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# HARVARD INDEPENDENT

The student weekly since 1969

# Slumber Party



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

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## End of October in the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum

Harvard's Institute of Politics closed out a busy month with visits from leading figures in media and government.

BY LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26

**W**riter's note: As the John F. Kennedy Jr. Forum enters another month of inspiring conversations with distinguished leaders and experts, it faces a profound loss. Institute of Politics Director Setti Warren passed away suddenly on November 2, 2025, at the age of 55. Warren dedicated his life to public service, serving in the Navy during the Iraq War, working for both the Clinton and Obama administrations, and making history as the first African American mayor in Massachusetts.

Warren frequently moderated Forum discussions and was widely admired for his commitment to nonpartisan dialogue, elevating diverse perspectives, and championing his students' ideas. His presence in the Forum and impact on the Institute of Politics as a leader, mentor, professor, and friend will not be forgotten.

"It's often said that the measure of a person's life is found in their service to others—and by that standard, Setti's life stands as an example to us all," wrote Harvard Kennedy School Dean Jeremy M. Weinstein and Harvard College Dean David Deming in a joint email.

"Setti's students loved him, and their impact—like his—will reverberate for generations to come."

...

Throughout October, the Harvard Institute of Politics' JFK Jr. Forum welcomed a distinguished lineup of speakers, including former Singaporean Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo; United States Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo '93; NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson; "Pod Save America" podcast host Jon Favreau; and Republican strategist and commentator Scott Jennings. The month closed with notable guests addressing topics closely related to President Donald Trump's domestic and international policies.

### Dana Bash

On Oct. 22, CNN's Chief White House Correspondent and host of "Inside Politics" Dana Bash joined Lombard Director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy moderator Nancy Gibbs. How have the past ten months of Trump's term reshaped Washington's values? And what is the role of journalism in an era defined by political polarization?

"He wants to make sure that we never forget him and this is one way," Bash explained. "The idea that he is a disruptor who wants to take a wrecking ball to Washington, the fact that he is physically doing it, is almost too much."

Bash questioned the complicity of right-wing journalists in amplifying Trump's controversial actions, citing their coverage during the "No Kings" protests on Oct. 18. Republicans had warned of potential



unrest, prompting media outlets to brace for violence. Instead, Bash observed millions of people peacefully demonstrating nationwide. "It was narrative warfare," Bash said. "Republicans ended up setting themselves up for this becoming a bigger news event than maybe it even would have been because their predictions didn't happen."

"I try to unpeel the facts," she said. "The hard thing is to be intentional and not bounce from one thing to the next and say, 'Ok this is a big deal...and we are going to try to explain it.'"

Now, with CNN's potential sale under Warner Bros. Discovery and the rise of independent media outlets, the media landscape is continuing to evolve. Bash emphasized that these pressures do not influence journalistic standards: "It affects how we feel but not what we do and not how we approach the news."

### H.E. Ehud Olmert

On Oct. 23, Ford Foundation Professor of Democracy and Governance Tarek Masoud continued his "Middle East Dialogues" series with H.E. Ehud Olmert, former Prime Minister of Israel. Their conversation focused on the Israel-Hamas war, prospects for a two-state solution, and the role of the U.S. in advancing peace.

"I would have made a deal on the 8th of October to bring back all the hostages right away and to postpone any military action for a different period, a different time, a different circumstances," Olmert reflected, referring to Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, which killed about 1,200 people and took 251 hostages. "We were never before as polarized and divided as we are."

Olmert accused current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of having "flirted with Hamas" rather than pursuing a comprehensive peace. He maintained that a two-state solution remains the only viable path forward. "Only separation and the granting the Palestinians the opportunity to exercise their rights for self-determination will eventually build up the kind of rapport, the kind of rush of relations that will be entirely different from what they were and they are now," Olmert explained.

As ceasefire agreements were announced and broken, Olmert argued that U.S. leadership, especially from President Trump, who has approved nearly \$12 billion in support for Israel and remained involved in regional peace talks, is crucial. "[Trump] can force Netanyahu to embark on a peace process that will change history," Olmert stressed.

### Jen Psaki and Dee Dee Myers

Closing out the month, Jen Psaki and Dee Dee Myers, Joe Biden's and Bill Clinton's former White House Press Secretaries, took the Forum stage on Oct. 27 for a conversation titled "The Power of the Podium." The event was moderated by Peter Baker, Chief White House Correspondent for the New York Times and Fall 2025 Harvard IOP Resident Fellow, and Forum Student Committee member Kyle Davis '28.

According to Psaki, the beginning of her tenure was rough. "I didn't really know Joe Biden very well... How am I going to do this job?" This fear was only compounded by the unsteady media ground left by the prior presidential cabinet. "We were following the first Trump administration. They did not regularly brief... They regularly lied to the press."

Together, Psaki and Biden sought to change this



narrative for his White House press room. "Joe Biden's objective for us was to take the temperature down and to return it to a room where people could ask questions, where there could be healthy debate," Psaki said. "And that's part of democracy too: debates between the press secretary and reporters."

Building on Psaki's assessment, both guests stressed transparency and accountability in public service. Psaki criticized the White House's recent decision to remove the Associated Press and the Wall Street Journal from the briefing pool.

"The public has no idea what's happening. And all the public is going to be served is whatever Benny Johnson or whatever other sycophant that they have in the pool or the press briefing room is telling the public. That's what they want," Psaki added. "There's propaganda, and it's spent sending this message to the public that these are normal lines of questioning."

Discussing the Democratic Party's future and the upcoming 2026 and 2028 elections, Baker asked Myers, now a senior advisor to California Governor Gavin Newsom, whether Newsom plans to run for president in 2028. Newsom, a frequent critic of former President Trump, is known for parodying his all-caps social media posts and sharing satirical videos online. "He made really clear that he would be lying if he said he hadn't thought about it, but that he's going to wait until after the 2026 election to make a decision, and he's termed out. His term ends in January of 2027," Myers said.

"He has a better feel for this moment than almost anybody in political life. He moves fast, he is willing to mix it up."

...

This month's Forum featured powerful conversations on media, governance, and the future of democracy. Looking ahead to November, the Harvard community can expect the Forum to continue fulfilling its mission: "We hope to prepare them for a life of servant leadership and imbue them with a dedication to the common good."

**LAYLA CHAARAOUI '26**  
([LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:LAYLACHAARAOUI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)) IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE  
**HARVARD INDEPENDENT.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF INSTITUTE OF POLITICS STAFF**

# “You Admitted Us Because We Had Straight A’s”

Harvard University faculty and students respond to the recently released grading and workload report.

BY CAROLINE STOHRER '28

On Oct. 31, undergraduate students assembled in front of Harvard’s University Hall, voicing frustration and concern. Some engaged in tense discussion, while others called out, “You admitted us because we had straight A’s,” and “We’re already dealing with so much stress.” Their words were prompted by an email sent on Oct. 27 from Dean of Undergraduate Education Amanda Claybaugh. The report, titled “An Update on Grading,” ignited widespread discussion regarding academic policy and student well-being among students and faculty.

“Our grading is too compressed and too inflated, as nearly all faculty recognize; it is also too inconsistent, as students have observed. More importantly, our grading no longer performs its primary functions and is undermining our academic mission,” the report reads. Data from the Office of Institutional Research showed that 60.2% of all College grades awarded in 2025 were As, compared to 24% in 2005.

“Students know that an ‘A’ can be awarded for anything from outstanding work to reasonably satisfactory work,” the report wrote. “It’s a farce.” The report links this upward trend in grading to factors such as faculty competition for course enrollments, high class evaluations, student anxiety about professional outcomes, and a shift from “providing critical feedback to providing emotional support”—not to improved student work.

To address these issues, Claybaugh urged a coordinated response from faculty and administrators. The report calls for instructors to review their grading patterns, reintroduce seated exams, and ensure consistency

across discussion sections. The document also proposes allowing professors to assign a limited number of A-grades in each course and record median course grades on student transcripts to provide a clearer context for their relative performances.

“We owe our students grades that send clear signals,” the report continued. “We owe them an education that is meaningful as well as rigorous.”

Student reactions were mixed.

Sidechat, an anonymous online forum popular among students at the College, filled quickly with posts for and against the report. “Harvard will pride their admissions process on placing the smartest and hardest working students under one roof, and then

act appalled that students work hard and get good grades,” a post with over 900 upvotes read.

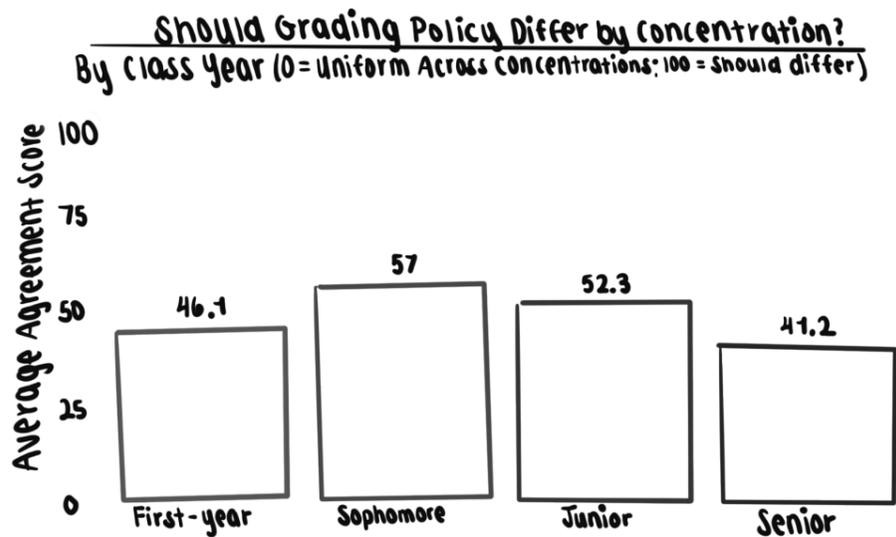
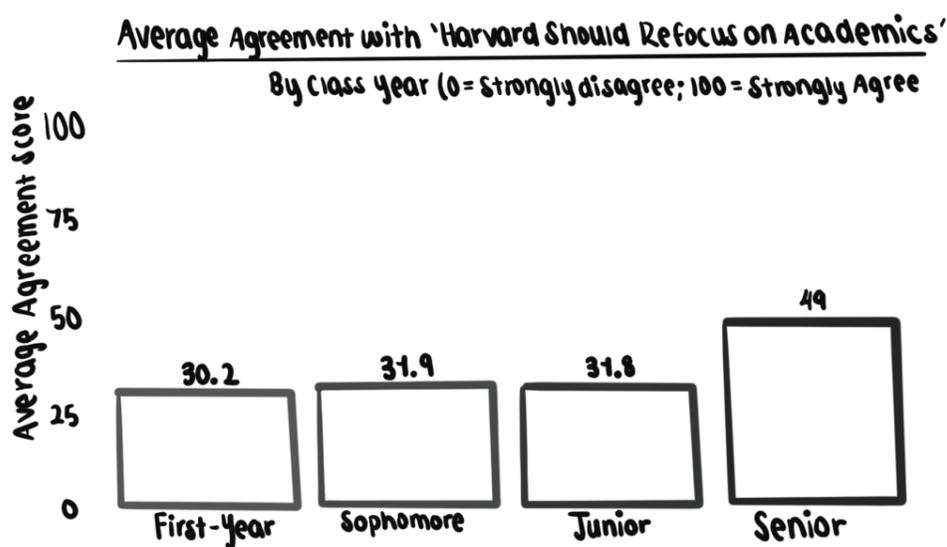
“It’s definitely mixed emotions,” Marielle Howlett ’28 told the *Harvard Independent*. “I understand the idea of wanting to recenter academics, to really put students back into the role of wanting to learn and wanting to go to class, and I think that’s a big problem. But at the same time, over the past ten years, [Harvard] really focused on doing extracurriculars.”

Nearly every student at the College is involved in an extracurricular activity, whether through one of more than 450 student organizations or among 42 Division I intercollegiate varsity teams. These activities

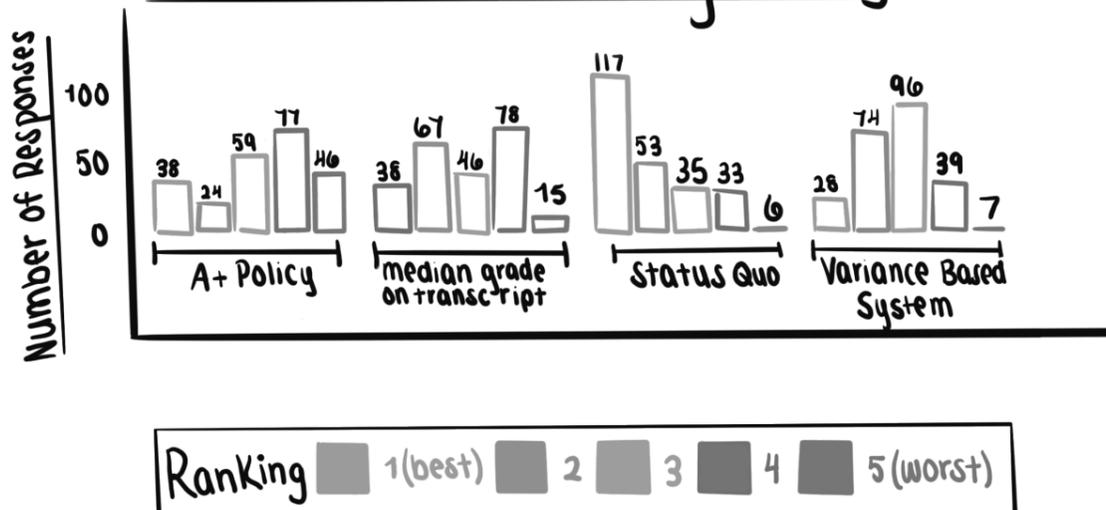
often involve a significant time commitment. Athletes reported spending an average of 29 hours on athletics each week. Meanwhile, many clubs require a rigorous entry process, known as “comping,” and often require similar hours to a University course. Extracurricular activities have become a cornerstone of undergraduate life at the College and are sometimes essential for post-graduate careers.

“Rather than valuing education for education’s sake, we come to see our undergraduate years as a sort of training ground for 9-to-5 office jobs, an opportunity to build a digestible resumé for corporate America,” Cade Williams ’23 reflected four years ago in an *Independent* editorial.

Moreover, some students fear that the grade report will make their GPA less competitive compared to those of students from other schools. “[The report] will have an even bigger negative, outstanding effect on many other groups of students, especially people who are, say, pre-med, and they need good grades to get into a



## What is the Best Policy moving forward?



good med school,” Mariia Solovi ’27 told the *Independent*. “They’re going to be [at] each other’s throats for the A-pluses.”

In a statement to the *Independent*, Claybaugh acknowledged the pressures many undergraduates face, and pointed out that students commonly measure success as they did in high school: “[A senior told me that] because they got into Harvard by earning a very high GPA and very high test scores, as well as participating in up to ten activities, they often think that they must do all of those things over again in college.”

“The paths out of Harvard are varied, and each requires something different. PhD programs, for instance, don’t care at all about extracurriculars, while certain industries care relatively little about grades. (I had a fascinating conversation with a tech recruiter, who said that the best person he ever hired had a 3.0 and the worst, a 3.9. What he cares about, he said, is that applicants show that they can teach themselves things outside of class),” she continued.

“So students shouldn’t feel that they must perform at the very highest level in all their courses and all their activities: that’s not possible, and it’s also not necessary. What they should do is figure out what matters most—both for what they want to get out of college and also what they want to do afterwards—and then prioritize those things,” Claybaugh emphasized.

Another key concern in the report was the divide between STEM and humanities/reading-intensive disciplines. “Faculty in the humanities and interpretive social sciences report that they’ve had to trim some readings and drop others entirely...Faculty in p-set disciplines report no analogous concerns,” the report read.

Students share mixed responses on this question. In a Harvard Undergraduate Association survey, nearly half of students in each year agreed that grading policy should differ by concentration.

And on Oct. 31, Dean Claybaugh held open office hours to discuss the report. Sign-ups for the sessions were full within the first hour of Claybaugh’s initial email announcing the opportunity. After group office hours, Yaroslav Davletshin ’28 was convinced of the Office of Undergraduate Education’s mission, particularly relating to the STEM versus humanities divide.

“My concentration is physics and math, so most of the classes that I have taken thus far have been...quite hard. The one Gen Ed that I took (Justice with Michael Sandel), while objectively easier than my p-set classes, was still somewhat demanding and was definitely not an ‘easy A’ class,” Davletshin wrote to the *Independent*. “On the other hand, the language class that I’m currently taking has extremely

generous grading, and I would definitely classify it as a gem. So overall, my impression is that STEM classes are more rigorous and demanding than non-STEM ones.”

“I think it is unfair that we have two systems of grading, two sets of standards and expectations towards STEM and non-STEM students, whereby a Government concentrator, for example, can easily ‘coast’ on all A’s, while a Physics or CS major has to struggle for the same grades,” Davletshin continued.

Humanities concentrators, however, noted that the report used hours worked outside of class as a metric for academic load, which creates an unfair comparison between computational and more conceptual courses that require different skills and thus different time commitments. “A lot of STEM people are like, ‘Oh, I’m STEM, I’m working harder than you,’ but at the same time, [the] humanities is the center of compassion and understanding of other people...it’s vital to the running of our society,” Howlett said.

Claybaugh stressed that the goal of the OUE was to bring classes up to par with each other, not to disparage non-STEM concentrators: “It’s clear that there’s considerable variation across our courses, and so the goal is not to make them all ten percent more demanding or something like that. The goal is to identify the courses that are already providing a rigorous and meaningful education and then bring other courses back up to that level,” she wrote.

The report also noted that in an effort to help students transition to Harvard, the College unintentionally encouraged faculty to become too forgiving in grading.

“For the past decade or so, the College has been exhorting faculty to remember that some students arrive less prepared for college than others, that some are struggling with difficult family situations or other challenges, that many are struggling with imposter syndrome—and nearly all are suffering from stress,” the report delineated. “Unsure how best to support their students, many have simply become more lenient...Requirements were relaxed, and grades were

raised, particularly in the year of remote instruction.”

Frustration abounds in students who feel as though their efforts have gone unnoticed, particularly those who identify as First-Generation/Low-Income.

“Most of us from underfunded/underrepresented areas have similar experiences where our peers back home have stellar grades at lower-ranked institutions, and we end up leaving a place like Harvard at a disadvantage despite spending hours more [working] each day,” an anonymous senior in Adams House wrote in a statement to the *Independent*—some students declined to provide their full name due to public ridicule surrounding recent coverage on this topic by the *Harvard Crimson*. “We enter a world that, confirmed by Harvard’s own recent caving, increasingly thinks A’s are given out like candy.”

Claybaugh emphasized that outside perception was not a factor in the move to recenter academics. “We began thinking about the grading in the aftermath of the pandemic, and we worked on the first grading report in spring of 2023,” she wrote. “Yes, universities are under attack right now, but it would be a grave mistake, I believe, to let those attacks drive us into paralysis or a defensive crouch. We have to continue doing what we think is right for the College, no matter what’s going on outside.”

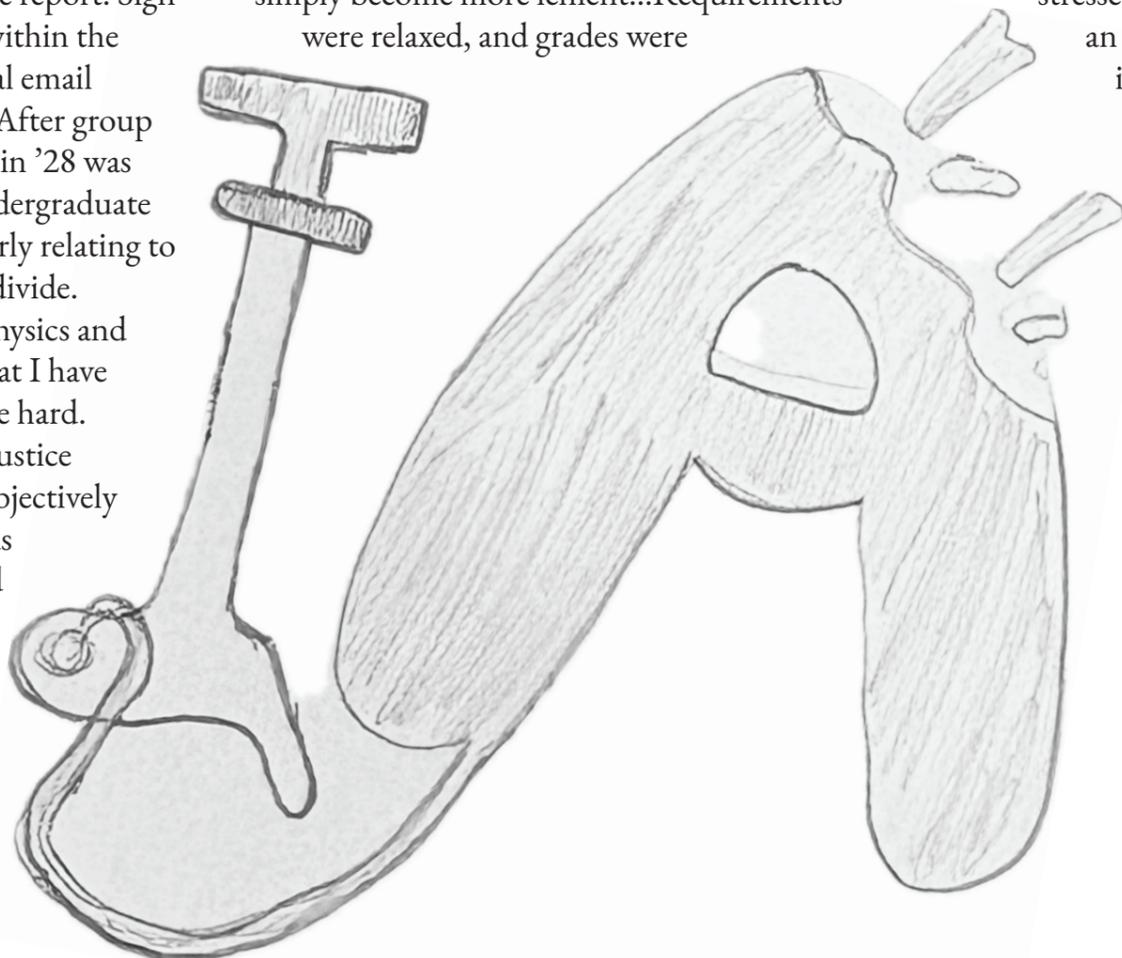
“Critics of higher education like to blame grading trends on snowflake students and negligent faculty, but that hardly describes the faculty and students at Harvard,” the report continues. “Our grading trends are driven by other forces... Our students are as talented and capable as they’ve ever been; we’re more dedicated to our teaching than ever before.”

Grades are due from faculty members in December and are released in January; the effects of the report will be seen then. For now, the relation between Harvard’s reputation and the perceived difficulty of classes reigns for many, as a freshman in Greenough Hall

stressed to the *Independent*: “It is an issue if people think Harvard is easy; we would rather they think we are rigorous. It makes our degrees more valuable.”

**CAROLINE  
STOHRER ’28  
(CAROLINESTOHRER@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.  
EDU) WRITES NEWS  
FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.**

**GRAPHICS BY  
AMELIE LIMA ’27 AND  
KATHARINE WEINER  
’29**



# How Much Do Harvard Students Sleep?

An analysis of the Independent's 2025 Sleep Survey.

BY MIA WILCOX '28 AND PIPPA LEE '28

**A**round the country, higher education institutions are teeming with sleep-deprived students.

Harvard is no exception: a campus culture of exceeding expectations made insomnia a sort of rite of passage. Students routinely juggle the demands of academics, extracurriculars, and social life, often at the expense of rest.

"The status quo is, are you tired and bad or tired and good?" said Summer Tan '26 in an interview with the *Independent*.

These words reflect a widely researched and documented trend of insufficient sleep among college students. "Most college-aged students need 7-9 hours of sleep in order to avoid daytime drowsiness (inability to concentrate or remember and slowed reaction time), altered mood states (anxiety, irritability, and depression), weight gain, poor health, and low energy," a Cornell Health page reads. Scientific literature also shows that sleep deprivation is a major issue for college students in particular. This manifests in a myriad of ways, from all-nighters to anxiety-induced insomnia—but the consequences are the same: burnout and exhaustion.

The Office of Undergraduate Education revealed on Oct. 27 that 69% of faculty at the College believe "Harvard students do not sufficiently prioritize their coursework." This does not appear to align with actual college-affiliate experiences.

In a survey conducted by the *Independent* across all four undergraduate classes, students commented that sleep fell lower on the list of priorities—a result of a desire for academic productivity.

## Survey Findings

The grade-level distribution across the 205 polled students was relatively balanced: 23.9% of those surveyed were from the Class of 2029, 45.9% from the Class of 2028, 18% from the Class of 2027, and 12.2% from the Class of 2026.

Among all surveyed Harvard undergraduates, nearly half reported getting less than six hours of sleep on a typical weeknight; the average nightly sleep duration was 6.62 hours, and 40.2% of students disclosed experiencing only five to six hours of sleep per night.

The numbers remained fairly consistent when broken down per grade level. Students in the Class of 2026 reported an average of 6.72 hours of sleep per weeknight and 7.92 hours on weekends. The Class of 2027 reported sleeping slightly more than the seniors, averaging 6.80 hours of sleep per weeknight and 8.27 hours per weekend night. Meanwhile, reporting the least amount of sleep on school days, the Class of 2028 had an average of 6.54 hours of sleep per weeknight and 7.84 hours on weekends. Finally, the Class of 2029 reported an average of 6.60 hours of sleep per weeknight and 7.70 hours on weekends.

Significantly, none of the classes had an average number of weeknight sleep hours within the recommended range for college students, suggesting that almost half of Harvard undergraduates are sleep-deprived.

The *Independent* observed that the weekend average across all respondents was 7.86 hours, indicating a common trend of "catch-up" sleep, a term defined by the National Institutes of Health, where students attempt to compensate for

rigorous Monday through Friday schedules.

Survey comments suggested heightened sleep deprivation during midterms, with one student reporting getting only two to four hours of sleep during peak exam season, a threshold that somnologists classify as chronic sleep deprivation. This trend was primarily observed in students concentrating in STEM fields; students pursuing the humanities reported more consistent sleep patterns.

In interviews with the *Independent*, two students described their unique struggles in prioritizing sleep. Their experiences reflected different survey comments, pointing to the difficulty of maintaining a balanced and regular sleep schedule.

## Student Profile: Summer Tan '26

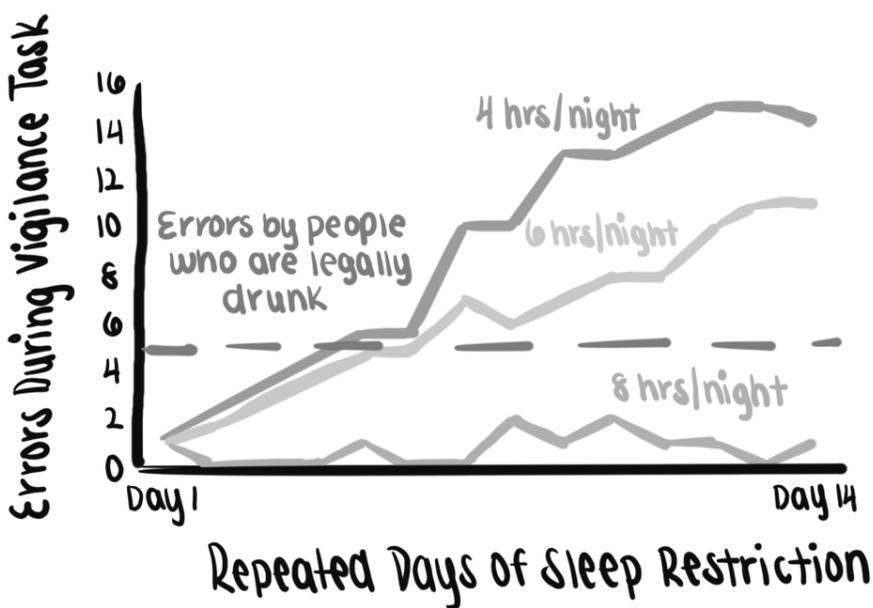
In her freshman year, Tan, a Social Anthropology and East Asian Studies concentrator, accidentally adopted what is known as a biphasic sleep pattern—essentially two naps comprising a night's sleep. She would sleep for four hours at the beginning of the night, spend the early hours of the morning working on assignments, then sleep again for a few hours before class. "I would be awake almost every night, from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m.," Tan explained. "I had an Apple Watch at the time. I would look at the screenshots of my sleeping time, and I would just be like, 'this is a patchwork quilt.'"

Tan's story seems to reflect a general campus sentiment: "I mean, look around," she said. "Do you see the dark circles and eye bags we have?"

Through the adoption of this sleep pattern, Tan became what the National Institutes of Health deems an "irregular sleeper." Irregular sleep patterns lead to compensatory daytime sleep. These sleep patterns also result in delayed circadian rhythms—the body's natural clock, which runs on a 24.27-hour cycle for adolescents and young adults. Irregular daylight exposure for those awake at night and asleep for many hours of the day makes it increasingly difficult for irregular sleepers to adjust to sustainable sleeping patterns.

Tan expressed concern that the new grading policy, encouraging an evaluation of grade inflation, will further exacerbate already concerning sleep patterns. "If [it] means that people are getting three hours instead of four hours a night, that's probably what a good amount of students are going to do until they burn out and then decide that they need to sleep for an entire year," Tan said.

"I think, in general, it's not going to be good for campus culture, academic culture, how people view themselves and what they owe each other in terms of self-care, and also



How much sleep do you get on average on weekdays?



in terms of what reasonable expectations are.”

Students across campus share Tan’s concern regarding the effects of grade deflation on sleep. “Workload is a lot, grading certainly should not become harder,” one survey respondent wrote.

At the beginning of her sophomore year, Tan developed a chronic illness, which she and her doctors believe was largely attributed to her long-term lack of sleep. “When you enter enough of a sleep deficit, everything is just in survival mode. If you’re in survival mode for a long enough time, everything gets a little messed up, because your baseline is no longer that of a healthy, normal person,” she explained.

It took a chronic illness for her to realize the true adverse effects. A drastic lifestyle change was the only option for her to get her health in order. “I was recovering and on a treatment plan for that, and I needed so much sleep, right? Like, for a baby, getting 14 hours a night and still being tired,” Tan said. “It’ll be fine if I’m more tired in my late 20s. Because right now I have a p-set that’s due. And then it came on all at once, and I was like, ‘Oh, now I can’t even do my p-set.’”

“I think there are some people who manage to have really healthy, balanced sleep schedules and still show up for their extracurriculars and have excellent attendance and submit excellent academic work, but I think it requires a level of discipline and willingness to let go of certain things that the average Harvard student is just not going to have,” Tan said.

### Student Profile: Ellie Chen ’28

Not all students on campus suffer from sleep deprivation. Varsity lacrosse player Ellie Chen ’28 shared a different perspective in an interview with the *Independent*.

As both a varsity athlete and a Social Studies concentrator, Chen has a busy schedule yet still manages to get seven to eight hours of sleep every night, despite waking up at 6:15 a.m. for practice. Practice starts anytime between 7:30 and 8 a.m., and players are expected to be in the locker room by approximately 7 a.m. At 10 a.m., practice ends, and Ellie goes straight to her 10:30 a.m. class. On top of a day of classes and practice, she must make time for assignments and extracurriculars, while also leaving time to spend with her friends.

Chen is one of 1,200 student-athletes across 42 Division I teams at Harvard. To sustain both her mental and physical health, she, alongside her athlete peers, must remain disciplined in the face of heavily structured and often-exhausting practices.

“Last year, I sacrificed my sleep for doing my assignments and staying up, and really trying to balance everything. But this year, I made it a priority to make sure that sleep comes first,” she said.

“Scientifically, getting eight hours of sleep is just better for your health and your performance in general,” she explained. To

ensure she gets her eight hours, Chen set a hard deadline for herself. “10:30 is when the lights are off and everything is done, and I’m going to bed.”

Studies have shown that sleep is directly correlated with academic performance. In his course PSY 1: “Introduction to Psychology,” Professor Daniel Gilbert presented data in his lecture showing that an individual who gets six hours of sleep for two weeks straight will perform almost twice as poorly as someone who is under the influence of alcohol. From days six to eight, they performed at around the same level as those who are legally drunk.

Chen also talked about her own experience with juggling spending time with friends and getting enough sleep.

“There are times when I struggle with it a lot, because I’m the type of person who just likes to say yes to everything. But I also really think that if you can make sure to prioritize your workload and your sport throughout the week, the weekends are really the opportunity to get into your social scene,” Chen said.

Between socializing and recuperation, she pointed to the importance of the weekend in order to maintain balance. “The weekend is also time for relaxation, like your body is tired from practicing all week, and you really have to take care of it on the weekend to prepare for the next week.”

Chen describes the key to setting aside time for socialization as devoting tiny sections of your schedule to seeing friends.

“Finding time for social life comes in kind of just little bits throughout the week, like either attending an event for like an hour or two just to see people and talk to them. It doesn’t have to be like

going out and really like spending five hours at a time hanging out with people,” she explained.

...

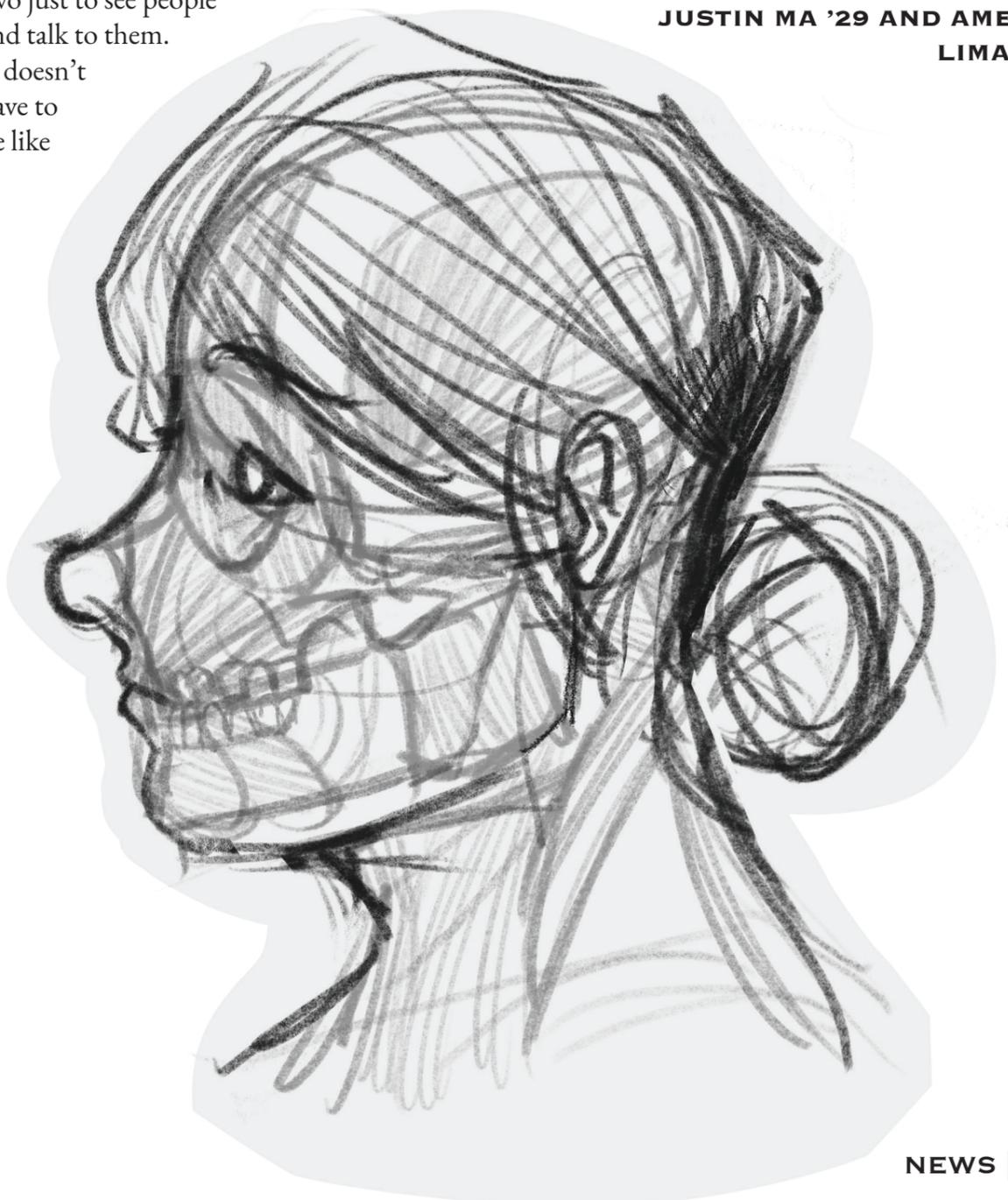
The *Independent*’s 2025 Sleep Survey suggested that sleep deprivation is prevalent among undergraduate students at the College—the average amount of reported sleep per school night was 6.62 hours, which is below the minimum of 7 hours that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends for adults.

Moreover, according to the NIH, sleep has numerous benefits both to your mental and physical health. Mentally, getting enough sleep helps your brain retain information, and it improves learning and problem-solving skills. On the physical side, adequate sleep heals your body, supports growth, and boosts your body’s immune system.

The survey data points to a persistent gap between the importance of sleep and students’ ability to achieve it. And, with the new grading policy, it may become more difficult for students to find a balance between work, life, and sleep.

**PIPPA LEE ’28 (PIPPALEE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) STRUGGLES WITH GETTING EIGHT HOURS OF SLEEP, WHILE MIA WILCOX ’28’S (MWILCOX@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) INSOMNIA AND 9 A.M. COMBO GETS HER A SOLID FOUR HOURS.**

**GRAPHICS BY JUSTIN MA ’29 AND AMELIE LIMA ’27**



# Conservatives and Controversy: On Recent Tensions Within the Harvard Salient

A glimpse into why one of Harvard College's primary conservative journals is currently under fire, both internally and externally.

BY SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28

The *Harvard Salient's* Board of Directors announced on Oct. 25 that the conservative student publication would suspend operations pending an internal investigation, citing “reprehensible, abusive, and demeaning material” in recent articles and “deeply disturbing and credible complaints about the broader culture of the organization.” Days later, Editor-in-Chief Richard Rodgers '28 denounced the board's statement as an “unauthorized usurpation of power,” further deepening divisions within the organization. The dispute echoes the growing campus divide between those who value the *Salient* as a conservative outlet and those who believe it has shifted to a right-wing, radical journal.

Founded in 1981, the publication first emerged during the Reagan administration as a journalistic counterpoint to liberal perspectives dominating national and campus narratives. Its 2021 revival coincided with a national surge in right-wing thought among college students between President Donald Trump's first and second terms.

The *Salient* operates within a long tradition of student journalism. The University's major publications include the *Harvard Crimson*, founded in 1873 and recognized as the nation's oldest continuously published daily college newspaper; the *Harvard Lampoon*, founded in 1876 and known as one of the longest-running continually published humor magazines in the world; and the *Harvard Independent*, founded in 1969 in response to media censorship during the Vietnam War and now Harvard's oldest weekly newspaper. Together, these outlets define the campus media landscape, with the *Salient* positioning itself as the representative right-leaning voice.

The *Salient* distributes six to eight print issues across campus while maintaining a steady stream of online editorials.

Recently, the *Salient* faced backlash over its “Fraternitas” issue, which featured opinion pieces criticizing the 1999 Harvard-Radcliffe merger and describing leftism as “a mental illness.” A few weeks after the issue's release, the Board issued its campus notice.

“The *Harvard Salient's* Board of Directors was an unauthorized usurpation of power by a small number of individuals acting outside the bounds of their authority. This action was taken without notice or consent from the duly appointed leadership of the organization and in direct violation of the bylaws governing *The Harvard Salient*,” Rodgers wrote. According to him, the *Salient* will continue to operate. Since the statement, however, no new articles have been uploaded to the website, and the paper's status remains unclear.

The Board of Directors consists largely of *Salient* alumni and former editors who oversee the publication's long-term mission and finances. While the student team manages the day-to-day content, the Board handles broader authority.

Members of the *Salient's* Board of Directors and *Ex Officio* advisors declined to comment. Rodgers has not responded to the *Independent* at this time.

Nonetheless, other students have offered their thoughts on this publicly broadcast friction.

Co-President of the Harvard College Democrats, Jack Tueting '27, spoke on the *Salient's* pause in operations. “[The *Salient*] made it their mission to support conservative dialogue, but it's veered towards echoing extreme right-wing, fascist rhetoric,” Tueting said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*.

While the *Salient* classifies itself as “neither partisan nor narrowly political,” some students share Tueting's concerns about the messages that the *Salient* conveys beyond its most recent publications.

“I like engaging with other viewpoints, and I think the *Salient* is a great opportunity to do so, but when they're

overtaken by these very, very alt-right views, it's hard to have a legitimate conversation when the person I'm arguing with is accidentally quoting Hitler,” Stephen Behun '28 told the *Independent*.

Behun referenced a September editorial that was reminiscent of one of Hitler's 1939 speeches delivered to the Reichstag, in which he said nationalistic phrases such as “Germany belongs to the Germans” and “blood and soil.” Both of these Nazi phrases were used in the *Salient* piece that has since been removed from the website.

Screenshots of the article spread quickly on campus social media, prompting calls for clarification and sparking debates. Rodgers, however, remained firm in the quality of the narrative and larger publication. “Neither the author nor the editors recognized the resemblance and that the phrase long predates the Third Reich,” Rodgers wrote in response to the controversy in another *Salient* article.

The incident instilled a strong correlation between the article and the possible ideologies of the *Salient*. “If you're a student echoing fascist sentiment or quoting Hitler or engaging in Nazi ideology, that is not freedom from consequences from your board,” Tueting said.

“The University-wide Statement on Rights and Responsibilities (USRR) expresses our strong commitment to free speech, including the right to protest and dissent,” President Alan Garber '76 emphasized in an April 2025 letter to members of the Harvard community. “Our effort builds on the University's work over the last year to clarify further the rights and responsibilities we share while reaffirming free expression, mutual respect, and content-neutral enforcement.” The University's efforts to advance these goals come amid pressure from the Trump administration, which has accused Harvard of favoring liberal and antisemitic viewpoints.

Though the University affirms bipartisanship, Harvard College nonetheless has a conservative minority. According to the *Independent's* Fall 2024 Political Survey conducted before election day, 302 students said they would vote for Democratic nominee Kamala Harris, compared with the 60 who supported Republican nominee Donald Trump. This data is similarly reflected by the *Independent's* Fall 2024 Sex Survey, in which, out of 672 responses, 73.1% identified as liberal, 14.7% as conservative, and 12.2% as moderates.

“How could [Republican students] not [be marginalized] when they're outnumbered 10 to one among peers and nearly a hundred to one among faculty,” Rodgers told the *Independent* in October.

While the present political minority on campus, the conservative-centered *Salient*, and its 21 active members serve as a part of this small but present community. “Conservatives are always aware that they're in the minority... It forces you to form your beliefs more fully, to articulate your convictions more carefully,” Rodgers continued.

While the minority on campus, some students feel that conservatives have been strengthened by the recent rise of right-wing influence.

“Some of these articles may have been emboldened by inflamed tensions and Trump being elected to a second term. Certainly, there's much more of a market for these more extreme opinions in the Republican base and perhaps young minds in general,” Behun said. “It looks like maybe they're trying to work on some deeper core issues, and those recent articles are more symptoms of that.”

“Having the opportunity to push

back against a different idea in a respectful and informed way is something maybe we haven't been seeing as much of recently, but what I would hope to see from the *Salient*,” Behun added.

The controversy seems not to center on the *Salient's* mission as a platform for conservative thought, but on the rhetoric featured in some of its recent articles.

The *Salient* typically publishes approximately 10 editorials per month, along with themed print issues that compile a month's worth of writing and are distributed to students across campus. In the days before the pause, publication accelerated, with seven articles appearing between Oct. 20 and Oct. 23. Since operations were halted, it is unclear if and when publication will resume both online and in print.

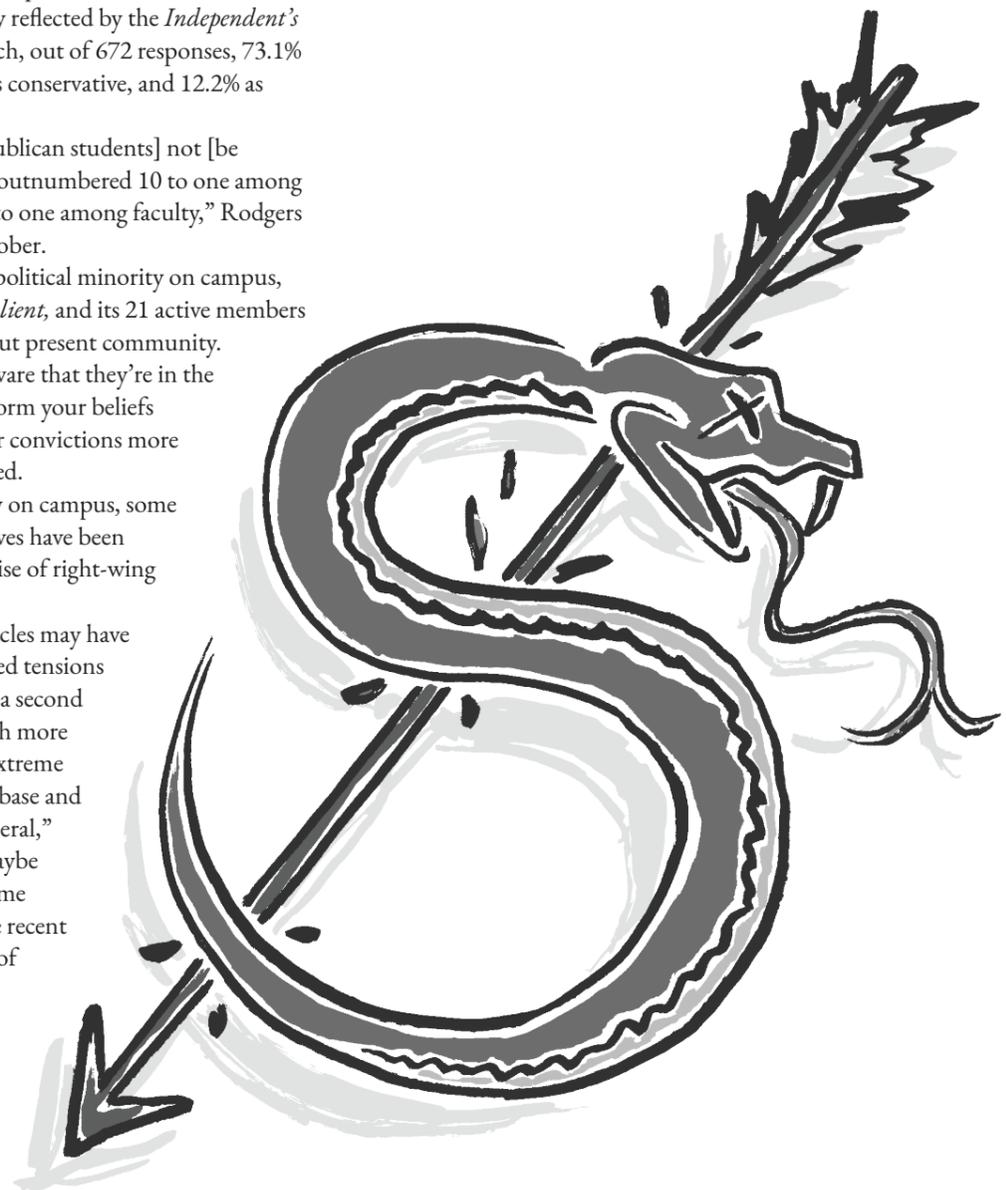
“There is still strong journalism happening on campus, on both sides of the aisle, from all different perspectives,” Tueting continued. “This is an example of good people who still have good ideas pushing back against these radical ideas.”

Amid criticism and uncertainty, others view the pause as an opportunity for the *Salient* to reshape its voice toward broader, more inclusive dialogue.

“I've had a lot of really great conversations with people who identify as conservative, maybe not necessarily members of this current Republican party, but are definitely right-leaning,” Behun emphasized. “I do not see those views always reflected in a publication like the *Salient*. I would like to see more of that.”

SOPHIA GONZALEZ '28 (SOPHIAGONZALEZ@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES NEWS FOR THE *INDEPENDENT*.

GRAPHIC BY RILEY CULLINAN '27



# Harvard College Admissions Prohibits Race Disclosures in Interviews

As new rules restrict references to race, ethnicity, and religion in alumni interviews, students and faculty reflect on how identity, passion, and merit fit into Harvard's evolving admissions landscape.

BY EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29 AND LAURA CREMER '29

Harvard College is navigating a series of changes for its 2025-2026 application cycle. Following a new policy that bans alumni interviewers from writing about applicants' race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliations, the College is faced with further tightening of race-conscious admissions—spearheaded by the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*. Restrictive Early Action closed Nov. 1, and the Regular Decision deadline is set for Jan. 1. As thousands of applicants hit "submit," these changes have sparked conversation across campus and beyond about what equity and transparency mean in this new admissions landscape.

Under a presidential memorandum issued on Aug. 7, the United States Department of Education now requires higher education institutions to submit detailed data on applicants, admitted students, and enrolled cohorts—disaggregated by race and sex. Beginning this academic year, institutions must also report academic metrics such as standardized test scores, GPAs, and other measures of achievement, allowing federal officials and the public to better monitor whether race-based preferences persist in any form.

"Race-based admissions practices are not only unfair, but also threaten our national security and well-being. It is therefore the policy of my Administration to ensure institutions of higher education receiving Federal financial assistance are transparent in their admissions practices," the memorandum read.

Alumni interviewers may discuss such topics in general terms when relevant to an applicant's background or experiences, but not racial or cultural identifiers. For instance, interviewers may note that a student speaks a second language at home or is an immigrant, but they may not specify the particular language spoken or the country of origin. Evaluation reports containing restricted information will be disregarded, and in such cases, a second interviewer may be assigned to ensure compliance with the updated guidelines.

The effects of the post-SFFA admissions policy changes are already visible in the numbers. Black undergraduates comprised roughly 18% of the Class of 2025, compared to about 11.5% in the Class of 2029. Hispanic or Latino enrollment has similarly fallen from 13.3% to around 11% over the same period.

"It is already the law of the land that race/ethnicity/religion/other identity characteristics cannot be directly weighed in admissions comparisons," Theda R. Skocpol, Harvard Professor of Government and one of the foremost scholars of American public policy, wrote in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "So I am not surprised that steps are being taken, like telling personal interviewers their reports cannot flag such things."

The Harvard 2024-25 Common Data Set previously confirmed that the College's admissions office was not considering race, religion, or place of residence. However, a student's first-generation status and geographic origin will still be considered, as well as their academic GPA, standardized test scores, talent/ability, and other factors.

"The overall principle should be full and equal consideration of the entire range of qualities

applicants bring to the table—not just formal measures like test scores or grades but evidence of specialized talents, taking on challenges, cooperating with people, serving communities, the entire set of qualities that wholistic admissions at privileged universities like Harvard can weigh," Skocpol said.

"I do worry a bit that interviewer reports could be turned into vague mush by extra efforts to rule out any specific descriptions," Skocpol continued. Still, she believes the system will adapt. "People will adjust, and many applicants of all backgrounds will flourish and gain admission."

Harvard students are more reserved following this tightening of race-conscious admissions policies.

"The whole point behind this is [that] they don't want to be biased towards certain ethnicities or racial backgrounds...[To] make it fair for everyone, then I guess it makes sense to not have that," a Harvard sophomore who wished to remain anonymous told the *Independent*. "But again, I think that not having that takes away from really getting to know the person beyond just what things they did."

Students who believe their backgrounds played a large role in their Harvard acceptances further stressed their reservations about the University's new guidelines. "I'm also very Christian, so I think a lot of my application was hinged on my involvement [in] youth group, praise team. I think those things were also mentioned in my interview," a College junior from Quincy House who requested anonymity said to the *Independent*.

Before the 2023-2024 application cycle, applicants could submit an optional, longer essay on a topic of their choice or select from prompts that encouraged broad reflection on identity, intellectual interests, life experiences, integrity, and community contribution.

Since the 2023-2024 application cycle, essay questions are shorter, narrowly framed, and limited to 150 words. The new, creative prompts leave more room for an applicant to disclose identifier-specific experiences if desired. Notably, explicit references to race, ethnicity, or cultural background have been removed.

Beyond admissions, Harvard has reshaped its diversity infrastructure amid pressure from the Trump administration to roll back DEI programming in higher education. On April 28, the University announced that it would rename its Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging as the Office for Community and Campus Life.

"All universities are subject to the new SCOTUS rules and Trump administration threats about overwielding attacks on social diversity," Skocpol noted. "Very rich universities have the capacity to make individualized, all-around evaluations, while large state universities and less wealthy institutions are more easily forced into reliance on mechanical measures."

Harvard also quietly ended its Undergraduate Minority Recruitment Program—an initiative founded in 1971 that encouraged minority high school students to apply to Harvard by providing them with information and application guidance. Its functions have now been folded into a new, race-neutral initiative called the

Harvard Recruitment Ambassadors program, which focuses on general outreach and enables prospective students to connect with current undergraduates, but explicitly avoids in-person high-school visits or targeting specific student groups.

Yet while admitted undergraduate identifiers are in flux, one element remains constant among Harvard College's incoming classes: strong involvement in academics and extracurricular activities. However, according to Skocpol, there is room to rethink what kinds of experiences deserve greater recognition in the admissions process—and what merit itself should be defined.

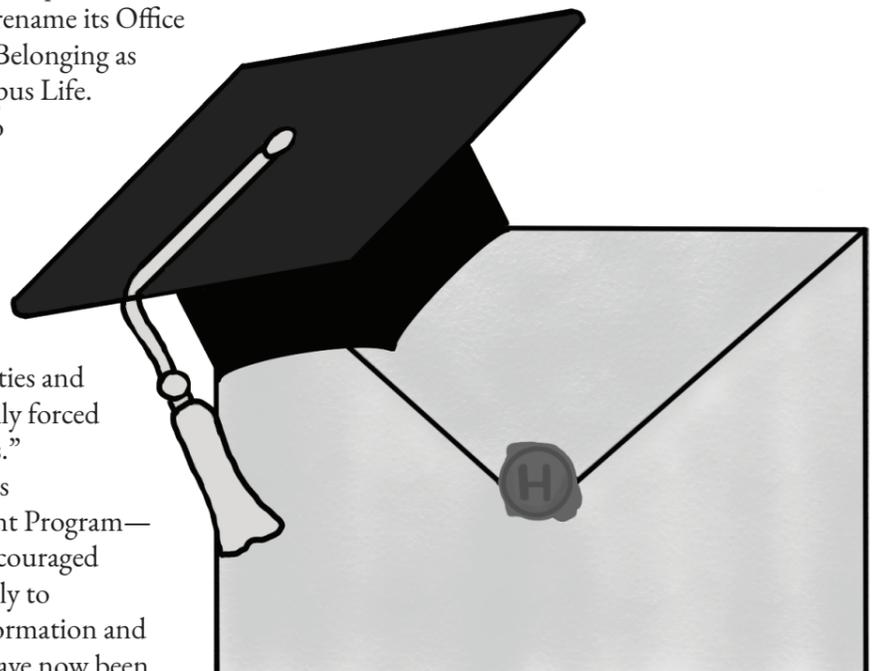
"I would give extra points to applicants who had worked in real-world modest to low-wage jobs, e.g., in summers, and less weight to those who did foreign trips or fancy programs that cost their parents a lot of money," she suggested.

"If we admitted more students who had at least found out personally what regular non-college-degree work is like jobs at restaurants, on farms, in construction, in poorly paid social services, we would help sustain valuable kinds of diversity in our classes AND have privileged students who had gotten out of their wealthy cocoons and made some contacts with non-college people," Skocpol continued. "There is nothing in this idea that would in any way violate the SCOTUS decisions."

Restrictive Early Action decisions will be announced in mid-December, with Regular Decision results following toward the end of March. Data for the incoming class of 2030 will not be released until the following fall. Nonetheless, recent trends in the admission statistics currently suggest a potential continuation of shifts in the representation of specific minority groups.

**EDEN BRIDGE-HAYES '29  
(EDENBRIDGEHAYES@  
COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)  
AND LAURA CREMER '29  
(LAURAPEREZCREMER@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) WRITE NEWS FOR  
THE HARVARD INDEPENDENT.**

**GRAPHIC BY  
SOPHIA RASCOFF '27**



# FORUM

## Remembering Setti Warren

Harvard Institute of Politics Director Setti Warren passed away suddenly on November 2, 2025 at the age of 55.

BY INSTITUTE OF POLITICS EXECUTIVE TEAM



*"I got a text from one of his favorite students the day after the news broke, right as I visited the IOP. For some reason, even though I knew he was gone, I immediately beelined to his door because a part of me wanted to tell Setti because I knew he'd have some answer. When I got there, his door was covered in notes from his students, and there were these gorgeous bouquets lining the floor—you could tell they were mostly from the same place; there's only a few places in the Square that sell flowers that early in the morning. The student had texted me "we weren't finished with our work but now it's just he and me will work together in a different way," and it's that text I keep thinking about whenever I think of Setti now." - Summer Tan '26*



Our late Director, Setti Warren, was a cherished mayor, pillar of the Harvard community, loving father and husband. He brought service to life at the IOP, and led with curiosity, humility, and an endlessly generous spirit that touched everyone who had the honor of knowing him.



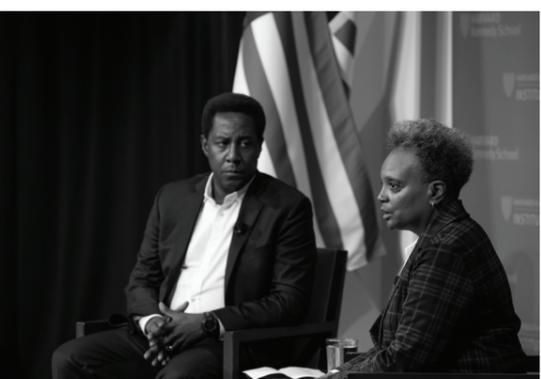
Setti kindled in generations of students the passion and courage to dedicate their lives to service. He taught us to believe in ourselves and in the power of our voices to make change.



To the students he mentored with such joy, Setti opened a world of possibility. And all who met him can attest—he was a rare, electric presence. You knew when Setti was in the office—the laughter was louder, and the lights somehow brighter.



His humor, his counsel, and his boundless warmth will be deeply missed. Yet the memory of a dear mentor, friend, and fighter will live on in every life he shaped and every future he guided toward service.



Each of us will carry forward, at Harvard and beyond, the spirit of a man who gave us confidence when we doubted, brought joy when we feared, and lent an ear when—more than anything—we needed to be heard.



We will always picture him as we so often saw him: arms crossed, smile beaming, rooting on his students from the back of a packed nightly Forum.

In our hearts and memories, Setti will remain as he did in life—a force for good, and a force for others.

**THE INSTITUTE OF POLITICS EXECUTIVE TEAM IS LED BY PRESIDENT TENZIN GUND-MORROW '26, VICE PRESIDENT SUMMER TAN '26, TREASURER KEVIN BOKOUM '26, AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR LORENZO RUIZ '27.**

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF INSTITUTE OF POLITICS EXECUTIVE TEAM**



# Academic Rigor or Institutional Anxiety?

The administration's potential grading reform is damage control, not educational policy.

BY NOAH BASDEN '29

The “smoke-filled” rooms of Loeb House—home to the University’s governing bodies and their administrative offices—have more in common with the crowded newsroom of the New York Times than you might expect: both are filled with people talking about Harvard, though hardly any of them actually go here. The University and its students remain under constant attack from politicians, the press, and professional pearl-clutchers. Instead of using this moment to bring those in administrative power closer to the students, the latest update—the “Update on Grading”—that hit our inboxes last Monday, only serves to widen the chasm between the administration and the students it aims to serve.

The report reads more like a perfectly crafted PR response rather than genuine educational reform, an attempt to appease critics rather than defend the excellent quality education that Harvard provides. When faced with intense external pressure from politicians and media outlets questioning the school’s every move, the administration chose to solve a public relations problem by creating an academic one. The world has shifted from the days when academics were the sole priority. Today, students are expected to balance their studies alongside extracurriculars, leadership roles and an active social life. This latest announcement is a potential attempt to drag us back in time, hold us to unrealistic standards, and has created a problem no student wanted in the first place.

Forget the statistical analyses of rising GPAs or the dubious use of Q scores as a true measure of student effort; it was one particular criticism of the student body that caught my eye. According to the report, an overwhelming majority of faculty agree, to varying extents, that “Harvard students do not sufficiently prioritize their coursework.” Yet, later in the same report, the administration admits that their own data suggest “that students are working as hard as they ever have—if not more.” Students are spending nearly an hour more outside of the classroom on coursework compared to 2015, yet we are not, according to 69% of faculty, sufficiently prioritizing our coursework. So which is it? How can we be working harder than ever, yet somehow still not hard enough?

The faculty’s complaint about student’s priorities might hold merit if we lived in a world where academic performance was the only measure of success, but that’s no longer the world we live in. Students are forced to balance academics and extracurriculars, not out of pure choice but because the world demands it. It’s an untenable argument to criticize students for doing what is required to excel professionally.

We’re expected to succeed academically, which we do, and build competitive résumés for life after college. It says so, in the case of Harvard Law School, not in the fine print but in bold letters under the title *Standards for Admissions*: “As a general guideline, most admitted applicants demonstrate potential for success in law school through an exceptional undergraduate academic record, standardized test scores in the top percentiles, and substantial accomplishments in work or extracurricular activities.”

This phenomenon is not limited to law school; it is true for medical schools, business schools, and the job market more broadly. The University’s

administration seems to be stuck in the past, while the student body has adapted to the realities of the modern professional world. Academics are no longer the be-all and end-all; they remain an essential foundation, but are just that, a base upon which everything else must be built.

This push toward grading reform isn’t about student effort or priorities. By the administration’s own admission, we already meet those expectations. This is about PR and damage control, about having a ready answer when the next volley of criticism comes from D.C. questioning Harvard’s high GPAs, or when the New York Times runs yet another piece accusing us of laziness. The student body is becoming collateral damage in a political battle over a narrative that has nothing to do with learning. We’re not being asked to work harder; we’re being asked to accept standards that have already failed elsewhere.

Princeton and Wellesley tried similar grading policies, only to reverse them amid student concerns that such policies “increased stress and discourag[e] collaboration.” Cornell and Dartmouth also attempted scaled-down versions of this approach, with little success. When this policy inevitably fails, what will remain is a betrayed student body and graduating classes whose transcripts bear the marks of a failed experiment.

When we applied to this university, we accepted the potential opportunity to learn, grow, and prepare ourselves for the challenges of an ever-evolving world. What we didn’t sign up for was to be pawns in a political PR game. The smoke in Loeb House may be thick, but it’s not thick enough to obscure the foundational principle upon which this University was founded: *Veritas*, truth. And the truth is that no amount of grade reform will ever satisfy Harvard’s critics, but it will certainly damage those it aims to serve.

So what’s next? Expanding student participation in upper-level university decision-making beyond the Harvard Undergraduate Association is a complex problem with no clear solution. Even so, the idea of *Mitbestimmung* speaks to me as the most convincing of solutions to the issue.

*Mitbestimmung* is a German concept that mandates that employee representatives are included on the supervisory boards of large companies. We have the HUA, but by including them on the University’s actual supervisory boards, it would ensure that our voices and grievances are actually listened to. We win when the University wins, and we, the students, lose when the University loses. Does that not make us, in effect, shareholders?

The Concept acknowledges that those affected by an organization’s decisions deserve a voice in shaping them. In Germany, *Mitbestimmung* is not controversial; it is just good governance. We’re not asking to run

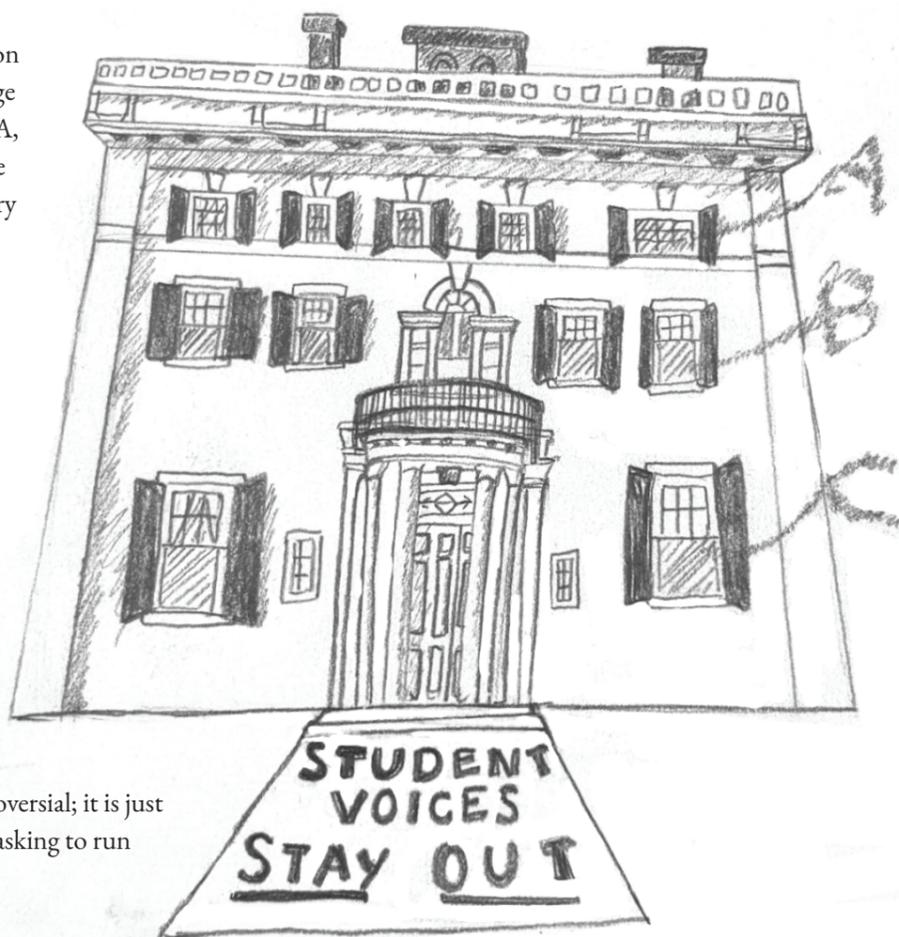
the university; we’re asking to be formally consulted and taken seriously when it comes to our concerns about topics that will directly affect our education and futures.

Take the issue of grade inflation, for example. If students had formal representation and were involved from the very beginning, maybe we would not be seeing the widespread backlash that has spread across campus. How we solve the issue of grade inflation, I do not know. Perhaps we abandon our current grading system and place more emphasis on “contract-based learning” or make participation a much more prominent feature of academic life to ensure people show up to class and are involved in discussions. An alternative to the issue of “disparities in grading between concentrations, between courses, and even between sections of the same course” is to go course by course and correct these issues to form more uniform standards instead of making broad sweeping reforms that do not address the root of the issue.

The point is, as this op-ed makes clear, we do not have all the answers, but we deserve to be part of the discussions searching for them. Our opinions would not be perfect, but we would bring the unique perspective of those actually living through these potential policies. *Mitbestimmung* doesn’t give workers control of their companies; it just ensures that their voices are heard when it matters most. If the administration truly believes that it’s acting in its students’ best interest, what is there to lose by including us in their deliberations? Office hours are not going to cut it; we need a seat at the table.

**NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS WONDERING WHERE THIS SUPPOSED GRADE INFLATION IS AND WHY IT HASN'T BLESSED HIM YET.**

**GRAPHIC BY NUALA MERNIN '29**



# Keep Us Out of the Media

What the media gets wrong about Harvard, and what we can do to change it.

BY AIDAN GALLAGHER '29

If you believe everything you read in the news, Harvard students are either future billionaires, political masterminds, or villains in a culture war. This narrative is making Harvard, a pinnacle of higher education, seem as if it's plotting to undermine the country from within.

The truth is, as always, less dramatic: most of us are just trying to make it through p-sets, balance clubs and classes, and figure out what comes next. Yet every time our campus trends online or appears on the news, we're reminded that being a "Harvard student" is not just a description, it's a caricature. Maybe the best press we could get is no press at all.

Reporters descend on Harvard as if it were a stage set for the entire nation. We are seen as symbols instead of students, cast into stories that have already been written. When the news wants to talk about wealth, ambition, or politics, Harvard becomes the perfect headline bait. News such as "Remedial math at Harvard" or "Harvard refuses to condemn political violence" continues to gain national attention. Stories like this capture attention because, regardless of truth, they tap into politically charged themes in the media: elitism, hypocrisy, and degradation of standards. Although most of us are too stressed to attend a protest, and despite the "old money" stereotype applying to very few, the narrative sticks. We're still painted as the spark for everything supposedly "wrong" with America's elite.

There's certain logic to this claim: with 41 *Fortune 500* CEOs among its alumni, Harvard produces some of the brightest and most influential minds every year. But it isn't Harvard that determines their path; it's the drive and intellect that got them here in the first place.

In my three short months here, I've seen enough to be wary every time an influencer appears in the Yard: They ask loaded questions with no right answers, framing Harvard as an ideological hive mind. Seeing a video of one of my fellow first-years being asked their thoughts on Charlie Kirk's death made me realize how fragile our public image is. What if I were the next

one interviewed and said the "wrong" thing, becoming the subject of national outrage? As my father likes to say, "If you ask the smartest person a bad question, you can make them seem dumb."

This media narrative is nearly impossible to debunk from within. Most people's only experience with Harvard students comes through what they hear secondhand. From the New York Times talking about how, at Harvard, "many of its students skip class and fail to do the reading," to social media interviews conducted by people asking leading questions, fitting Harvard students into a preconceived narrative, few ever speak with us directly. And so we're reduced to tropes, seen not as individuals, but through a media portal.

Of course, Harvard should be held to a higher standard, maintaining academic rigor and producing excellent students, but that standard should be about education, not ideology. The strength of this University isn't in a political leaning but in the investment it makes in its students. In my short time here, I've met people who have challenged my worldview through shared experience and genuine conversation—not by the political "brainwashing" some imagine happens at Harvard.

If the media truly cared about what happens here, it would focus less on culture wars and more on how universities like Harvard can nurture the next generation of thinkers, leaders, and changemakers. Media consumers, too, can be more conscious of what they are reading. Instead of falling into the trap of a "Harvard" headline, they may ask themselves who really benefits from this caricature, and whether they are hearing a story about a student or just a story about power.

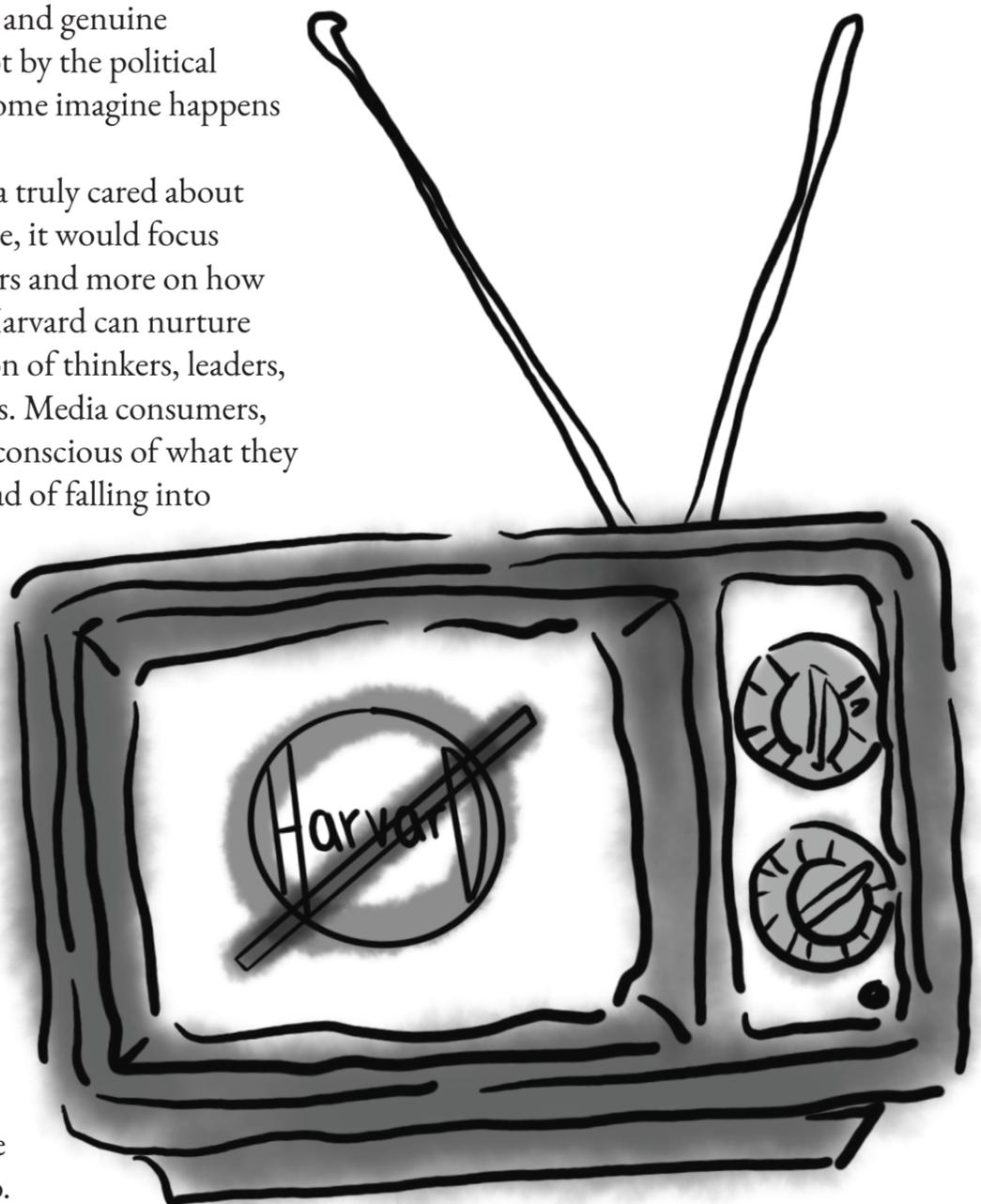
There's also something we as students can do.

Rather than running away from media attention, we can choose to interact on our own terms. Writing and speaking beyond campus allows us to reclaim our own narrative, displaying to the public that we exist beyond our media portrayals. Maybe the best solution to this caricature isn't silence, but authenticity. It seems unreasonable, but we must defend the identity of Harvard through our own actions, disproving the unjust media perception of ourselves.

What the world should understand is that Harvard isn't a singular entity. It's a collection of thousands of voices, each with its own story. There's irony in the fact that the place most famous for producing voices that shape the world rarely gets to speak for itself.

**AIDAN GALLAGHER '29**  
(AIDANGALLAGHER@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) IS FROM  
WYOMING AND COMPING THE  
INDEPENDENT.

**GRAPHIC BY**  
AMELIE LIMA '27



# Equally Scary: Halloween as Liberation in Fashion

Halloween democratizes style, inviting us to reject fashion standards.

BY CLORIS SHI '29

Every year on October 31, the world dresses up. From oozing blood to plush fur, gleaming armor to inflatable suits, there is no limit to what people wear. For a single day, sidewalks turn into public runways. We stride through the night as designers, performers, and works of art.

Halloween may be the most democratic fashion event in the world. On this day, beauty standards are suspended; attire is ranked not by brand label but by imagination. Someone in a hand-assembled cardboard contraption can outshine a celebrity in couture. Fashion belongs to everyone, liberated from traditional rules of dress.

The concept of wearing costumes is as old as civilization itself. Baroque and Renaissance masquerade balls were arenas where aristocrats could flirt, cross-dress, or mock social order, while their identities were hidden away. Even earlier, Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin coined the term “carnavalesque” to describe moments when social order becomes inverted. In medieval carnivals, peasants dressed as kings, kings as fools, and the world, for a breath, laughed at itself. At a carnival, this taste of equality and freedom existed only for its duration, but it revealed how arbitrary social hierarchies truly were.

The carnivalesque would only occur on Halloween if both the famous and the ordinary people participated. The holiday’s power depends on celebrities at the top of fashion’s pyramid embracing the same tongue-in-cheek rebellion as everyone else.

In recent years, it has become standard for fashion’s highest echelons to compete for the most grotesque and the monstrous. This past Friday, Heidi Klum, famous for her elaborate costume tradition, held her 24th Halloween party at Hard Rock Cafe in New York City.

Klum’s costumes are not about glamour, but metamorphosis and self-erasure. She has appeared as E.T., an older version of herself, Princess Fiona from “Shrek,” a peacock, and, this year, as a reptilian Medusa. Her husband, fittingly, was a warrior frozen to stone. In each transformation, Klum’s costumes, swollen, wrinkled, or exaggerated, challenge the standard of equating fashion with beauty. As a supermodel, she turned this topic on its head.

Halloween blurs the hierarchies of class, beauty, gender, and propriety. Costumes transform taboo subjects—death, horror, and sexuality—into play, inviting us to confront what frightens or unsettles us most. Children become monsters, and

supermodels step into the shoes of aliens. When a kid dresses as the president or a grandmother as a vampire, they reject society’s expectations of how one should look or how one should age. For queer populations, Halloween is often a rare day when people can circumvent gendered dress code legislation. “I looked in the mirror and saw the grown-up I dreamed of being,” Lazarus Letcher, a reporter for the Source New Mexico, writes regarding how the holiday helped her reconcile her gender at birth with the gender she wanted to be.

This year, queer communities flocked to the internet to show off extravagant costumes to highly specific cultural references with the tagline, “I hate gay Halloween, what do you mean you’re \_\_\_?” By encouraging people to lean into costumes created often for their own humor, Halloween both promotes self-expression and externalizes the gay culture for everyone to see. A costume allows people to show off their personality, and then be noticed and discuss their preferences in conversation. The masquerade becomes empowerment, offering a chance for people to inhabit what society often ignores.

Costumes also refocus attention on the craftsmanship behind fashion. Heidi Klum’s metamorphoses take hours of prosthetics and special effects; they require planning, detailed assembly, and expertise. Hand-painted by fifteen individuals, her most recent Medusa costume took five months to execute, with repeated rounds of trial and error by sculptors, fabricators, and special-effects artists. Animatronic snakes, eerie green contact lenses, and razor-sharp acrylic teeth integrate technology with artistry. What makes Halloween so special is its collectivity: the mass costume display on our streets.

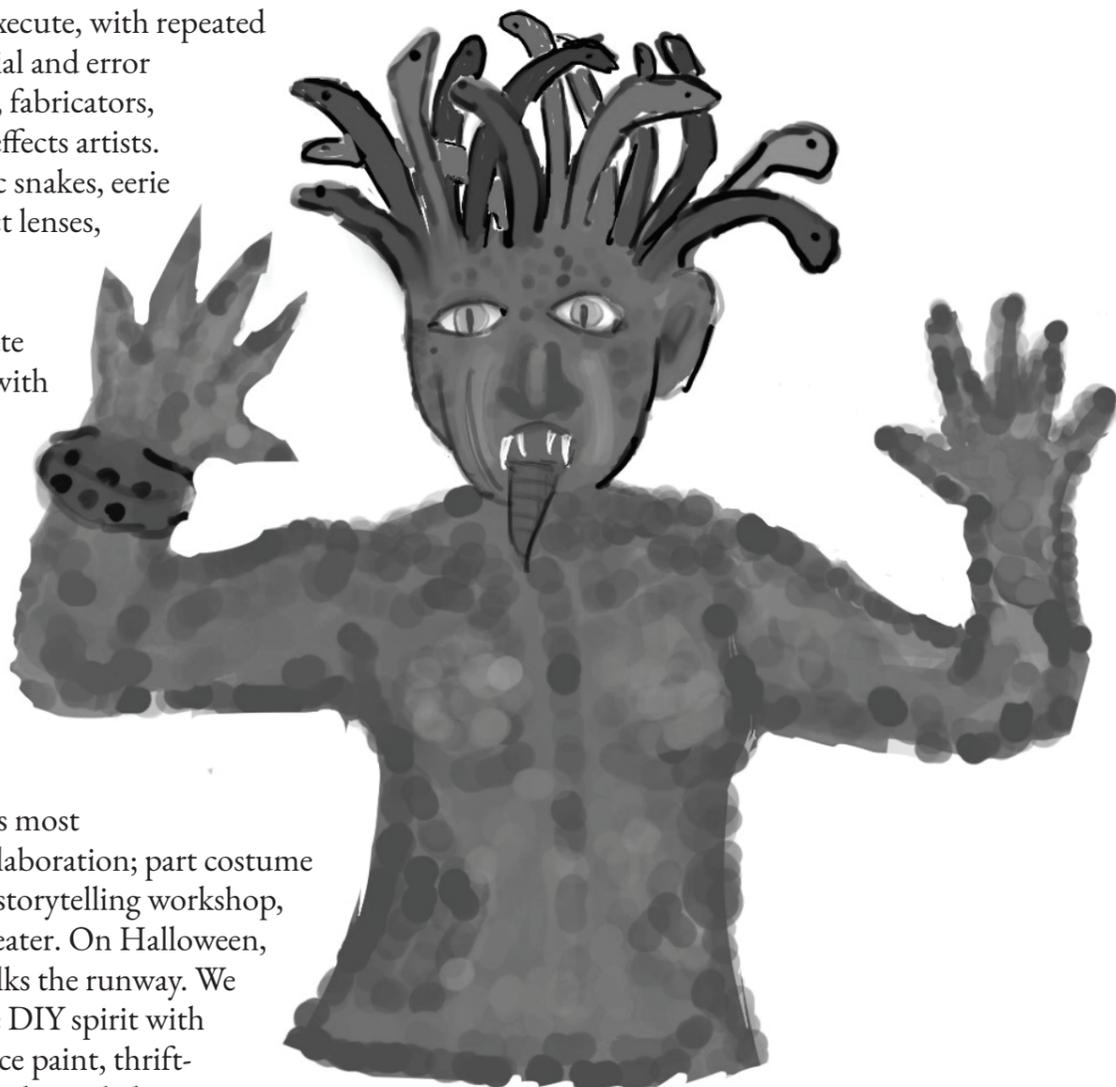
It is fashion’s most inclusive collaboration; part costume design, part storytelling workshop, part civic theater. On Halloween, everyone walks the runway. We celebrate the DIY spirit with duct tape, face paint, thrift-store tulle, and recycled

objects. The aesthetics vary—blood, sequins, latex, plastic, inflatables—but the intent is consistent: to try being something else, even if only for a night.

There’s something hopeful about this. The simple act of stepping into someone else’s body is, at heart, an expression of empathy and a desire to understand through intent and imitation. Fashion, often accused of being insular or sterile, need not be so. Halloween restores its wild heart, reminding us that fashion is always about the fun of dressing up. Our clothes are costumes, and identity itself is a performance requiring effort and imagination. The night’s visual cacophony reveals fashion stripped of pretension and returned to its pure function: self-expression and transformation. Beneath the glimmer and gore, Halloween suggests that the freedom to look absurd is, ultimately, the freedom to be human.

**CLORIS SHI '29 (CLORISSHI@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) DRESSED UP AS A GOAT, A PART OF A TRIO COSTUME OF THE MONTY HALL PROBLEM.**

**GRAPHIC BY KELLY TUNG '28**







# College Students Need to Reprioritize Their Sleep, and Here's Why

In the face of school work, extracurricular activities, and a social life, sleep should not be sacrificed.

BY SONIA SINGH '29

When I thought my sleep schedule in high school couldn't get worse, I was wrong. As a junior, I could easily run on five hours of sleep like a champ.

My average day in high school looked something like this...

7:45 a.m.: get ready

9 a.m.-4 p.m.: school

4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.: sports practice

7:30 a.m.-12:30 a.m.: dinner, shower, homework

5:30 a.m.: wake up and finish the rest of my work.

Rinse and repeat.

Admittedly, my old routine was not the healthiest for a high school student—but worked for me. When I arrived on campus this fall, I assumed college life would finally bring me more time: fewer classes in a day, no after-school practices, more flexibility. But, somehow, I still feel like I am constantly playing catch-up. Between homework, club meetings, and late-night conversations with friends, it often feels like I am right back where I started.

However, I have learned that sacrificing sleep doesn't help me get more done. Research shows that it actually does the opposite; it weakens memory, causes trouble with decision-making and problem-solving, and slows down one's ability to finish tasks. While this feels intuitive, getting enough sleep remains a persistent struggle, not only for me, but for much of the student population. From drooping eyes in classrooms to heads resting on open laptops in Widener, it is clear that I am not the only one struggling with this challenge.

A late-night walk through Cabot library makes it clear. Students hunch over desks, grinding out p-sets in the Math Question Center until 10:30 p.m. before heading to Brain Break for snacks and caffeine to fuel the long night ahead. By 4 a.m., some are slumped over their desks, while others are still typing furiously. The campus never sleeps. With a culture that breeds overcommitment, between packed course loads, social pressures, and extracurricular deadlines, prioritizing rest at Harvard is often not the default decision.

The truth is, most of us know sleep is important, but we just don't act like it. In an environment brimming with ambitious students balancing coursework, extracurriculars, and social lives, it is easy to push rest to the bottom of the list. I am well versed in prolonging my excuse: in high school, I told myself college would be

different. Now, I tell myself things will slow down after midterms or once a big project is over. Yet, I still find myself awake at 2 a.m. working on the next "most important" thing. The more I wait for things to slow down, the more I realize that time for rest won't appear on its own.

College is where we begin forming habits that follow us into adulthood. A healthy sleep schedule won't magically appear when life gets easier; it is something we have to intentionally make space for amid the chaos. To do that, it helps to understand what sleep actually does for us.

For college students like myself, it is easy to fall prey to the belief that staying awake a little longer means getting more done. But that mindset actually ignores what sleep does for us. Before the 1950s, many believed that sleep was a passive state when the mind essentially "turned off." But Professor Robert Stickgold at the Harvard Medical School explains that "nothing could be further from the truth." Sometimes, our brains are more active when we are asleep than when we are awake. Sleep occurs in cycles, with four main stages per cycle: three non-REM sleep stages, followed by one stage of REM sleep. During non-REM sleep, brain waves slow as heart rate and breathing drop to their lowest levels. Then, in REM sleep, the brain becomes highly active, stabilizing the skills and information learned throughout the day. For college students constantly taking in new material, that matters. Sleep allows our brains to process and sort through information in ways we can't when we are awake. Still, around 70% of college students get insufficient sleep.

From my experience so far, college has been about constantly learning to balance work, a social life, exercise, and rest. Coming in as a freshman, I have tried to say "yes" to every opportunity. But as I am slowly settling in, I have learned that to maintain my sanity, I have to make daily tradeoffs about how I spend my time. If I want eight

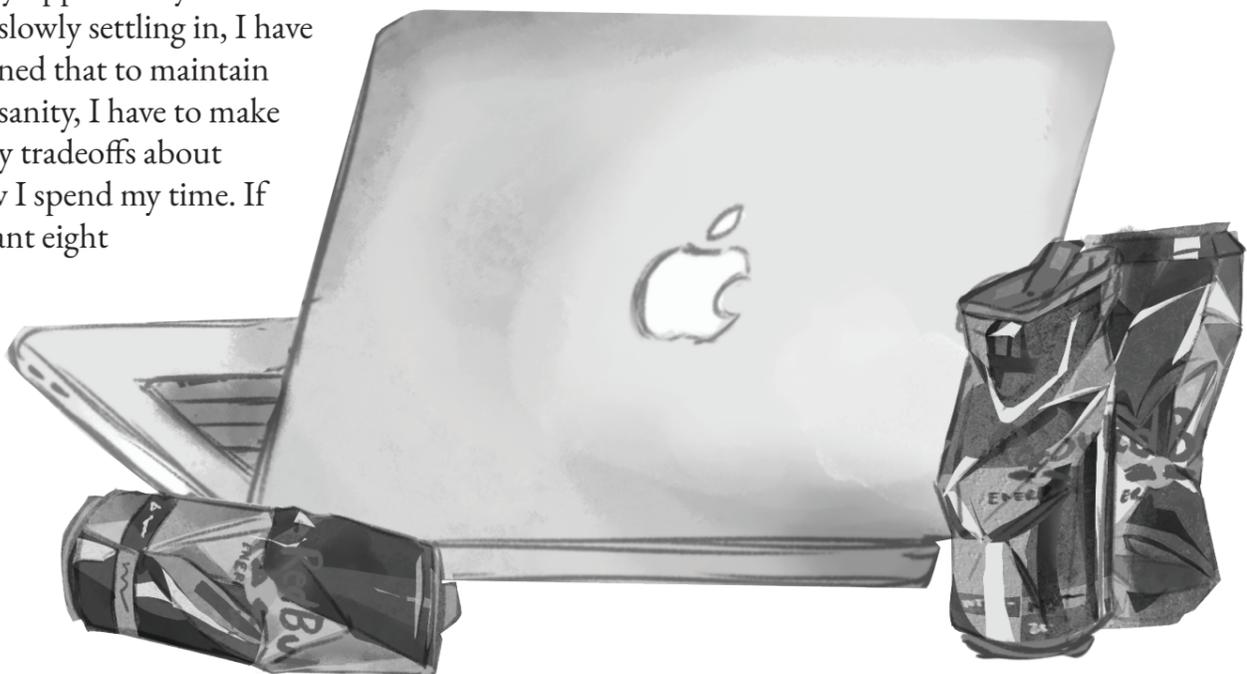
hours of rest, I might need to skip a morning workout. If I decide to run, I might have to say no to hanging out with friends. Oftentimes, saying "no" to one thing means saying "yes" to something else.

For students trying to say "yes" to rest, I have found that small changes make a big difference. On some nights, it works to schedule sleep like an academic commitment. Other times, I group my work into blocks so that I am not constantly jumping between tasks, or I set a cutoff time for checking my email at night. While no method is fool-proof, trying to start good sleep habits now will help you stay physically and mentally healthy in the long run. With only so many hours in a day, learning to protect time for rest is one of life's most valuable skills.

As Assistant Professor Lawrence J. Epstein at the Harvard Medical School reminds us, "We need to rethink how we prioritize sleep. It is one of the basic building blocks of good health." Sleeping well and making time for rest is something I'm still learning, but I already see how much it impacts my focus, my physical health, and my overall well-being. Some lessons are worth relearning again and again: fixing your sleep schedule isn't about waiting until you have more time; it's about learning how to reprioritize the time you already have.

**SONIA SINGH '29 (SONIASINGH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EXCITED TO GET A GOOD NIGHT OF SLEEP TONIGHT.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHAU NGUYEN '29**



# Falling Back, Falling Apart

We should think twice about the bi-annual switch between daylight saving and standard time.

BY SEYI AMOSUN '29



It's time we fix the time.

Each year, on the first Sunday of November, most Americans turn back the clock and relish an extra hour of sleep as we “fall back” to Standard Time, marking the end of Daylight Saving Time until March rolls around.

Though our Halloweekends were blessed with an extra hour of fun, the long-term consequences far outweigh the short-term perks. I'm dreading the 5:30 p.m. walk home after my Thursday section, trudging through the pitch-black evening after an absurdly early sunset. Personally, I detest the annual switch back to Standard Time and the inconvenience of alternating between different time zone systems.

Ben Franklin famously mused about the benefits of waking and sleeping early, yet I can't help but disagree. My days often begin at nine or 10 in the morning, due in part to Harvard's practice of scheduling classes at 9:00 a.m. instead of 8:00 a.m.; many of my peers share a similar experience. Clubs, classes, sports, and parties often keep us awake well past midnight.

College students' unique schedules make the time change all the more difficult. In fact, this change runs directly against our bodies' natural rhythms. According to the National Institutes of Health, adolescents and young adults are biologically disposed to sleep and wake later than older adults and children. With more sunlight earlier in the morning, we're caught between conflicting forces: our schedules, our biology, and the sun.

While we're encouraged to adjust our sleep schedules and use the “extra” hour to catch up on rest, disruptions to our circadian rhythms linger, regardless of whether we gain or lose an hour. It's not just about sleep schedules: this dysregulation has various health implications, including worsened mood disorders, weakened immune systems, and increased reliance on sleep supplements like melatonin. It also affects cognition, threatening mental concentration and academic performance.

On a federal level, time changes are a recurring source of contention. In 2022, the Senate passed the Sunshine Protection Act, which would make Daylight Saving Time permanent nationwide, but it stalled in the House. In 2024, then President-elect Donald Trump pivoted course, announcing plans to eliminate DST permanently, citing inconvenience and economic inefficiency.

This controversy isn't new. Daylight saving is commonly thought to have originated from farmers' desires to have more daylight for fieldwork. However, the true nature of the time change is more strategic: the U.S. passed the Standard Time Act in 1918 as a measure to conserve energy in World War I. Following the law's 1919 repeal, time-change enforcement was inconsistent across cities and states. This persisted for decades until Congress finally passed the Uniform Time Act in 1966, which established consistent dates for switching between daylight saving and standard time.

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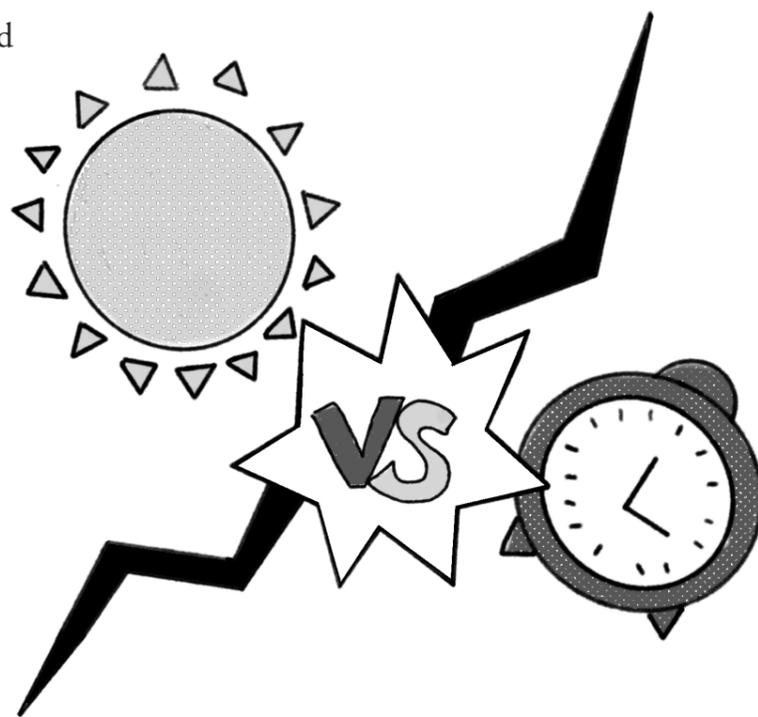
As college students, I believe the time change has unique effects on our lives. Living in Cambridge, our earliest sunsets will occur before 4:30 p.m., which is essentially the middle of our days. Coupled with the colder weather, it discourages us from spending more time outdoors and in community with one another. Staying locked in our dorms as the nights grow darker threatens Harvard's already shaky social scene.

A common defense of the annual switch between times is tradition: we're used to it; it's part of the rhythm of the year. But maybe it's time to reevaluate old habits. Our world has evolved past the wartime era of 1918. Twenty-four-hour businesses, modern technology, and flexible work schedules show that life has progressed, and our clocks should, too.

Some traditions are worth keeping for continuity's sake. But in this case, the twice-yearly change only reminds us that we can't even agree on what time it is. DST breeds confusion, fatigue, and frustration—habits worth letting go of.

Then again, maybe the problem isn't time itself. Modern society is ruled by the clock—the classic nine-to-five structure that keeps our lives tethered to work. We've learned to treat time as a fixed measure rather than something we can live with flexibly. Historically, humans followed the seasons: longer summer hours, shorter winter workdays, time structured around daylight rather than the clock. Somewhere along the way, we lost that rhythm. Without the ability to capitalize on the limited winter daylight, we unintentionally invite seasonal depression and less time outdoors.

Eliminating the time change would be a first step toward reclaiming control of our time, letting human nature, not policy, dictate our schedules. If daylight saving has taught us anything, it's that time is more fluid than we think. Change can happen if we decide it should.



Still, even today, states remain divided. Hawaii and most of Arizona remain on Standard Time year-round, while 19 other states have passed legislation to permanently observe Daylight Saving Time, pending congressional approval that has yet to come.

With such inconsistencies, it's no wonder the time change sparks chaos every year. Between airports, shift workers, emergency services, and tech systems, resetting the clock invites miscommunication and logistical headaches. This is exacerbated by the era of global scheduling and digital infrastructure.

Beyond the large-scale grievances, it's simply irritating on a personal level. My micro-fridge is the only clock I've had to adjust this year, but I think of the dozens my family must change back at home: the microwave, the oven, the analog clocks on the walls. It takes time to fix them all. Multiply that by millions of households nationwide, and we're wasting countless collective hours—the very ones we are meant to be “saving”—on this outdated

**SEYI AMOSUN '29 (SAMOSUN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) CAN'T WAIT FOR THE DAYS TO GET LONGER AFTER THE WINTER SOLSTICE.**

**GRAPHIC BY CHRISTY ZEMBROWSKI '28**

# A Love Letter to Bedrotting

The art of bedrotting and the relationship we have with it.

BY AUDREY WU '29

In the midst of late-night Lamont sessions and 9 a.m. lectures, I find myself returning more and more to the one thing that is always there for me when I need it the most: the longest and most stable relationship I have ever had—bedrotting. A phrase popularized through TikTok, bedrotting involves spending extended periods of time in bed while engaging in passive, thoughtless activities such as watching TV or scrolling online.

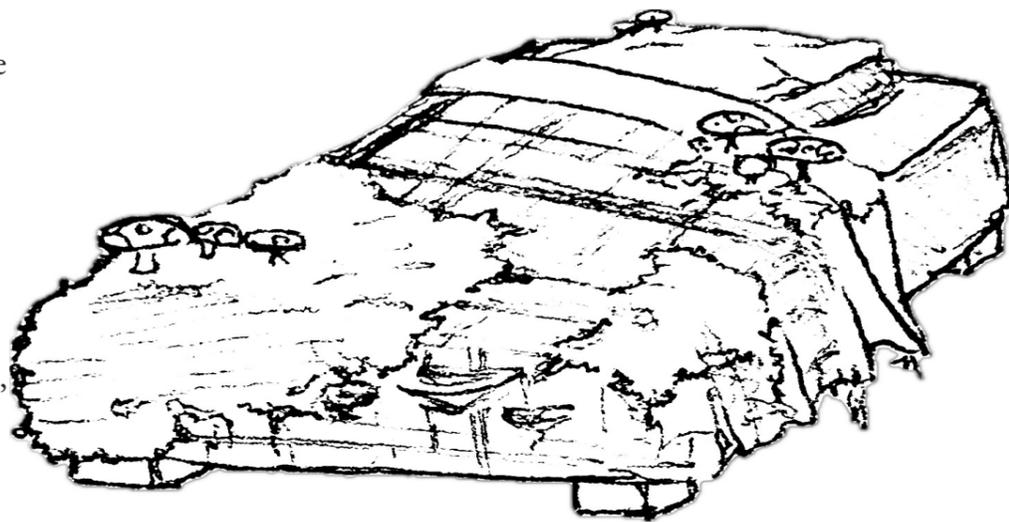
Our honeymoon phase started around seventh grade during the pandemic. When there was no need to leave our rooms or get out of bed, I started to appreciate the intricate art of bedrotting, which, when balanced carefully with other activities, can be a beautiful way of decompressing and taking care of yourself. While bedrotting can sometimes be a clingy and overbearing partner, we are now learning to set our boundaries. Bedrotting is the friend you call after a breakup, the companion who comforts you after a loss, and the one who promises to care for you in sickness (surrounded by tissues and cough drops) and in health (as you snooze your alarm for the tenth time on Monday morning).

How could you say no to a few hours spent in the warmth of your comforter, the softness of your pillows, and the background hum of Instagram reels or trashy television? There is a simple joy in being still, having nowhere you need to be—nowhere but your bed. After a long day, it is hard to find motivation for something “productive” like working on an essay, a p-set, or going to the gym. Sometimes, you just need a moment to lie in bed and unwind, reminding yourself that you deserve to rest after working for so long.

Like all loves, bedrotting can turn toxic when it takes up too much of your time. It is addictive to want to never leave your bed, especially as the weather grows colder and fall fades into winter. Seasonal depression makes it even harder to find motivation, to get up,

to go out, to attend class. Bedrotting becomes dangerous when it consumes you. Napping, scrolling, or binge-watching are not harmful when done in moderation, but because they give your brain a break, it is tempting to only do these things, creating a cycle of falling behind, falling asleep, and falling into bad habits.

It is a domino effect most of us have experienced. Social media has turned bedrotting into a generational phenomenon, so that even after the pandemic and life returned to normalcy, emotional exhaustion and burnout remained. Social media plays both a negative and positive role in how we view bedrotting. It glorifies grind culture and normalizes rest-free days through “day in a



life” videos, for example. However, it has also led people to normalize rest and self-care.

Social media can also play a role in the toxicity of too much bedrotting. You tell yourself you will spend five more minutes on Instagram or TikTok. When your screen-time limit pops up, you mindlessly press “remind me in 15 minutes.” 15 minutes turns into an hour, and suddenly you have spent an hour doing nothing. You finally put your phone down and go to sleep, only for your alarm to ring five hours later. Exhausted, you skip your morning lecture to stay in bed, indulging yourself because it feels so good in the moment. Many of us, myself included, do not realize when the relationship has turned toxic—it still feels comforting, even as it quietly drains us. We focus on the pleasure of our bed and forget the cost of too much time spent in it.

So how do we find balance? Individuals at and beyond Harvard find it difficult to admit that bedrotting might be a guilty

pleasure. With overflowing G-Cals and overdue assignments, students rush from one commitment to the next without a pause. The perfect balance of rest and work looks different for everyone, but it is important to trust yourself, to know when to pause and when to restart. Because of our campus’s bustling culture, it is important to give more attention to tending to ourselves through the art of bedrotting and prioritizing self-care.

Some may argue that bedrotting is a waste of time. I would argue the opposite: it is your body’s way of telling you to rest. It is never a waste to recharge by doing something mindless. Spending half an hour, or even an hour, bedrotting can leave you far more energized and productive afterward. Instead of fighting sleep while forcing yourself to work, spend that hour in bed, under the covers, doing whatever makes you feel good and rested. You will emerge rejuvenated and ready to face the day.

While our relationship has had its ups and downs, I have learned to make time and space for bedrotting amidst the busyness of everyday life.

Bedrotting has taught me a simple yet underappreciated truth: you are allowed to take time for yourself. You do not always have to be doing something just because everyone else is. You can take a pause. Consider this your gentle reminder: you deserve to find love and rest, and you may just find both in the art of bedrotting.

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

**GRAPHIC BY CALEB BOYCE '29**

# ARTS

## Sleeping in the Shoes of Harvard Students

How do others' sleep schedules and routines compare?

BY KALVIN FRANK '28 AND SONIA SINGH '29

With the demanding academic and extracurricular schedules of many Crimson undergraduates, one might wonder: how much sleep do Harvard students actually get? To answer this question, we asked twenty students across Harvard's campus to keep a sleep journal for a school week smack dab in the middle of two major midterm seasons and compiled their responses below. From an "ROTC Student Athlete" who wakes up before sunrise to a "Chill Student" who falls asleep as the sun rises, how do our nights compare—and what does that say about life at Harvard across different class years, majors, and extracurricular participation?

### Day 1, Monday-Tuesday:

Monday was a restless night for most of our sleep journalists. Our anonymous "Chill Student" started his sleep at 4 a.m. after chugging an energy drink in Lamont and popping melatonin to force a crash. The next morning, he admitted to feeling "tired" after only five hours of sleep.

The night wasn't much longer for the "Crypto Queen." After going to bed at 11 p.m., she woke up at 4 a.m. Her reason? "Euro jetlag from crypto side event."

Clocking the lowest sleep of the night was the "ROTC Student Athlete." They stated they had a p-set due in the morning, so they stayed up until 12:45 a.m., only to wake up for ROTC a few hours later at 4:45 a.m. The athlete described that they "woke up scared," and "so fucking tired." Despite clocking a solid four-hour night, they were able to squeeze a post-ROTC 9:40-10 a.m. nap.

Others had more structured sleep schedules. Our "Track Student Athlete" clocked in seven hours after finishing their homework. Meanwhile, our "Social Sophomore" watched the World Series go into 18 innings before calling it a night around 12:45 a.m. "We hit the sheets at inning eleven," they wrote. The next day, they rolled into a language oral exam around 8 a.m., still thinking about the game.

### Day 2, Tuesday-Wednesday:

After Tuesday morning, some of our journalists seemed to have forgotten to update their journals. Despite this, many remained dedicated writers. "Pickle God," for instance, shared: "Went to sleep at midnight, woke up at 8:30 a.m." They must be a person of few words, but we're glad they got their optimal eight hours of sleep.

The "Business King" didn't have much to share, stating: "Went to be at 4 a.m., work up at 8 a.m., and had a one-hour nap during the day." We might have to get some spell check on that journal, but in the interest of quality reporting, we must share it as written.

Our "ROTC Student Athlete" managed to beat their four-hour slumber on Monday night with three hours and 45 minutes of sleep on Tuesday. But caffeine pouches came to their rescue. They shared, "Had two caffeine pouches during lab, it helped the sleepiness."

Once again, the "Social Sophomore" had a busy night before bed. They shared, "Had dinner with a few adults and had two glasses of wine... Played pool until 11 p.m., and sat and chatted with my friends until 12 a.m. Played two games of Clash Royale before sleeping at around 12:30 a.m." He had a solid night of sleep before waking up at 9 a.m. for class.

On the other hand, the "Studious Freshman" found herself "locked-in" in Cabot until 3 a.m. Though her entry doesn't sound very "locked" or "studious," with her stating, "I had to lock in at Cabot, then I watched a movie and scrolled on my phone for around an hour and a half." Luckily, she managed to get six hours of rest, waking up at 9 a.m.

Finally, our "Artsy Student" wrote in their journal: "Tuesday, I was up late in the lab printing and editing for photography class. I got around seven hours of sleep and did not feel super well-rested in the morning, so I drank a Redbull to get me through the day."

### Day 3, Wednesday-Thursday:

By day three, our pool of reporters had noticeably shrunk to around nine students. Maybe some forgot to write, or maybe the mid-week fatigue got in the way, but regardless, the few who remained captured the slow creep of the week's exhaustion settling in.

The "ROTC Student Athlete" posted a record five hours on this night. Despite getting a stunning night of sleep, they still reported they "felt kind of groggy at practice today."

The "Social Sophomore" shared that "It was a late night. I had something I needed to memorize for a long time, so I went to sleep at like 1 a.m." They also reported that the next day was rough because "Couldn't play Clash [Royale] in the morning, so my equilibrium was off the whole day."

The "Crypto Queen" took a break from their finances to do a "p-set :( " for class. That was the only description, but on the bright side, they got a full night of rest, sleeping from midnight to 8 a.m.

### Day 4, Thursday-Friday:

By the end of the week, our pool of

reporters had dwindled to only five individuals. With the weekend on the horizon, most seemed ready to drop the homework, forget the alarms, and finally relax with friends.

Our "Party Animal" went to bed at 1:30 a.m. because they "had a friend sleep over," which they noted was "bad for [their] quality of sleep." A good night of company seemed to win over the need for rest.

The "Artsy Student" explained, "Thursday night I saw some friends, so I stayed up pretty late. I was able to sleep in on Friday morning, though, because I didn't have class until late in the day. I had a coffee to get me through class." A long night and a Red Bull had turned into a long morning and a coffee, which feels like progress.

### Day 5, Friday-Saturday:

By Friday night, only three students were still keeping a journal. And all three seemed ready for the weekend.

The "ROTC Student Athlete" stayed up until 1:30 a.m. watching a movie and hanging out with friends. They were soon up again at 8:10 a.m. for a passport appointment, then crashed for an hour nap after practice.

The "ROTC Warrior" went to a party and didn't get to bed until 2:30 a.m., finally catching up on sleep with a later wake-up at 10:30 a.m. They rated their sleep accordingly: "Restfulness: 7/10."

Our "Studious Freshman" wrote simply that they went to bed around 3 a.m.—no notes, simply another late night.

That just about sums up our school week of journal entries. Regardless of whether the journals reveal more about how students manage their time or how little sleep they can run on, they gave us a glimpse of how different Harvard nights really are. From the "Social Sophomore" staying up with friends to the "Crypto Queen" recovering from their financial events, everyone seems to find their own balance between rest and everything else demanding their time. This willingness to sacrifice sleep to complete other tasks is a unifying factor among many students. From p-sets to side projects to social plans, most students choose to sacrifice sleep and hope to make up for it later. The question that lingers is: why are people so willing to sacrifice their rest? It is a pattern that feels both exhausting and far too common among these students. You can tell a lot about a person from how they sleep, and maybe even more from their ability (or lack thereof) to journal it.

**KALVIN FRANK '28 (KFRANK@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS GLAD NO ONE ASKED HIM TO REPORT HIS LACK OF SLEEP SCHEDULE. SONIA SINGH '29 (SONIASINGH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS HOPING TO GET A FULL NIGHT OF REST TONIGHT.**

**GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29**



# The Uninvited Party Guests

The ghosts that keep me up at night.

BY PAIGE CORNELIUS '28

I lie wide-eyed in the dark, praying for sleep that will never come. The soft hum of my fan echoes across the walls while the night bus horn pierces the 2 a.m. stillness. The room looks unchanged. A few pieces of clothing remain scattered across the floor, and half-eaten cookies stare back at me from my desk. My mess—usually causing no harm—suffocates me. Every paper that's not lined at a perfect right angle, every water bottle with one sip left, makes my room feel crowded, like there's no space for me to rest inside of it.

The air begins to feel heavier, as if the room itself is trying to breathe. To soothe my inevitable anxiety, I begin to count sheep. One sheep, two sheep, and onwards until the words devolve to mere sounds, making me question language in its entirety.

I try a new strategy. I will my mind blank, but every thought finds a way to creep in. It begins with the ordinary stressors, nothing I can't manage. Upcoming tasks, the essay I procrastinated, questions I suddenly need answers to. With every new fragmented mental image, the thoughts spiral. The friend I never texted back... am I a bad person? The call I promised to make... am I a disappointing daughter? I never feel more alone than at this haunting hour. My eyes trace the ceiling in the dark, envisioning tally marks of my life's mistakes and regrets.

The longer I stay awake, the less the room feels like my own. It feels like a space that I've lost control over, like a slumber party I didn't want to throw. The guest list sits with me in the dark, patiently waiting for their time in the light.

At first, they arrive quietly. The closed door becomes transparent, allowing the uninvited guests to make themselves at home. They enter through memories, not footsteps. Manifestations of my mind.

The first guest sits criss-crossed at the foot of my bed. Even in the dark, I recognize her; when I move, she follows. Her hair is thicker than mine, her nail beds intact, but she carries the same blanket—Boppy. She's wearing the pajamas I outgrew years ago, the ones I got on Christmas Eve. She speaks to me, her voice too pure, her eyes too full of innocence to see me at this hour. I fight back tears.

She asks me what books I'm reading, what poems I'm writing. I tell her I'm too tired for those things now, that I'm busy with work and more important tasks. Still, her eyes light up when I mention Harvard. "You're at the best school in the world? That's so cool!" I yearn to tell her that it is,

that she should be so excited, but the words don't come. She doesn't see it yet, that pride has turned into pressure. She tilts her head. "Why are you up so late if you're tired?" I realize my excuse of exhaustion doesn't make sense to a girl who falls asleep as soon as her head hits the pillow. I don't want to scare her. She doesn't need to know yet that in ten years' time, insomnia will make her dread the witching hour—the hour when the mind stays loud long after the world has gone quiet.

The presence on my bed shifts, that version of me gone for good. I feel sturdy arms wrap around my back, holding the front of my stomach. I let myself melt into the familiarity, momentarily. The warmth, the steadiness, the feeling of being home. My body knows who my next guest is before my mind does.



The ghost of a boy I once thought I'd grow old with begins to speak. He says something about right person, wrong time, but I don't believe in that. Time is an inescapable construct; we are meant to adapt to it. I let him talk anyway, because I'm so tired of fighting. My voice would not reach him even if I tried. When he's finished, the smell of his cologne lingers on my bed sheets. The scent of empty promises and begging for love lures me toward my next guest.

Forced to continue my night as the puppeteer of memories past, I spot long hair waterfalling down my desk chair. Her legs are crossed, shoulders back, as she rhythmically types away as if her keyboard were a piano. I recognize her, but her name escapes me.

"You're behind," she says. Not in a cruel way, but matter-of-fact. It stings all the same. She offers to help with my p-set, even to clean my room. Of course, she's nice too, I think. I peer past her toned back to the glowing screen. She switches between

her color-coded Google Calendar and an assignment due in two weeks.

I resent her for how composed she is, how organized. I loathe her 4.0 GPA and thriving social life. I despise that her stomach doesn't hurt and her head doesn't pound. I envy her for the same reasons. Maybe she isn't the girl I pass in the dining hall or who I spot across the lecture hall. Maybe she's me—or rather, who I want to be. The seemingly impossible version of myself that would finally feel content. I want to tell her I'm doing enough, but the words wouldn't sound convincing. I want to say that I have it all together, but the late-night spiral proves otherwise. The world is too quiet to distract me from myself.

I continue sitting in silence, waiting for another guest to make their presence known, but no one does. The hum of my fan returns to my consciousness. Light creeps through the blinds. The air still feels crowded, but it feels different now. Everyone has left, or maybe was never here at all. The child, the boy, the girl at the desk, they did not show up uninvited. I created them—figments of my imagination, playing dress-up in the dark.

It seems that the last guest is a mere underlying presence. It doesn't take bodily form, but has a persona just as large. The future—a weight that hovers out of sight, still pressing down on me. It was always there, whispering what-ifs. The questions start small, but they never stop there. Will I find rest? Will I ever be enough for someone? Will I be happy?

The party quiets, the guests dissolve into the air. I will clean up the mess they made in the morning. For now, I watch as sunlight creeps in under my blinds, washing away the lingering thoughts on the walls. I breathe in the calm, and for the first time in hours, I am by myself.

When the morning comes, I hold the truths the uninvited left within me. Maybe I will sleep tomorrow.

**PAIGE CORNELIUS '28  
(PAIGECORNELIUS@COLLEGE.  
HARVARD.EDU) IS NOT THIS BAD  
OF AN INSOMNIAC.**

**GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE  
AFIHENE '27**

# Thoughts from New Quincy: Hydrotrope

Seasons of a single stem.

BY LUKE WAGNER '26

**A**t the river's edge, a single stem divides the current. Its roots grip the narrow seam between concrete and clay, where the residue of the city collects—rust, pollen, glass dust, fragments of old coins. Gnats hover above the water in small, quivering loops. A film of oil drifts past, breaking the reflection into bruised color. The mud smells mineral and sweet, like rain caught in iron. Each ripple carries silt against the roots, polishing them smooth. Beneath the surface, bottles roll against stone, their edges knocking softly like teeth.

Morning comes as a pale wash of light crawling through fog. The air is damp enough to taste. Far off, a train crosses the bridge, its rumble arriving through the ground before its sound reaches the ear. The vibration trembles through the water, through the stem itself. The light strengthens gradually—first pale gold, then white—touching every wet surface with the same indifferent hand. The stem leans toward it, slow and exact, rehearsing the same movement that has kept it alive.

The river beside is half reflection, half forgetting. On clear days, it behaves like mercury; on others, silk. What looks smooth from above is fissured beneath, filled with sediment that remembers every tide. At the meeting point of current and silt, even a small tremor stirs a leaf lifted briefly into light before sinking again.

Light moves across the surface in brief, trembling shapes of gold. Every flicker translates—sky to wave, wave to stem, stem to shadow. Beyond the river bend, the path fills with motion: the steady percussion of runners' feet, the soft whirr of bicycle chains, the distant shimmer of a bell marking the hour. Traffic moves across the bridge in slow, even waves, its sound thinning as it falls towards the water.

Each noise reaches the water changed—thinner, slower, translated by distance into rhythm. The river listens without reply, absorbing every vibration until it becomes a single, continuous note. Nothing is kept or lost; only rewritten.

By noon, the color of the day thickens. The light no longer drifts, but presses. Heat gathers on the river's surface until it quivers like glass in the wind. Shadows tighten around the roots, and the ground hums faintly with warmth.

On the surface, light falls through the membrane, scattering into green. Invisible apertures pulse with the air, drinking what the city exhales: carbon, oxygen, vapor—each particle caught in the choreography of need. The leaf trembles as it works, its veins pulsing with the slow arithmetic of transformation. Photosynthesis: the oldest dialogue between stillness and desire, between what reaches and what receives.

Every second, the plant converts the city's breath into something clean.

Above, the bridge drops its shadow in precise intervals. Cyclists flash across it in colors that disappear. To them, the river is background, not body. Still, beneath their reflection, the

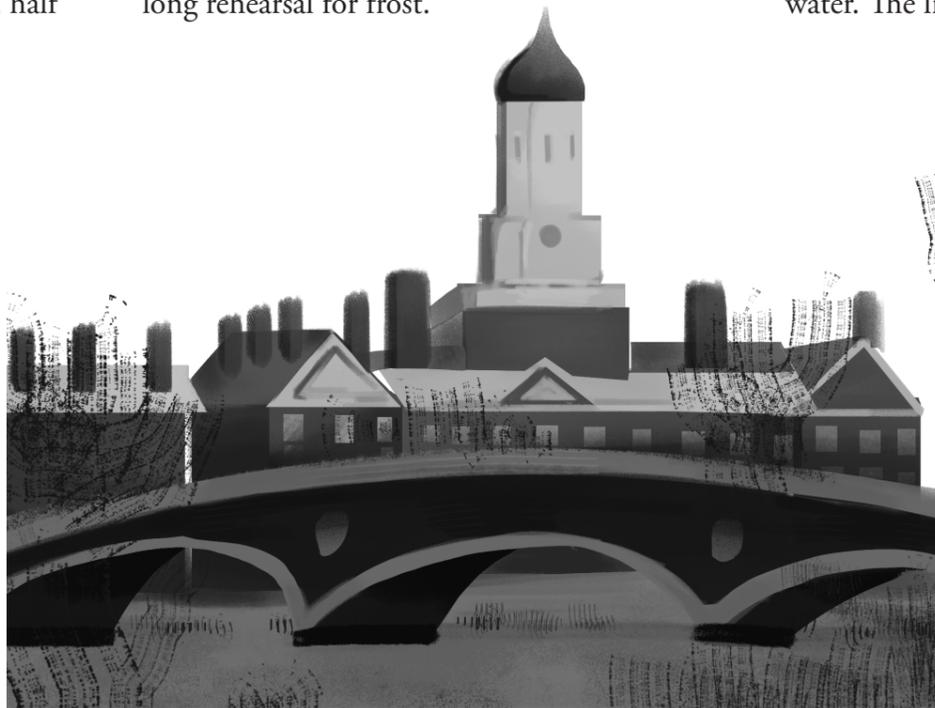
bridge trembles. Every structure carries its ruin inside its image.

I have no seasons, only temperatures of light. The river brightens when the city does—its glow borrowed from windows, from wires, from the sky's own reflection. Algae bloom and vanish in rhythm with this electricity, a second photosynthesis feeding what should be dark.

When rain begins, it sounds like language before meaning, each drop a percussion against the leaf and surface. The river rises slightly, greedy for more. Water slides down each vein, tracing its memory of gravity.

Evening enters by reflection, not color. The skyline liquefies into its own echo until the city and surface become one quivering plane. Artificial light moves impatiently. It can be absorbed but never kept.

For a moment, the city loses focus—buildings blur into color, glass unspooling into orange, blue, and silver light. Architecture becomes reflection, indistinct and weightless. Then the water settles, and edges return. Stillness resumes, as if composition were the river's instinct. The air cools, and the river begins its long rehearsal for frost.



Ice crawls from the banks, sealing the current until it forgets to move. The air sharpens to a thin, colorless blue; even sound turns brittle. The wind moves in thin, splintered melodies, like glass under pressure. Even echoes freeze before they form.

The light has no warmth now, only sharpened clarity. It falls straight through the bare branches and lands on the ice in clean outlines. Frost webs the concrete, each pattern vanishing the moment it's noticed. Beneath the surface, the stem endures—a pulse beneath glass, slow as breathing in sleep. Its roots tighten in the cold mud, sensing motion more than making it. Even frozen, it listens.

Above the frozen skin, the city quiets—the hum of traffic flattened, footsteps swallowed by snow. Steam rises where birds once moved. Light hardens into a reflective blade; ice returns it perfectly, a canvas of precision. Some mornings, the surface seals each detail in transparency. Beneath it, the current moves. Still, the water breathes.

Thaw begins with sound: ice cracks into water. The river releases its hold. Fragments drift downstream, catching light in cold flashes. Color returns without warmth—green silt, brown sediment, a strip of yellow plastic lodged

in the reeds. The surface arranges itself into a collage: bottle caps, feathers, branches, wrappers, each held briefly in harmony before dispersing. Sunlight moves across them, turning waste to shimmer.

Along the bank, new shoots push through the mud. They do not wait for purity; they grow through residue, feeding on what the city leaves behind. To live here is to metabolize contamination—to turn what's thrown away into the texture of renewal. Each leaf that opens is both inheritance and repair.

By spring, the bank gathers its debris again: plastic, paper, nylon threads, a bright array of persistence. Against the litter, new shoots push through, their color too bright for the dirt that feeds them.

The river paints over itself endlessly. Yesterday's skyline blurs into the water; light and debris mix into a new color. Branches drag lines across the surface, breaking reflections into strokes. Each ripple redraws the edge between river and shore.

At dusk, when the city softens into its own reflection, a final warmth lingers along the water. The light bends sideways, gilding what

endures. In that hour, reflection and form dissolve into one another. The difference between above and below ceases to matter. Light bends on the surface until it can't decide which it belongs to.

Art begins in that confusion—when reflection turns real, and the river starts to paint back. The river and the plant make their own kind of work, reshaping what touches them and erasing what's left behind.

In that quiet, what remains unseen continues: the slow circulation of breath, the invisible labor of conversion, the patience that keeps the world from collapsing. Night folds the bank into darkness, and the exchange

continues—carbon into air, speed into rest, sound into silence.

Nothing concludes. The surface smooths itself, and what was once bright becomes background again.

The rhythm persists:  
to slow is not to stop,  
to remain is not to fade,  
to breathe is to begin again.

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

**GRAPHIC BY CHAU NGUYEN '29**

# The Sweet Spot: Berryline's Rise to Virality

Berryline's recent boom in popularity has transformed it into a Cambridge staple.

BY PHILIPPOS ALEBACHEW '29

There are few experiences worth waiting in line for an hour: getting your driver's license at the DMV, soaring through Space Mountain at Disneyland, and seeing Tyler the Creator live in concert, to name a few. The hustle and bustle of 21st-century life has materialized the concept of time into a currency, so the few occasions one does have the extra time to spend recreationally, it can't be wasted. To use so much of that precious commodity to wait in line before even getting to the good stuff is the highest honor for any company—an honor Harvard Square's very own BerryLine can proudly flaunt.

Every night, in the calculations that maximize the enjoyment of our limited free time, dozens choose to stand in line at 3 Arrow St. for the chance to chow down on some non-fat, tart frozen yogurt. The quaint little store, nestled between a waffle shop and café, stands out as a splash of color in a sea of muted ones. If the vibrant doodles of personified frozen yogurt ingredients strewn across the front of the store don't immediately catch your eye, the herd of people wrapping around the sidewalk, converging at a little crowded room, most certainly will. While today BerryLine's reputation as the late-night dessert spot precedes itself, the underground shop's humble beginnings prove it was not always this way.

While friends Matthew (Matt) Wallace and Pok Yang, postdoctoral researchers at MIT and Harvard, respectively, were on the forefront of biochemistry research in the lab, they pioneered something else Massachusetts had yet to see—tart frozen yogurt. To realize their tangy dream, Wallace and Yang rented out an old massage parlor and transformed it into a space indicative of the same joy you get when digging into one of the over 150 flavors featured over the years. This “vibe” was accomplished with the help of other community members, like Boston-based artist Bren Bataclan, who has painted three of the iconic murals spread across the side of the store. While Yang has since left the business, Wallace has continued to help with the day-to-day operations since the store's opening in 2007.

“Matt comes in a lot; he's here all the time... Whenever there's a problem, he's one phone call away,” employee Eli Bartholomew said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. “I feel comfortable texting him or calling him—it's one of the best work environments I've ever been in, even though it gets super busy all the time. I know I'll be supported if something goes down, so I appreciate that.”

Students and Cambridge community members alike have enjoyed BerryLine's concoctions for the nearly two decades it's been open. But in the past year, the store's popularity has exploded, resulting in the now iconic long lines stretching outside the door. The cause? Word of mouth advertising and viral social media videos praising the shop's products—these two forms of promotion have turned BerryLine from a niche find you might see on a forum for underrated dessert spots to a

staple of the community people flock to every night.

Videos on TikTok from users like @lizeom, who claimed the shop was her “new fav froyo place,” and @katie\_hellmann, recognizing it as the “best frozen yogurt near Boston,” have collectively garnered over 660,000 views. Dozens of similar videos reviewing the froyo and capturing the aesthetics of the store are populated all across TikTok and Instagram. The “BerryLine” name, circulating between the residents of the greater Boston area, has cemented it as a must-visit stop for any tourists passing through Harvard Square.

Bartholomew, a Cambridge native, has witnessed this growth in popularity in real time. “My parents used to take me a lot because I used to go to the church right across the street, so that was my treat for going,” he said. “It was always students, but this time it's a lot more tourists. When I was a kid, like 10 [or] five... there was never a line that long—that went down the block.”



Sarah Berhan '28, a former employee of the store, noticed a similar trend. “BerryLine has always had extremely long lines, especially in the evenings. During my closing shifts, it was a rare occasion that I would have breaks between customers, as the line seemed to be never-ending,” Berhan wrote to the *Independent*.

“One thing I found is that many of the customers last year were consistent. Since its opening in 2006, BerryLine has made long-lasting relationships with families in the Cambridge area and has remained a staple for the Harvard community,” she continued. “It's further popularization this semester, I believe, has been largely due to TikTok exposure, bringing in customers from the Boston area who have never been to BerryLine before.”

The light-hearted, comforting aesthetic of the store, something the founders always emphasized, continues to act as a magnet for anyone passing by. The fun murals don't stop at the storefront; step inside, and you're greeted by playful sketches like a flying saucer abducting a cup

of froyo next to the sun wearing shades. The cozy feeling only grows when you're inside, helped by warm string lights draped across the ceiling—and by the fact that you are often shoulder to shoulder with other customers in the small space. Nearing the front of the line, you might glance to your left and spot a small counter lined with copies of our very own *Harvard Independent* newspaper, offering customers something to flip through while they savor their froyo or catch up with friends.

Of course, the real draw lies behind the counter. BerryLine's ever-evolving rotation of flavors, from classic tart and mango to specialties like lychee and Nutella, keeps even regulars coming back for more. To further show their dedication to customer satisfaction, they allow people to offer their own flavor suggestions directly on their website. Their toppings bar is equally beloved: fresh fruit, candy, sauces, and the toppings they make in-house let every visitor craft a cup to their taste. My “perfect cup” is the original flavor of tart yogurt topped with strawberries and their homemade Oreo cheesecake, the optimal combination of sweet, tart, and fruity flavors.

“They have more Asian inspired flavors—that appeals to me. The mochi topping is the big thing for me, [it's] why I come back.” Graduate School of Arts and Sciences student Annie Liu said in an interview with the *Independent*.

The new mochi topping, made in-house by bakers on staff, has become a fan favorite. When asked about the most popular topping, Bartholomew noted, “The mochi, 100%, it's extremely popular. I was making a joke with one of the people who works here, where I'd say 45% of the time someone comes in and they ask for an original with mochi and strawberries.”

BerryLine has become a cornerstone of Cambridge culture and a defining part of student life at Harvard. It's where generations of students have come to celebrate, de-stress, or just hang out after class. And while its popularity has spread beyond the Harvard bubble, drawing tourists and TikTok reviewers alike from all over Boston, its heart still belongs to the local community that built it.

So yes, the line might stretch down the block, but unlike a queue at the DMV, what waits at the end is a cup swirled with love, making it well worth the hour wait.

BerryLine is open from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays and 12 p.m. to 11 p.m. on weekends.

**PHILIPPOS ALEBACHEW '29 (PHILIPPOS.ALEBACHEW@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS GOING TO TRY TO SECURE A SPOT BEFORE THE LINE GETS TOO LONG.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF OSA UNUIGBE '29**

# The Indy's Sleep Guide

A how-to on enhancing sleep hygiene in your dorm so you can finally wake up feeling refreshed.

BY ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26

When did sleep deprivation become a badge of honor? Throughout secondary school, it was almost the norm for the most studious and eager of us to pull all-nighters, then champion them as signs of success the next morning. Earning high grades and leading student organizations was not a good enough consolation prize for these sleepless nights, nay—we needed to brag about how hard we were working to our friends, too. However, this pride taken in sleep-deprived “grinding” should dissipate in college. Now, we are forced to reckon with the fact that waking up exhausted in Lamont is not ideal. Harvard’s Gen Ed course on Sleep also makes clear to students the potentially harmful health consequences of poor sleep habits.

So, the question becomes: what steps can a student take toward optimizing their quality of sleep from a dorm room? While this may seem like a daunting task, there are a few dorm room essentials that can be used to finally rest easy away from home. Welcome to the Indy’s Sleep Guide:

## An Electric Kettle

An electric kettle is the perfect solution for making the midday switch from coffee and energy drinks to herbal tea. D-halls offer delicious tea packet options that go well with the fall and winter holiday season, such as Cinnamon Apple and Mint. With a kettle in your dorm room you can make tea even when the d-hall is closed. You can also purchase and experiment with different flavors of non-caffeinated drinks like Swiss Miss hot chocolate from CVS or Korean Honey Citron tea from H-Mart. These are all delicious ways to enjoy a hot drink without consuming enough caffeine to disturb your ability to fall asleep quickly. Just make sure your suitemates can keep a secret...

## A Fan

Whether it is a ceiling fan that came with your dorm room or that box fan you bought at CVS during the back-to-school rush, a fan is a must at a school with no dorm air-conditioning. Having this invaluable tool improves comfort while sleeping by cooling your room to a more ideal temperature. Secondly, fans provide gentle white noise that may help you stay asleep. Say goodbye to randomly waking up in the middle of the

night soaked in your own sweat!

## A Mattress Pad

If you don’t already have one, get one! The added comfort of a mattress pad (also known as a mattress topper) can transform your Twin XL from a hard block into a soft place to relax after a long, tiring day. Mattress pads can also make your bed more supportive of your body, allowing you to focus on sleeping well instead of tossing and turning as you descend into slumber. Just because you are given a standard Twin XL mattress doesn’t mean you need to accept discomfort as your expectation for rest.



## Pillows (To Your Taste)

One of the best ice breaker questions is “How many pillows do you sleep with, how, and why?” My response is “two, fluffed and stacked on top of each other, because it makes my neck and head feel supported when I sleep on my side.” Experiment with different pillow configurations to determine which style best suits your sleeping style. Some days, you may find that one arrangement leaves you with a persistently annoying kink in your neck while another makes you so comfortable you never want to leave your bed. Different people need different numbers and textures of this sleep-time essential. From memory foam to down feather pillows, there are plenty of options.

## Vitamins (With Caution)

While vitamins can not replace a balanced, nutrient-filled diet, they can help fill in the gaps in our nutrition. Some

vitamins have also been linked to improved quality of sleep. In my own previous experience, taking my multivitamin right before bed helps me sleep more soundly throughout the night. Some of my classmates and I have also found that over-the-counter vitamins such as Melatonin and Magnesium have helped us achieve better sleep quality.

Note these are not to be overrelied on. Side effects may include nausea, headache, dizziness, and constipation. Make sure to evaluate your own health needs and concerns before you try a new vitamin or supplement, no matter how innocuous it may seem. If you are looking for a place to start, CVS has a great variety of vitamins and supplements.

## A Diary

One of the worst interrupters of sleep is stress. Maybe you have an essay you have not started, a p-set you’re completely lost on, or a serious ordeal with family or friends. Any stressor has the potential to keep us awake and compound emotional exhaustion with physical exhaustion. One way to help manage stress and emotions is to journal your thoughts and experiences in a diary. A physical diary also helps reduce screen time and blue light exposure before bed! Jot your worries down tonight so you can take them off your mind for now. You can do the same thing should you wake up (possibly from a nightmare) in the middle of the night.

Sleeping better will change your life by elevating your mood and your overall health. While it is still easy to feel tempted to forgo sleep to complete more work, experiencing better sleep must be prioritized for health and even happiness. Fortunately, it does not take many adjustments to improve your quality of sleep. With the simple, accessible tools from this article at hand, you do not have to miss out on the benefits of sleep in college. Instead, you can finally appreciate sleep as a foundation for wellness as opposed to a barrier to productivity.

**ADEDOYIN ADEBAYO '26  
(AADEBAYO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.  
EDU) WILL TEXT YOU BACK WHEN  
SHE WAKES UP.**

**GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27**

# Craving a Late-Night Snack?

A review of Brain Break's biggest successes and failures.

BY LUCY DUNCAN '28

What's good sleep without a great late-night snack? At Harvard, late-night snacks come in the form of Brain Break—an opportunity for students to temporarily step away from p-sets and papers to grab a bite to eat in the dining halls while catching up with friends. Over the years, it has become somewhat of a Harvard tradition and staple of campus life.

But recently, students are complaining of a lack of options, poor quality, and even mice—looking at you Kirk—in the dining halls. Is Brain Break really worth the hype? Some on campus would defend Brain Break with their dying breath, and others would never show their faces in the dining hall past 8 p.m. I will be the first to admit that HUDS Brain Break can produce some massive flops, but I defend Brain Break as an experience. It's a chance to catch up with your blocking group before getting ready for bed, or the last time you'll see your roommate before they head to Lamont for the night. Here, I will be reviewing several Brain Break staples in an attempt to determine whether it's worth the trek to the dining hall.

## Cereal

Cereal is a consistent, dependable option—even if you betray it, cereal's your ride-or-die. The dining hall's assortment includes Chex Mix, Froot Loops, Cocoa Puffs, and more, which can be enjoyed on their own or with some milk. It's not the showstopper, but reliable and will always be available at Brain Break. Frosted Flakes serve as a great, gentle pick-me-up the night before your midterm; dry Lucky Charms are great for a movie night; Krave with a Redbull can get you through the most heinous of all-nighters. That being said, the best cereal options run out quickly, leaving behind only plain, stale Cheerios, so make sure you get to the dining hall early! 7/10

## Peaches and Cream

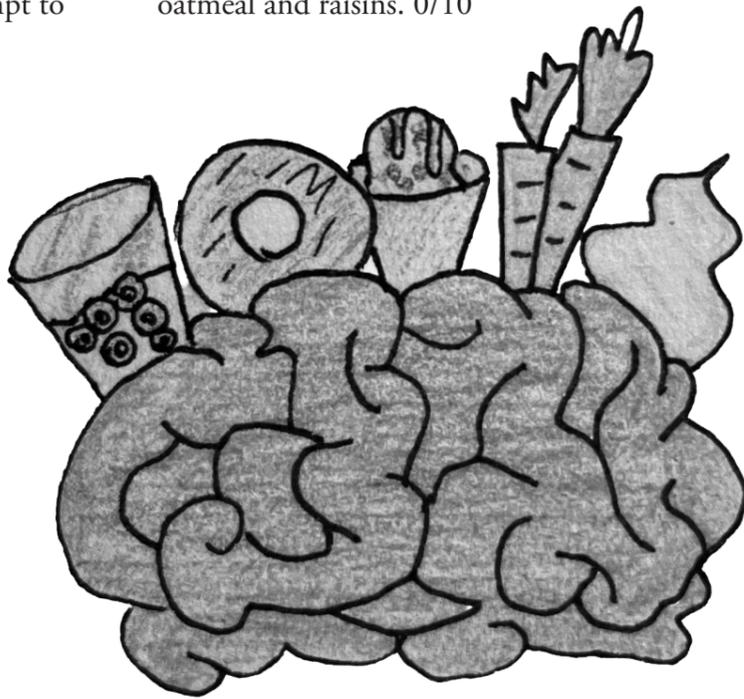
Peaches and cream is the ultimate Brain Break hit-or-miss. When it's good, it's great, but sometimes the peaches still have leftover frost on them or just taste a little funky, and that can ruin your whole night. The cream is pretty consistent; sometimes it's a bit too sweet and sometimes it's not quite sweet enough, but it's enjoyable enough. I tend to take the cream and skip the peaches. I'll say it's perfectly neutral. 5/10

## Hot Chocolate

When I have no one else, I know that dining hall hot chocolate will always have my back. No matter the weather and no matter the time of day, dining hall hot chocolate is always there and delicious. This is my go-to comfort drink and one of the very few HUDS options that I can say I genuinely enjoy—it's the perfect amount of sweet, warm, and rich. I would definitely recommend adding whipped cream and sprinkles—the chocolate sprinkles, not the rainbow sprinkles! Marshmallows are also the perfect touch, but they dissolve in seconds. -.5 points for being so filling that I can barely finish it. 9.5/10

## Oatmeal and Raisins

Oatmeal and raisins are not a good meal anywhere. And at HUDS, where no meal is good, oatmeal and raisins make a particularly awful meal. It is straight-up mush. This is the meal that Miss Hannigan would serve the orphans in *Annie*. Do NOT eat the Brain Break oatmeal and raisins. 0/10



## Fruit

The fresh fruit is mediocre. Typically, the bananas are brown, the oranges green, and the apples bruised. If you dig enough, you'll find something edible, but it's usually bland. Still, fruit is a solid, inoffensive Brain Break option. If it's a good night, they'll put out mixed berries, which are perfectly sweet, fresh, and great with whipped cream. If not, though, the other fruit options are not great—note: freshness cannot be guaranteed. 4/10

## Vegetables

Amazingly underrated Brain Break option—vegetables are the silent heroes of Brain Break. The people who hate vegetables are the same people who fed the dog their broccoli as kids. Vegetable options include carrots, celery, broccoli, cucumber, and zucchini, all

great bedtime snacks and a way to add fibre to your diet. The veggies are particularly yummy when HUDS serves hummus or ranch along with them. 8/10

## Chips and Salsa

The chips and salsa are pretty good. Not the best, but a solid option overall. Sometimes, they run out of chips, and there's just a massive bowl of salsa left behind, looking quite lonely. Of course, they don't hold up to nachos from Jefe's or Felipe's (no matter which team you're on), but as far as HUDS goes, they're solid. 7/10

## Pretzels and Goldfish

This is the rare gem of Brain Break. It comes out about once a month, but when it does, it means it's a good Brain Break. Pretzels and goldfish are two of my favourite snacks, so I will never complain when they are combined. However, I do wish that they would stop putting it in the fridge, as there is something oddly off-putting about having cold goldfish. 9/10

## Pound Cake and Strawberries

To be honest, I've never had the pound cake and strawberries at Brain Break. In fact, the majority of people I polled had never even seen pound cake and strawberries at Brain Break, but my roommate was adamant that it not only exists, but that it is the best Brain Break option. While right now it remains a mystery, pound cake and strawberries admittedly do sound like an absolutely delicious brain break option, especially when the dessert options are particularly lackluster. -1.5 points for being seemingly impossible to obtain. 8.5/10

As Harvard students do, although we love to hate on it, Brain Break is truly the lifesaver of plenty all-nighters, and it has its fine moments. From meeting new friends in the line at Berg Brain Break to falling asleep over essays in your house's dining hall, Brain Break is a special part of Harvard's campus life. Next time you're there, try out the vegetables, hot chocolate, and cold pretzels and goldfish. But, don't forget to avoid the oatmeal and raisins at all costs.

LUCY DUNCAN '28 (LDUNCAN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WRITES ARTS FOR THE INDEPENDENT.

GRAPHIC BY MIA STEWART '29

# SPORTS

## For the Love of the Game

Harvard football's head coach Andrew Aurich and QB Jaden Craig on the team's dominant 7-0 start to the season.

BY MEGAN LEGAULT '28

**A**fter their 31-10 win over Dartmouth this past weekend, Harvard football has extended their winning streak to seven and continues to dominate the Ivy League. This season's undefeated record places the Crimson at No. 9 in the NCAA Stats Perform FCS rankings and No. 13 in the AFCA Coaches Poll, their highest ranking in program history.

Head Coach Andrew Aurich is in his second season with the Crimson. Last season, Aurich led the team to its second straight Ivy League title, finishing with an 8-2 record, 5-2 in conference play. The team lost several key players from last season. Notably, Ivy League Offensive Player of the Year wide receiver Cooper Barkate transferred to Duke following last season's conclusion. Replacing these losses and developing players was a big part of the team's offseason preparation.

"If we wanted to be the same or better than we were last year, we had to make some serious improvements at a number of positions. And the guys embraced that," Aurich said in an interview with the *Harvard Independent*. "They had a great spring, and then a great summer, and then a great training camp, and put us in a position now where we're playing at a higher level than maybe we did last year at any point."

Aurich previously served on the coaching staff in the high-energy Big Ten Conference at Rutgers and as a defensive coaching assistant in the NFL with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "It's easy at those places; we had them from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. every single day. It's impossible not to get all your football done. That doesn't work here with their class schedules."

With conflicting schedules, in order to be an elite player in the Ivy League conference, players must have an internal drive and utilize time outside of the set practice schedule. Luckily for Crimson fans, "we have a bunch of guys who want to be elite," Coach Aurich noted.

Quarterback Jaden Craig '26 is among those players making waves this season. This past weekend, Craig threw for 322 yards against Dartmouth, shattering Harvard's

all-time passing touchdown record. His elite play is drawing attention across the league, the NCAA, and the NFL.

Despite the external noise, Craig maintains that Harvard's success is his number one priority. "All I've been focused on this season is uplifting the team first and trying to be as selfless as possible. I'm really just focused on the team," Craig told the *Harvard Independent*. "I'm not really worried about anyone who's looking, anyone who's out. I'm worried about the team, and



just going 1-0 every weekend."

In his senior season, Craig says that the biggest difference between last season and now is the amount of additional responsibility he has taken on. "I'm definitely taking on more responsibility as a leader and making sure everyone's doing the right things—they are where they're supposed to be, when they're supposed to be there."

"I think the best way to lead and bring those guys up is showing people that have fun with it," said Craig on his leadership style. "I think you can't complain when you're six and 0," he said ahead of the Dartmouth match-up.

The Crimson's defense has played a large part in their success thus far, holding teams well below their typical scoring averages and generating points themselves this season. While Harvard's defense is doing their part in the team's success, Craig thinks the offense has room to improve on their end. "I think the offense is going to execute better and have their back, like they have our back," said Craig.

A distinctive aspect of the Ivy League conference is its apparent lack of sports culture, which often requires teams

to generate a lot of their own energy on the field. Although this can certainly be frustrating for athletes and sports fans of the Ivy League, it sets Ivy League athletes apart because they play their sports out of love for the game alone, rather than recognition or athletic scholarships.

"The beauty in that is guys play football because they love football... They play the game for just the love of the sport, and not any, any external noise... We play football because we love football," Craig said.

Craig plays football for the love of the game, but he also represents his grandmother's alma mater; she earned her master's degree from Harvard in 1963 and her Ph.D. in 1972. "She's a trailblazer. She was one of the first Black women here at Radcliffe. I think her story is incredible," said Craig. "I love my grandma. I just want to do her proud. I want to do my whole family proud and just carry the last name with a lot of pride."

Looking ahead to the rest of the season, the Crimson have two conference games remaining, Columbia and Penn, before the fabled Harvard-Yale rivalry game. The team is taking its season one week at a time, maintaining consistent preparation regardless of its competition. "Our preparation doesn't change," said Craig. "I think that's why we've been so good to this point, is because we're taking everyone as seriously as possible."

Crimson fans should be ecstatic to watch the team for the rest of this record-breaking season, as they are currently on track to secure an Ivy League title. "I don't think we've played our best football yet," said Craig. This sentiment bodes well for Crimson fans, as the best of Harvard football is yet to come.

**MEGAN LEGAULT '28 (MLEGAULT@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) LOST HER VOICE AHEAD OF THE INTERVIEWS FOR THIS ARTICLE.**

**PHOTO COURTESY OF JORDAN WASSERBERGER '27**

# Fantasy Roundup: Week 9

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

BY TYLER DANG '28

With the NFL season now at its midpoint, the race for the Super Bowl remains wide open.

The Patriots and Drake Maye continue to make a name for themselves as worthy underdogs. Meanwhile, the Bills and Eagles continue their dominant performances. Other teams, like the Packers or Jaguars, are simply harder to rate—they win the tough games but lose the easy ones. Records are being broken as the Jaguars kicked a 68-yard field goal, shattering the previous NFL mark. For full team rosters, see Week 0's issue.

## First and Lowell (4-4) vs The Ball Currier (3-5): 122.32-109.2

Top performers: Drake London (38.8) | Kyren Williams (17.4)

Underperformers: George Kittle (6.9) | Patrick Mahomes (10.5)

## Kirkland Cousins (2-6) vs Bring it Dome (5-3): 123.66-127.62

Top performers: DJ Moore (22.98) | Josh Allen (28.82)

Underperformers: Jahmyr Gibbs (5.8) | Javonte Williams (7.3)

## Pfirst Down (6-2) vs The Inn-Zone (4-4):

144.8-131.08

Top performers: Christian McCaffrey (34.3) | Sam LaPorta (21.7)

Underperformers: Jonathan Taylor (7.7) | Daniel Jones (14.08)

### Standout Games:

#### Bears @ Bengals: 47-42

When you pit two teams with good offenses but terrible defenses against each other, you get this rollercoaster of a game. Immediately, the scoring onslaught began as Cincinnati returned the opening kickoff for a touchdown. However, the Bears responded

with a successful drive, finishing with a trick-play passing touchdown to quarterback Caleb Williams. The Bears put up another touchdown to lead 14-10 after a field goal by the Bengals.

After exchanging a pair of field goals, Joe Flacco connected with Tee Higgins for an incredible touchdown pass to put the game at 17-20 going into the half. At the start of the fourth quarter, the game was still neck-and-neck, with the Bears up 31-27. However, Joe Flacco was sacked, leading to a fumble recovered by the Bears. Chicago capitalized on this opportunity to put another three points on the board. After a Bengals missed field goal, the Bears scored again to lead 41-27.

With 2:46 left on the clock, things looked bleak in Cincinnati. The Bears went three-and-out, so Flacco had another opportunity to bring the Bengals back. In only 32 seconds, the Bengals scored yet another touchdown, followed by a two-point conversion to trail by only one score. Cincinnati recovered the onside kick to keep its dreams alive. Once again, Flacco and the offense struck quickly, putting up another touchdown to take a one-point lead. Williams and the Bears had less than a minute to either get in field goal range or score a touchdown.

With 17 seconds left in the game and no timeouts for either team, Caleb Williams threw the ball down the middle to tight end Colston Loveland, who broke two tackles and ran into the endzone. This 58-yard touchdown was the nail in the coffin as the "Hail Mary" attempt by Flacco was short and intercepted.

Despite 470 yards and two touchdowns by Flacco, the Bengals' comeback was thwarted by their own defense. With the continued poor performance of said defense, questions are being raised about whether paying three offensive players is the correct move. The salaries of Joe Burrow, Ja'Marr Chase, and Tee Higgins make up over 44 percent of the salary cap, leaving no cap space to sign good defensive players.

#### Chiefs @ Bills: 21-28

Another installment in the Patrick Mahomes-Josh Allen rivalry, this game marks the sixth regular-season installment between the two. While Allen entered with a 4-1 record in the regular season, the Bills quarterback has been stopped in the playoffs by Mahomes four straight times. Josh Allen continued his regular-season dominance with a touchdown on his first drive of the game. After exchanging punts, the Chiefs answered back with their own touchdown to start the second quarter.

Going into the half, the Bills led 21-13 off of long passes to tight end Dalton Kincaid, resulting in two more touchdowns. The Bills scored yet another quarterback sneak late into the third quarter for their final points of the

game. Though the Chiefs put up another touchdown and two-point conversion, the Buffalo defense prevented any comeback from Kansas City. With less than five minutes left in the game, Mahomes's deep pass was intercepted, theoretically sealing the game. Instead, a missed field goal gave the Chiefs another chance to tie, but they were unsuccessful.

### Looking Ahead:

Next week, the Bengals, Cowboys, Titans, and Chiefs are on bye. Meanwhile, several key matchups across the league should help reveal who the real Super Bowl contenders are. To start, the Patriots will face the Buccaneers (TB -2.5). Neither team entered the season as big names, but they have steadily shown that they should be feared. Baker Mayfield hopes to strengthen his MVP campaign, while Drake Maye will continue the resurgence of the Patriots. Similarly, the Rams will have a rematch against the 49ers (LAR -3.5). While the 49ers took the win last time around, they are now between quarterbacks as Mac Jones is still in for Brock Purdy. Meanwhile, Matthew Stafford has played exceptionally well with nine touchdowns in his last two games.

Be sure to look out for these players next week. Christian McCaffrey and the 49ers will play the Rams. McCaffrey has continued to have a phenomenal year, scoring more than 22 fantasy points in all but one week. The last time the 49ers played the Rams, McCaffrey put up 28 points. Also, Jonathan Taylor hopes to have a bounce-back game after their loss to the Steelers. He and the Colts play the Falcons, who allowed 110 rushing yards against the Patriots. With Daniel Jones' recent poor performance, expect more offense to run through Taylor.

As for a few games that you'd be excused for missing: the Raiders face the Broncos (DEN -8.5) and the Bills match up against the Dolphins (BUF -8.5). Despite Brock Bowers' return, Geno Smith and the Raiders still lost against Jacksonville. Smith has been horrible this season, as his performance is in contention for the worst starting quarterback in the league. Meanwhile, the Broncos have one of the fiercest defenses, which will surely be enough to silence the Raiders. Similarly, Miami, led by Tua Tagovailoa, has struggled this season, and the Bills' defense is sure to shut down the Dolphins.

**TYLER DANG '28 (TYLERDANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL BE TAKING NEXT WEEK OFF TO WRITE FOR THE SEX ISSUE.**

**GRAPHIC BY REEVE SYKES '26**



# Hallucinations of a Sleep-Deprived Athlete

The unspoken consequences of sleep deprivation for student-athletes.

BY TILLY BUTTERWORTH '28

Every student at Harvard has a different sleep schedule. But whether you're an early bird or a night owl, there is a way to pick a class routine that fits your preferences while managing to survive the semester and remain relatively sane. Finding time to take a quick nap when exhaustion hits or schedule a break between classes and meetings are an important part of the day for many busy students.

Unfortunately, student-athletes do not get this luxury. Instead, there is an expectation never to miss a practice or team activity, even if that means skipping required classes or having to schedule a dreaded 9 a.m. There's no option to take a 3 p.m. class so you can sleep in the whole morning. Inevitably, this leads to unavoidable disillusionment and exhaustion, and the hallucinations start.

## The Impending Alarm

Nothing's worse than constantly waking up in the night from dreams of your aggressive alarm ringing for morning practice. The evening is spent waking up in a panic to check the time, followed by counting

down the hours you have left to try and sleep. When the time finally comes to drag yourself out of bed, you throw sweats over your pajamas and make the trek to the locker room, having barely slept a wink. The epic journey wakes you up ever so slightly, as the wind leaves your eyes streaming with tears and your hair with a natural but questionable blowout.

## The Line Between Intoxicated and Tired

Time passes in strange ways between waking up and walking into the Harvard Palmer Dixon gym. Trudging through rain and snow leaves you questioning your life choices, though the post-workout adrenaline makes it all worth it. That is, until the adrenaline wears off, and your lack of sleep from the night before kicks in. The day does not stop when classes finish, as many teams have two practices a day; that means heading back to the locker room for round two even more tired than before. The feeling of putting on your practice gear for the second time builds character, and the battle with sleep hits during an early-evening film session.

## The Inadvertent Power Nap

75 minutes in a Science Center lecture hall never go by quickly. Battling heavy eyelids, student athletes fight the urge to drift off to their professor's voice. Not only is it startling to wake up after aggressively snoring in a 600-person class, but it is also extremely frustrating. Classes are an important opportunity to learn and help students excel off the field, but the exhausting commitments of life as a student-athlete affirm the experience of classes as chores rather than opportunities.

## The Coffee Curse

Never underestimate how easy it is to fall into a cyclical trap of consuming caffeine to stay awake, while willfully ignoring the resulting inability to sleep. Before you know it, it's 3 a.m., and you are questioning

every decision from the day before. The lack of emphasis on striving for good sleep habits is alarming. Instead of celebrating an early night, student-athletes glorify surviving a 32-hour stint wide awake, keeping the hidden consequences quiet. Many must decide between sacrificing work or sleep; the typical answer to this is to always prioritize academics over recovery. This same ultimatum exists in deciding if it is more beneficial to go for early-morning physical treatment or to salvage an extra 20 minutes in bed.

## The Imaginary Meal

When you pass out after morning lift for a quick power nap before your 10:30 a.m., only to wake up incredibly disoriented and questioning what the purpose of life is, know that other student-athletes have faced those same feelings. We also relate to the hunger hitting when you have missed breakfast; the rest of the day will now be spent consistently fantasizing about a fresh Black Sheep Bagel before your dreams are crushed by a below-average HUDS meal.

Sleep is often undervalued, which is why it's so important to remind each other that rest is just as valuable as endless assignments and unrealistic tasks. The next time you interact with a tired student-athlete, give them some grace if they offer you an awkward reaction, or suggest grabbing an evening coffee as an activity. It is probably just another sleepy hallucination.

**TILLY BUTTERWORTH '28**  
([MBUTTERWORTH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU](mailto:MBUTTERWORTH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU)) EXPERIENCED  
A FEW HALLUCINATIONS  
WHILE WRITING THIS.

**GRAPHIC BY MIRANDA CHAO  
HWANG '28**



OPINIONS OF FORUM PIECES AND ARTISTIC  
INTERPRETATIONS OF DESIGNERS BELONG ONLY TO THE CREATOR  
AND DO NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE *INDEPENDENT*

# Sweet dreams

fill out  
the Sex Survey



crossword by:  
Fred Klein '28

design by:  
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ACROSS:  
2 Type of fight  
common at  
sleepovers  
4 Poker Currency  
5 Type of Story  
demanded by  
Toddler  
9 SMH, He Left Me  
On \_\_\_\_\_

DOWN  
1 First Rule of This Club Is To Not  
Talk About It  
3 Unevenly Balanced  
6 As Opposed To Emergency Department  
7 Harvard TF Equivalent At Other  
Schools  
8 Type of Hotly Contested Voter  
Law

don't sleep  
on these



*Latie Merriam* *Lyla Chanassi*