right passes for the first down. Cam

Skattebo also had

an outstanding game, rushing for nearly 100 yards and racking up three touchdowns along the way. Finally, the Giants' defense stepped up, recording an interception and forcing a fumble while constantly pressuring the Eagles' Jalen Hurts. On the Eagles' side, Saquon Barkley continued his slow year with only 58 yards over 12 carries on the night. While Hurts was not afraid to throw the ball deep, the Eagles just could not score. Coming out of halftime down 20-17, the Eagles did not score a single point throughout the entire second half. Dallas Goedert had a great game, but the Eagles were simply outmatched.

Cowboys @ Panthers: 27-30

After beating the Dolphins last week, the Panthers entered the game hoping to show that the win was not a fluke. Immediately, it was clear that this game would be a back-and-forth. While the Cowboys' first drive fizzled into a punt, the Panthers began with a field goal. George Pickens had a huge game, racking up 168 yards on just eight receptions. Prescott and Pickens were the only ones who really showed up for the Cowboys, as their defense allowed three touchdowns to Bryce Young. On the Panthers' side, the former-Cowboy Rico Dowdle had another monster game, rushing for 183 yards on 20 carries and adding another 56 yards in the air. Tetairoa McMillan also recorded two touchdowns. However, most impressive was Panthers' QB Bryce Young, who was a yard shy of 200 yards on only 17 completions. The former first overall pick consistently found an open man and set up the Panthers to seal the game with a last-second field goal. The Panthers move to 3-3 and are two wins away from matching their win total from last year.

49ers @ Buccaneers: 19-30

Mac Jones's third game with the 49ers saw one of San Francisco's toughest matchups so far against the Bucs. Almost immediately, cracks in the 49ers' offense appeared with Mac Jones throwing an interception on the third play of his first drive. Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers capitalized on this mistake to score the first touchdown of the game. A slew of scores and field goals in the second quarter had Tampa Bay leading 20-16 going into the second half. Despite another interception, Mac Jones delivered a solid performance, throwing for 347 yards with a lackluster receiving corps. Kendrick Bourne had another good week for the 49ers with 142 yards on only five receptions. As for the Buccaneers, this win cements Tampa as one of only two 5-1 teams in the league and a true Super Bowl contender. Baker Mayfield's ability to scramble for first downs must be studied

as the quarterback continues to find his way through trouble each week. Tampa ran away with the game in the third quarter for a comfortable win.

Looking Ahead:

With the Bills and Ravens on their bye week, fans can still look forward to a list of great games next week. Thursday night features a matchup of veterans with the Pittsburgh Steelers and Aaron Rodgers facing off against the Cincinnati Bengals and newly acquired Joe Flacco (PIT -5.5). The combined age of these starting quarterbacks is 81. On Sunday in London, the Jaguars will face off against the Rams (LAR -3.5). These two 4-2 teams have the potential to be Super Bowl contenders, but they lack the consistency to truly garner fans' confidence.

In terms of players to keep an eye on, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and Amon-Ra St. Brown are anticipated to perform well. Smith-Njigba, the wide receiver for the Seahawks, will play against the Texans and has had great games recently alongside Sam Darnold. While Houston has a strong defense, Seattle's abundance of offensive weapons ensures that Smith-Njigba will put up numbers as Houston can't afford to double-cover him. As for the Lions' wide receiver, St. Brown will face the Buccaneers, who, despite having a good game against San Francisco, have a poor passing defense. Tampa's run defense is the fourth strongest in the league, so Detroit will probably opt for a more pass-heavy game, at which Tampa is ranked 21st.

Expect a few games that you can likely let fly under the radar. The Saints @ Bears (CHI -5.5) matchup is a clash between two teams whose playoff hopes have all but been extinguished this year. Neither team has shown to be particularly amazing offensively, with consistency being a big problem for both. Also, the Patriots @ Titans game (NE -7.5) is one-sided, favoring New England while Tennessee still figures out its offense. After firing head coach Brian Callahan, the Titans' woes are likely far from over.

TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS MAD THAT THE PATRIOTS ARE A DECENT TEAM.

GRAPHIC BY ALLYSON XU '28



2025-2026 NHL Season Preview

We are so back.

BY JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27

Use the music, it's hockey season again. The puck dropped Oct. 7, so here are my predictions for the 2025-26 NHL season, division by division, followed by some way too early awards.

PACIFIC DIVISION

8. Seattle Kraken

Since the Kraken's playoff splash in 2023, there's been no spark, no leader, and no clear direction. Veteran goaltender Philip Grubauer's \$5.9 million anchor contract blocks any real moves, and no one on this team can turn a game on their own. On paper, they shouldn't be awful, but with no reason for them to get better, I think they'll slide to last in the Pacific.

7. San Jose Sharks

The San Jose Sharks have been one of the worst teams in the NHL for the last three years. They lose most of their games and haven't made the playoffs in eons, but by God, the young guys on this team are electric to watch. 2024 first overall pick Macklin Celebrini, formerly of Boston University, is better than Connor Bedard (first overall before him in 2023), with fellow young stars Will Smith (Boston College) and William Eklund as phenomenal complements to his game. I think 2025 second overall pick Michael Misa is going to be a stud when he makes his NHL debut this year. There's reason to hope that goaltender Yaroslav Askarov can be a true starting talent. That said, NHL teams are made of 23 players, not five. San Jose's defense is cataclysmic, and they still lack depth scoring, particularly on the wings in the bottom six. It's going to be another tough year for the Sharks, but the future is teal!



6. Calgary Flames

The Flames are currently facing an identity crisis. I am excited about their young players, particularly Conor Zary and Matt Coronato '23. 2024 9th overall pick Zayne Parekh will be making his debut on Calgary's defense this year, and all signs point to him being a stud. Dustin Wolf was a dark horse contender for the Calder Trophy (best rookie) last year, and I think he is the best goaltender in the NHL under the age of 27. The rest of the team is either old and staying or in their prime and leaving. Barring a miracle, the best course of action for this team is to sell before the trade deadline and rapidly rebuild.

5. Vancouver Canucks

Quinn Hughes is beyond elite, Elias Pettersson used to be, and goaltender Thatcher Demko might be again, barring injury. Beyond that? Shrugs all around. Their top lines and power play have been unusually quiet, a recipe for disaster given they have lackluster scoring depth. This is as "meh" a team as it gets, although I will be ecstatic to hopefully see goaltender Aku Koskenvuo '27 make his debut.

4. Anaheim Ducks

Finally, signs of life. Anaheim's rebuild is ending, their youth movement (Mason McTavish, Pavel Mintyukov, and former Harvard captain Ian Moore '25) is thriving, and the vets bring steady leadership. I'm partial to any team that functions as a retirement home for the New York Rangers (four former Blueshirts on Anaheim's roster). Still a year shy of playoffs, but trending up fast.

3. Los Angeles Kings - x

The Kings are fine, good even, but perpetually doomed to lose to Edmonton. "One last ride" for legendary captain Anze Kopitar gives them purpose, but offseason moves were more than questionable. They remain playoff-bound, but nothing new.

2. Edmonton Oilers - x

The Oilers don't care about the regular season. Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl will obliterate the stat sheet, coast into the playoffs, and chase redemption after two Cup Final losses. With McDavid's contract extension done, the focus shifts to finally finishing the job and ultimately giving him whatever tools he wants to finally hoist the Stanley Cup.

1. Vegas Golden Knights - x

Three years post-Cup, Vegas reloaded with Mitch Marner. Losing Pietrangelo hurts, but Eichel and Marner are going to light up the league. Vegas feels hungry again, and they will take the Pacific crown.

CENTRAL DIVISION

8. Chicago Blackhawks

The second-worst team in professional sports (looking at you, Buffalo). They are starting to build a young core around Connor Bedard with Lukas Reichel, Kevin Korhonski, Frank Nazar, and Colton Dach, but beyond that the 2023 first overall pick is stuck dragging corpses. Their best course of action: tank again, get Gavin McKenna in the draft, and start to get some legs under this rebuild.

7. Nashville Predators

They spent big last year (signing Steven Stamkos and Jonathan Marchessault) and played like trash. This season? Probably more of the same. They made zero exciting moves in the offseason and I don't see why we should expect a different result.

6. Utah Mammoth

The hype here is premature. Cooley and Peterka are soon-to-be stars, but this team is still a piece or two short. Until they make serious trades, they're a mid-tier curiosity.

5. St. Louis Blues - x

People forget that for at least a third of last season, the St. Louis Blues were one of the best hockey teams in the world. I love the way this team looks. Like the Mammoth, they are still one or two pieces away from being a team with Cup aspirations, but their foundation is rock-solid.

4. Winnipeg Jets - x

Dropping from first to fourth might sting, but regression was coming. Losing Ehlers hurts, and Hellebuyck can't mask every flaw forever. They are still a playoff team, just not a dominant one.

3. Dallas Stars - x

It's Cup or bust. Their window's closing, and they know it. They should be focused on staying healthy for another deep run, before probably losing to Edmonton again in the Conference Finals. Goaltender Jake Oettinger will go nuclear fighting for an Olympic spot.

2. Colorado Avalanche - x

They fumbled trading Mikko Rantanen, but they're still elite. Nathan MacKinnon, Cale Makar, a breakout year from Ross Colton, and hopefully a Martin Necas extension should make them a Cup contender again.

1. Minnesota Wild - x

Superstar winger Kirill Kaprizov re-signed for \$17 million across 8 years and now has to carry them to glory. The Wild are

there's no reason that shouldn't happen again.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

8. Buffalo Sabres

It's been 14 years with zero playoff appearances. Thus far, they have two goals in three games this season. The players are miserable, and the fanbase is in pain. It's time to blow it up again.

7. Boston Bruins

The Bruins have gone from record-breaking to rock-bottom in three years. Their top prospect, James Hagens, is staying at Boston College another year; this is smart for him, bad for them, and bad for Harvard come Beanpot.

6. Detroit Red Wings

This is a team that desperately needs to make the playoffs, and it feels like they're always one step away from breaking in. Maybe these new (and gorgeous) Centennial Jerseys will be the final piece of the puzzle? Probably not, but I hope so.

5. Ottawa Senators - x

The Sens jumped ahead of schedule last year and actually look legitimate. Adding Jordan Spence was smart, and Olympic-year motivation for Brady Tkachuk and Jake Sanderson should give them an edge.

4. Montreal Canadiens - x

The Habs are pure joy. Lane Hutson's contract is a steal, Demidov is a Calder sleeper, and the rebuild is ending faster than expected. Expect another playoff trip, this time hopefully with better results.

3. Florida Panthers - x

After two Cups, they are now aiming to be the first team since 1983 to three-peat. Injuries to Matthew Tkachuk and Aleksander Barkov will knock them down a peg, but that might help long-term if they return fresh. The regular season doesn't matter for Florida; April through June is all that counts.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning - x

The Lightning have the same story as Dallas: elite core nearing twilight. They only have one or two more serious runs before the decline sets in. Expect a playoff showdown with Florida that might kill everyone involved.

1. Toronto Maple Leafs - x

No team needs a win more. Marner's loss was a deep cut, but maybe it forces Auston Matthews, William Nylander, and Matthew Knies to level up. They'll dominate the regular season and maybe make a deep run. Lord knows that after 58 cupless years, they're bound for something.

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

8. Pittsburgh Penguins

It's over. Crosby, Malkin, and Letang are done. Trade them all, and build their statues fast. What an unbelievable era it has been.

7. Philadelphia Flyers

Philly is quietly building something. Zegras and Drysdale, dynamic duo traded from Anaheim, with the addition of Michkov form a fun young trio, but they're still a couple of years out. Keep an eye on them.

6. New York Islanders

Winning the lottery for Schaefer sped things up, but they're still rebuilding. Trade the vets, keep the kids, and wait for 2027.



5. Washington Capitals

The Washington Capitals were miraculous last season. Alexander Ovechkin's chase of Wayne Gretzky's goal record was astonishing; watching The Great Eight surpass The Great One was an all-time moment in sports. Ovi has already announced that he will retire after this season, and without the monumental energy of last year, I don't think the Capitals will be even close to making the playoffs. Who knows what the future holds for this team, but for now, we can all watch the greatest goal scorer of all time skate off into the sunset.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets

Columbus began last season with the tragic and horrific killing of star player Johnny Gaudreau in a drunk driving accident. Despite their monumental loss, the Blue Jackets rallied together and fell just two wins shy of the playoffs. I expect a similar outcome this season, as the Blue Jackets struggle to find a way to replace the irreplaceable Gaudreau. They are a rapidly developing young team, with some absolute superstars in the making, and they will be a championship contender within the next few years, if not sooner.

3. New York Rangers - x

I have no idea what to make of the New York Rangers. It seems like every other day, the mood on this team flips from "we're winning the Cup" to "sell the franchise"

and back again. I think this is going to be a bounce-back year, carried by a Vezina Trophy-caliber performance from Igor Shesterkin and a Norris Trophy-winning year from Adam Fox '19. The Rangers could be good *if* nearly everyone on the team takes a step forward, and that is a massive "if."

2. New Jersey Devils - x

If Jack Hughes stays healthy, this team's a juggernaut. If not, they collapse. Add one scoring winger at the deadline and they're Cup contenders.

1. Carolina Hurricanes - x

They finally added the missing piece in Nikolaj Ehlers. Combined with Svechnikov, Jarvis, and newcomer K'Andre Miller, this is a complete roster. Carolina's in win-now mode, and they may be the only team in the Metro that can do it.

WAY-TOO-EARLY AWARDS

Hart (MVP): Connor McDavid. Obviously. He is the best player in the world and just signed arguably the most team-friendly contract in NHL history. He only cares about winning a cup, and I think he's going to play like it.

Rocket (Most Goals): Auston Matthews needs to prove he doesn't need Mitch Marner to score. I think he's going nuclear with 70 goals.

Norris (Best Defenseman): Adam Fox has been a disrespectfully underrated defenseman for three years now. He's getting his revenge this year.

Vezina (Best Goalie): Igor Shesterkin. See above.

Calder (Best Rookie): Ivan Demidov. I know the obvious pick would be 2025 1st overall Matthew Schaefer, but I think we're in for a repeat of 2016 with then-rookie Artemi Panarin winning the Calder over Connor McDavid. Demidov is an electric player on a much better team than Schaefer, and I think that's going to boost him over the edge.

Stanley Cup + Conn Smythe: Edmonton beats Florida in six. McDavid wins Conn Smythe #2. Dynasty over. Finally.

JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27 (JWASSERBERGER@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WOULD GIVE HIS KIDNEY FOR THE RANGERS TO BE GOOD THIS YEAR.

GRAPHIC BY MADISON KRUG '27

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RIVER CROSSING

By Fred Klein '28
Design By Nuala Merrin '29



ACROSS

- 1. TV Sitcom Alien
- 4. Change In Math Terms
- 7. ___ Kat: Small Mongoose
- 8. Rapper: ___ Choppa
- 10. Is A River In Egypt
- 11. Missing Without Official Leave
- 13. UF Mascot
- 14. Raw Meat Dish
- 17. These Workouts Target Abs

DOWN

- 1. Ginger ___
- 2. Cell Service Letters
- 3. Chris Down By The River, Of SNL Fame
- 5. Texas Hold' ___
- 6. River Crossed By GW
- 8. Name Of River That Feeds Famous Waterfall
- 9. Mexican Street Corn
- 12. ___ ' And Behold
- 15. Remote Control, Type Of Toy Car
- 16. "Back ___ Black" (Amy Winehouse Album)

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