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INDEPENDENT

THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969

*When
September Ends*



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As Harvard College’s weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, 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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“This is the Wave of the Future”: A Summer of Cancer Developments

Summer 2026 saw major advances in cancer treatment and research at Harvard.

By KATHLEEN SHOVLIN '29

Summer 2026 brought four breakthroughs in cancer research within a single month. These included new laboratory models of cancer, personalized cancer vaccines, a drug that targets proteins scientists once thought were invincible, and improved immunotherapy effectiveness. International research teams made the progress, but Harvard affiliates were at the center of each advancement, highlighting the University's international impact on cancer research.

Researchers at Longwood's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, a teaching affiliate of Harvard Medical School, played a critical role in these developments.

“We're very proud of the types of research going on here in melanoma, also in many other forms of cancer as well. This is the wave of the future,” Dr. David Fisher, Department of Dermatology Chair and Distinguished Wigglesworth Professor of Dermatology at HMS, said in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.” Fisher is also a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital, where he studies the pathways that cause melanoma.

Patient-Derived Cancer Models

On Aug. 5, a team led by researchers at Dana-Farber published 665 next-generation patient-derived cancer models, spanning 27 forms of cancer. The research was an international effort and was the first of its kind to release all results publicly at once. The 665 cancer models doubled the number of available in vitro models, significantly expanding resources for researchers.

“This is likely to be everyone on the team's most important contribution to cancer biology in their career because the resulting resource enables new research at such a large scale and for many years into the future,” Dr. Keith Ligon told journalists at Dana-Farber.

The published models include 3D organoids, 3D spheroids, and 2D patient-derived cell lines representing adult and pediatric cancers. These next-generation methods improve on earlier models, which became inaccurate over time, allowing researchers to produce versions that stay reliable for longer.

This advancement is especially significant for rare cancer types, which make up 20% of published models. Previously, researchers had access to only a couple of models for certain rare cancer types.

Personalized Cancer Vaccines

Two weeks later, on Aug. 19, Merck and Moderna announced success in producing personalized cancer vaccines that reduced melanoma recurrence and spread. Dr. Catherine Wu, a current professor at HMS and a researcher at Dana-Farber, published the proof of concept for personalized cancer vaccines in 2017. Her research was foundational to the advances made by Merck and Moderna.

Experts explained to the “Harvard Independent” that the unique methodology used to formulate the vaccines is just as significant as the vaccines themselves. “This is different from historical discoveries against cancer, where a drug was discovered by luck or some natural product,” Fisher explained. “This is rational and mechanistically based.”

In the scientific journal “Nature,” reporters Rachel Fieldhouse and Mohana Basu explained that the vaccine is a personalized mRNA treatment that uses the same mRNA technology used to develop COVID-19 vaccines. The vaccine's phase three clinical trial compared it with the best treatments currently

available; it was the first of its kind to succeed in a late-stage trial. However, the personalized vaccines are still a long way from being the go-to treatment for melanoma. “It doesn't prove to us that this treatment has jumped to the front of the line,” Fisher continued.

Fisher acknowledged that while this treatment is promising, questions regarding its implementation still need to be answered. “It will take a little time to figure out how to exactly integrate that into the treatment algorithm for patients,” Fisher said.

New Treatment for Pancreatic Cancer

A week after Merck and Moderna announced their personalized melanoma vaccine, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved a different drug, a once-daily tablet to treat pancreatic cancer. Harvard scientist Dr. Greg Verdine led the research behind the breakthrough.

Verdine started his company, Warp Drive Bio, in 2012 and began developing drugs that target a protein called KRAS. The KRAS protein signals a cell to grow and divide or to take on another role. The KRAS gene is an oncogene, so when it is mutated, it can turn cells cancerous by altering their growth and life cycle.

In 2018, Revolution Medicines acquired Warp Drive Bio, the company now leading the production of daraxonrasib, the drug that targets KRAS proteins using an approach Verdine researched years earlier.

Previously, the challenge of targeting mutated KRAS proteins was that they were almost impenetrable to drugs. However, in 2013, scientist Kevan Shokat at the University of California, San Francisco, found a weakness in KRAS proteins that helped develop daraxonrasib.

While it is promising to have another treatment option available for pancreatic cancer patients, such developments force physicians to have difficult conversations with patients.

“As a practicing physician, I see new developments really through the lens of each individual patient that's sitting in front of me,” Dr. Leah Biller, a gastrointestinal oncologist at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, said in an interview with the “Harvard Independent.” Biller described a disconnect between what the headlines emphasize about a treatment and what that advancement actually means for individual patients. “They've revolutionized the care for a subset of patients, which is fantastic, but there is still so much more to go.”

“A headline can make a preliminary finding sound like an established treatment,” Biller continued. “It can make for challenging conversations, but they are important conversations.” These difficult conversations ultimately build the trust and understanding at the foundation of a physician-patient partnership.

Overcoming Immunotherapy Resistance

On Sept. 2, a team spearheaded by Dr. Chen Chu at Dana-Farber published findings showing that CDK2 inhibitors could help immunotherapy work even in resistant cancers.

CDK2 inhibitors, previously used to treat only specific types of cancer, may now benefit a broader range of cancers, recent evidence suggests.

CDK2 inhibitors make

immunotherapy more effective by reducing resistance to immunotherapy treatments. One form of immunotherapy is immune checkpoint inhibitors, which release the immune system from its own checkpoints, allowing it to attack cancer cells more productively. However, some cancers resist this therapy. When paired with a CDK2 inhibitor, the immunotherapy can overcome this tolerance.

This treatment was successful in mouse models but has not yet been tested in humans. Dr. Peter Sicinski, a professor of genetics at HMS, is a co-senior author of the study. “One should always be skeptical, as many approaches that work in mice do not work in humans,” he wrote in an email to the “Harvard Independent.”

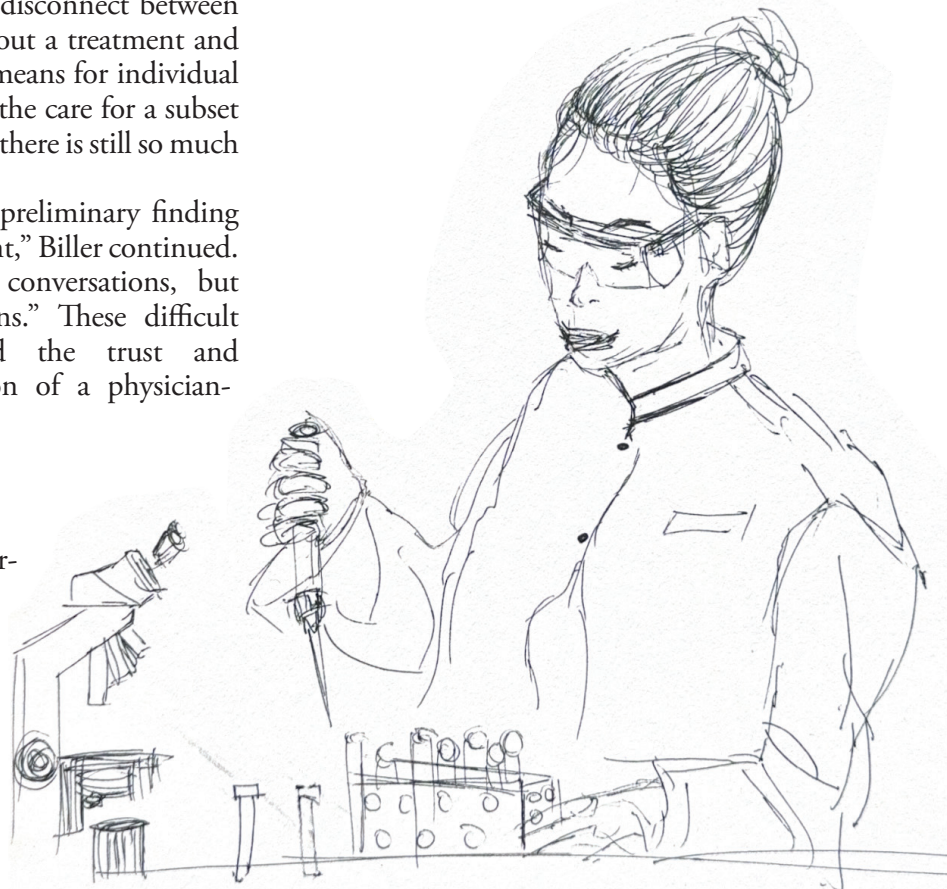
This is just one part of immunotherapy's development. The Cancer Research Institute describes the 2000s as a “renaissance” for immunotherapy. In 2001, Dr. Robert D. Schreiber showed that the immune system helps fight cancerous cells.

Since then, immunotherapy has continued to advance. The National Cancer Institute describes immunotherapy as treating cancer by empowering a patient's own immune system, the patient's built-in line of defense, to fight the disease.

These developments are exciting and show strong promise for future treatments. However, much more research is still needed. Early detection and prevention, along with effective treatments, remain important, Biller said. “For me, the revolution happens when I'm out of a job because cancer is not even happening anymore.”

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GRAPHIC BY EVELYN FERGUSON '29



Still Waiting: HMC Climate Report on Endowment Absent for Second Year in a Row

Members of the Harvard divestment movement comment after another unpublished report.

By WREN HORNE-SARKEES '29

For students and faculty who spent nearly a decade pushing Harvard toward fossil fuel divestment, the annual Climate Report was the one concrete way to assess whether the University was trying to fulfill its promises. Now, with that report absent for a second consecutive year, members of the divestment movement—including student organization Sunrise Harvard and a founding member of Harvard Faculty for Divestment—say they're left with no clear way to assess whether the University's \$56.9 billion endowment remains on track to meet its own climate commitments.

In April 2020, Harvard became the first U.S. university to commit to achieving net-zero endowment emissions by 2050. From 2021 to 2024, the Harvard Management Company

Many involved in the original push for fossil fuel divestment say the delay feels especially relevant given the current political climate. "We are experiencing devastating setbacks to climate progress as the Trump administration increasingly thwarts renewable energy projects and expands fossil fuels," Sunrise Harvard co-lead Helen Mancini '29 said. In the past two weeks alone, the Trump administration's EPA has repealed rules limiting greenhouse gas emissions from coal and natural gas power plants; a federal judge also reinstated a \$7 billion program to provide rooftop solar in low-income communities, rebuffing President Trump's attempts to axe it.

"Harvard should be visibly fighting for the energy transition that they committed to in 2021, not brushing it under the rug," Mancini continued. "Failing to release the annual Climate Report is a display of carelessness and capitulation. Not only that, Harvard owes it to the students and staff who spent years fighting for divestment to be transparent about the status of the endowment." Sunrise Harvard, formerly Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard, was co-founded in 2012 by students including Chloe Maxmin '15 and rose to prominence over the decade as the primary student organization toward climate-based endowment reform on campus.

Not everyone knows why HMC has not published. "I do not know why HMC has not issued, in 2025 and 2026, its annual Climate Report," James Engell '73, Gurney Professor of English Literature Emeritus and a founding member of Harvard Faculty for Divestment, wrote in an email to the "Harvard Independent."

"In previous years I read the reports and discussed them with HMC."

Harvard Faculty for Divestment was created during the winter of 2013–14 with five initial members. By 2020, more than 1,000 Harvard-affiliated faculty had signed the petition to push the University toward fossil fuel divestment. Engell was one of those five. "The current federal administration has done much to block renewable energy and to promote fossil fuels. The president has called climate change a hoax," he wrote.

Engell suggested that, by not publishing, Harvard may hope to avoid ruffling any more feathers with the Trump administration, but emphasized that this was merely an informed guess. In a similar vein, he stated that, as far as he was aware, the investment policy itself regarding climate issues had not changed.

He also highlighted that Harvard's 2021 policy change went beyond simple divestment from fossil fuel corporations and instead called for complete decarbonization of the endowment by 2050 toward net-zero, in line with the goals of the UN and the IPCC. "In many ways this is a more ambitious and harder goal than divesting from a few hundred companies, whether they are held publicly or through private, pooled, or commingled funds," Engell pointed out.

He added that meeting this goal has grown more difficult over time as companies themselves fall behind internal climate goals and global temperatures approach 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. "It makes it harder to meet a decarbonization or carbon neutral goal

when fewer opportunities for such investment are available."

The University of Michigan, for example, has continued to publish detailed updates on similar pledges. Committing to a net-zero investment portfolio in March 2021, the University reported in December 2024 that it had invested \$420 million in sustainable energy over the previous two years and expected its endowment-related investments to offset more than half of its portfolio emissions by the end of the decade. The University of Michigan has continued to publish similar reports annually. Harvard has not released comparable figures since its 2024 report.

"We are experiencing devastating setbacks to climate progress as the Trump administration increasingly thwarts renewable energy projects and expands fossil fuels."

- Helen Mancini '29

Still, Engell expressed optimism about the long-term trajectory of climate-conscious investing. "I have faith that over the course of the next few decades, the economic advantages and efficiencies of renewable energy, along with growing awareness of the negative economic, social, biodiversity, and health effects of climate change and extreme weather, will continue to direct investments away from commodities and activities that exacerbate climate change."

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GRAPHIC BY MAYA KODALI '30



published annual reports each February or March detailing its progress toward the goal. Since 2025, however, HMC has released no public climate reports.

In a statement to the "Harvard Independent," HMC Communications Director Patrick McKiernan emphasized HMC's dedication to net-zero. "HMC remains committed to achieving a net-zero portfolio by 2050, and we look forward to providing an update on our progress in due course," McKiernan wrote.

The statement echoes one HMC sent to the "Crimson" over a year ago and again earlier this month.

Bill McKibben '82, former "Crimson" president, founder of climate change organizations 350.org and Third Act, and a longtime advocate for divestment from Harvard's endowment, was more pointed in a written statement to the "Harvard Independent." "Turning in your assignments on time is not exactly an unheard-of task in academia. HMC has lots of money and staff; perhaps they need to talk with a tutor about their problem," he wrote.

All the Money in the World: Concern Over National Debt

Harvard University professors comment on the national debt, economic policy, and concerns for the average American.

By HAFEEZAT GHAFAR '29

In a recent interview with CNBC, Kenneth Rogoff, Harvard University's Maurits C. Boas Professor of Economics and former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), warned that the United States is hurtling toward an unavoidable debt crisis, citing concerns about annual deficits and a lack of political urgency. Rogoff cautioned that the situation may only change in the wake of a major crisis, a shock that would have significant ramifications for the United States and the global economy. As the national debt steadily grows, economists who were once relaxed about budget deficits are now alarmed.

As of Sept. 16, 2026, the U.S. national debt sits at \$40,114,445,691,166.84. Since the Revolutionary War, the United States has carried

“As the national debt steadily grows, economists who were once relaxed about budget deficits are now alarmed.”

some form of debt from foreign loans and war bonds; by Jan. 1, 1791, its debts amounted to over \$75 million.

National debt increases when government spending exceeds tax revenue during a fiscal year, creating a deficit. Every time the government runs an annual deficit, it borrows money by selling marketable securities (such as Treasury bonds, bills, and notes) to cover the gap. Furthermore, borrowed money incurs interest. Thus, the national debt consists of borrowed money and the interest owed to investors who purchased those securities. The national debt has grown because of increased spending from major crises and emergencies (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and federal programs like Social Security and Medicare as our population ages.

The U.S. government is projected to spend \$1.039 trillion on net interest payments in the 2026 fiscal year due to the high national debt and high interest rates. Furthermore, the Federal Reserve, whose primary role is to

manage the money supply and keep the economy stable, raised interest rates on Sept. 16 for the first time since 2023, signaling an intentional effort to calm an overheating economy and rampant inflation.

The Federal Reserve's efforts suggest that the United States is not past a point of no return—especially since other countries have experienced cycles of debt and inflation and later recovered. “It's true that many other countries in the industrialized world—you mentioned France, you mentioned Japan, you could have mentioned Italy, you could have mentioned others—are also running deficits pretty large compared to the size of their economy,” William Joseph Maier Professor of Political Economy Benjamin M. Friedman '66 said to the “Harvard Independent.” “Americans have historically saved a smaller share of their national income.” This creates acute stress with a deficit looming over the economy. The government is expected to spend trillions of dollars on net interest payments, which absorb much of what we save.

Other experts further caution against treating America like other nations. “The concern is that when our debt is very high, the interest rates we face are already very high,” Rogoff said to the “Harvard Independent.” A debt crisis is complex and highly specific to the country being discussed.

The combination of high debt and high inflation rates can lessen the government's borrowing power, despite the constitutional authority granted to Congress under Article I, Section 8, Clause 2 to borrow money on the credit of the United States.

The clause was written primarily to give the federal government flexibility in financing war and national emergencies. “The reason it's good to have borrowing power is you want to be able to borrow promiscuously to borrow a lot when you face a crisis, and if you borrowed a lot during times you're not facing a crisis, you could find yourself facing problems when you did have a crisis,” Rogoff said. High inflation and high interest rates reduce U.S. borrowing power by making credit more expensive and eroding the dollar's purchasing power. “The debt crisis doesn't come out of thin air,” Rogoff continued. “It comes because ... [of] enormous pressure on borrowing and spending.” Thus, borrowing a lot of money when there is no dire need puts the nation at risk of an economic crisis.

The United States has turned to borrowing from abroad to cover budget deficits. “But that isn't really a solution to the problem that just makes the United States more and more and more indebted to foreigners,” said Friedman.

Ultimately, this creates an unsustainable, self-perpetuating cycle, raising the question of when debt becomes too much.

“At some stage, investors in the market, people here at home, and also foreigners will lose confidence,” Friedman explained. Friedman believes no one knows when this will happen, underscoring the need for urgency.

According to Rogoff, partisanship influences officials' decision-making. Rogoff reflected on his long history of

advocating for central bank independence and his experience with the IMF. “Contact with world leaders, with finance ministers, treasury secretaries, and my period at the IMF gave me a lot of that. And what was interesting was better understanding the pressures that the other side is on,” Rogoff said. Rogoff said independence helps insulate interest-rate and monetary decisions from short-term political pressures, which can make the economy unstable.

Rogoff also referred to power struggles between the Federal Reserve and the current Trump administration, highlighting the situation's delicacy. For context, the recent rate hike has complicated President Trump's goal of lowering interest rates. Competing objectives across government highlight the Federal Reserve's need for institutional sovereignty.

“Neither political party today is prepared to make addressing the deficit problem a major priority,” Friedman stated. Deficit-cutting measures include raising taxes or decreasing spending, neither of which are politically popular, according to Friedman. With the next election cycle on the horizon, the question of whether to prioritize the national debt remains unresolved, especially as voters grow more concerned.

Rogoff offers context on how economic challenges influence daily life. Interest rates affect mortgage, student loan, and auto loan rates. This

“The United States has turned to borrowing from abroad to cover budget deficits.”

is a major consideration for families across the nation. Interest rates determine the costs and returns associated with borrowing and saving, ultimately affecting daily budgets and long-term income security.

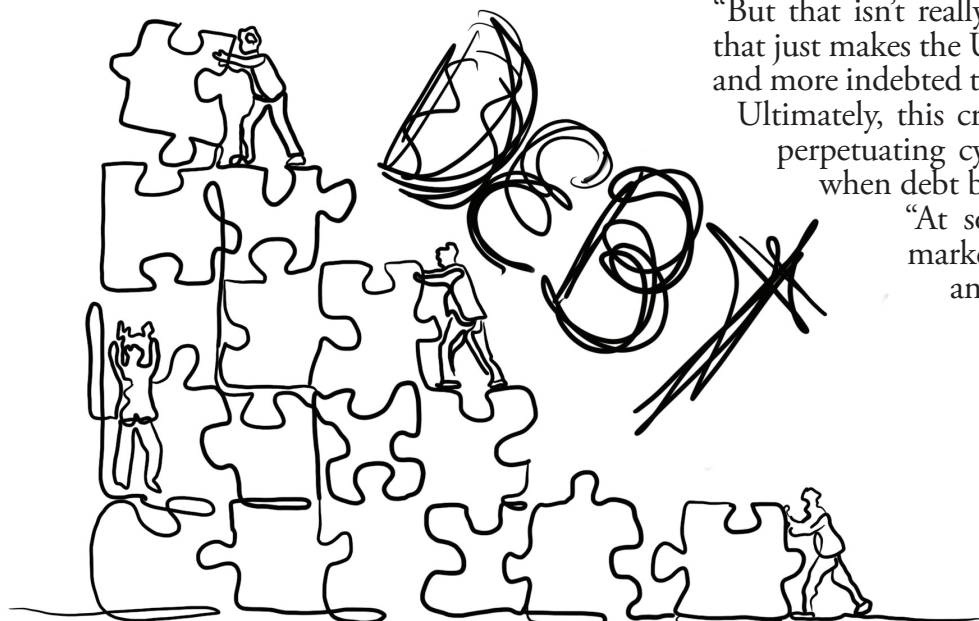
Furthermore, Rogoff believes that the U.S. financial markets affect the entire world. “So if we're having something that roils U.S. financial markets, it hits the whole world. That's what happened in 2008 ... the global financial crisis, which fundamentally was rooted in the United States,” said Rogoff. The 2008 U.S. financial crisis triggered a severe global economic shock, causing a worldwide freeze in credit, deep recessions, and massive losses for international banks that held toxic U.S. mortgage assets.

“I think [financial issues] are very interesting and compelling. That's why I'm in the field ... I hope people find chances to look at it,” Rogoff explained.

As the national debt continues to grow, Americans can keep a watchful eye on how elected officials and economists respond to this issue.

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GRAPHIC BY AMELIE LIMA '27



FORUM

I Don't Wish You Just Success

I wish you dreams.

By NOAH BASDEN '29

Earlier this year, I found myself roasting in the Tercentenary Theatre—otherwise known as the Yard—for my older brother's graduation. The speeches went on and on and on and ... you get the gist. There were just so many speeches—a lot of boring ones, some funny ones (thank you, Conan O'Brien '85 and Ronny Chieng). What united most of them,

“Success is good; living a full life is even better.”

though, was their focus on the future and this notion of wishing all the graduates success.

A nice message to hear, I'm sure; however, success should not be the only goal of the Harvard graduate, nor any person, for that matter. Success is good; living a full life is even better. In a way, achievements are the reward and byproduct of a life well lived. In that vein, to the graduates who went and the ones to come, I don't wish you just success, though I hope for it; I wish you to live a full life in all senses of the word.

But first, we have to better understand what success looks like in this context. I would argue that success is usually defined rigidly by Harvard's metrics, rooted in the idea of being the “best”: the highest-paid and most praised. This definition isn't only proposed by the institution but by the students themselves. We talk endlessly about the big names, the Gateses and Zuckerbergs, and strive to accomplish more and change the world. It is admirable, but we've allowed the extreme outliers to become our baseline.

Why aren't we celebrating, for example, the graduates who, when shown all the riches the world has to offer, choose to go back home and become a public school teacher? Or the graduate who simply wants a steady job and time to spend with family and friends? Is that so bad? I think not. I bet they get much more sleep than those in investment banking do, even if they have less money in their pockets come payday.

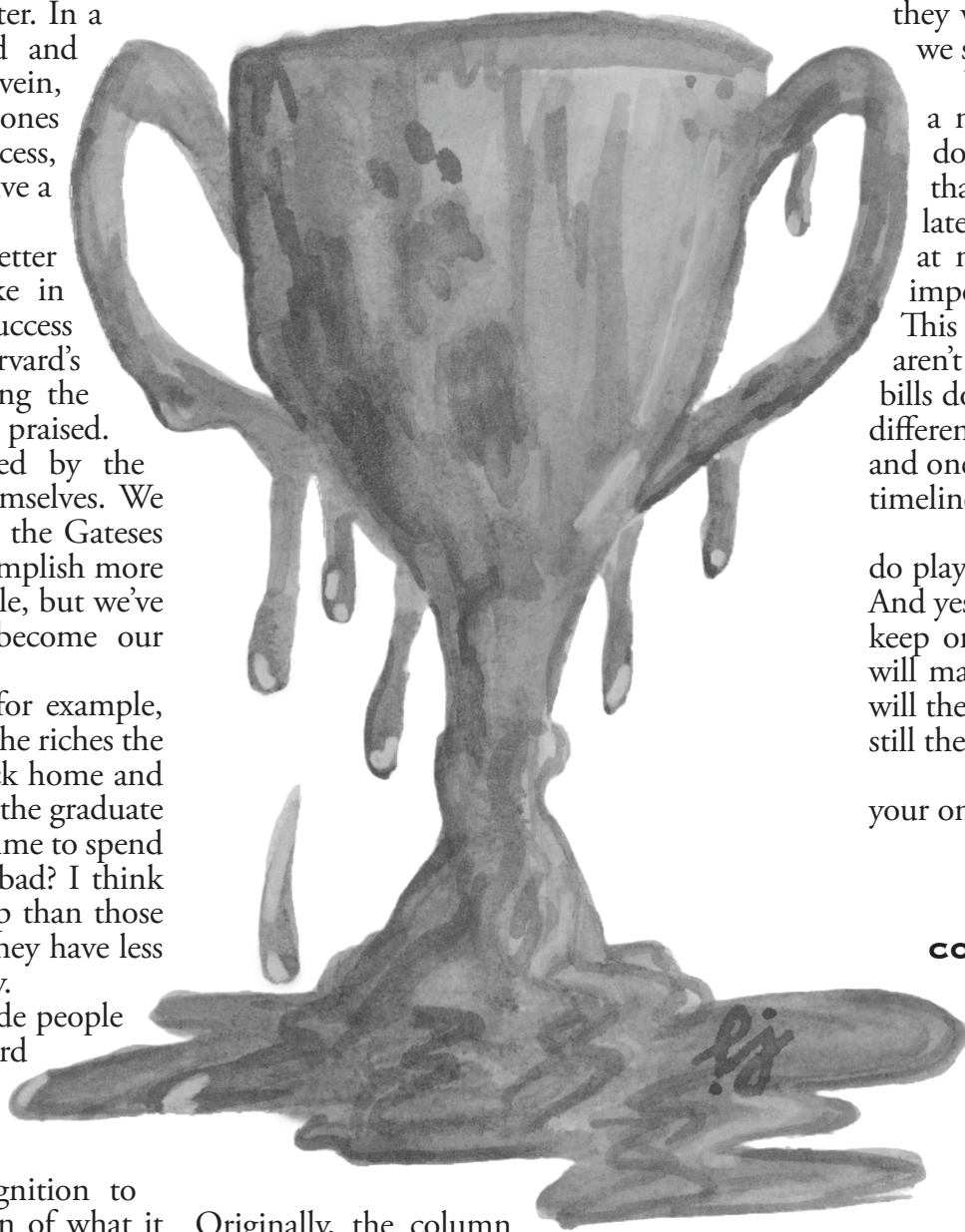
I say all of this not to dissuade people from the merits of ambition and hard work. Hard work is valuable, and it is only fair that we get rewarded for our efforts. However, we have allowed prestige, salary, and recognition to stand in front of the larger question of what it means to live a good life. I, like many of you, sacrifice far too many hours of sleep in pursuit of success, and I often ask myself: Is this what life is meant to be like? Work, work, work, and then ... work some more. We retire and then, finally, are allowed to start living the life we always wanted. That doesn't sound too fun to me. So, think on that and “tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” This line is from Mary Oliver's 1992 poem “The Summer Day,” and it is also the essential question I ask all of you now.

At Harvard, we are always working toward our post-college lives. No dinner goes

by without someone mentioning an info session or a consulting club meeting at some god-awful time of night. It's telling that people never smile when they talk about these things. I can say from experience: there's nothing to smile about in Harvard Undergraduate Consulting on Business and the Environment.

It's always the next thing, then the next thing: constant motion, never stopping to just be. I am a workaholic in recovery, a title of which I am oddly proud. At one point last semester, I did something I had never done before: I took five minutes with no distractions, no phone (can you believe it?!), and I just sat with my thoughts. Meditation is the wrong word for it, but my room felt still that day. In that stillness, I came to a realization about myself. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew that it wasn't what I was doing at the time.

So, later that night I slipped out of bed—actually quite difficult as a freshman sleeping on the top bunk—picked up a pen, and started writing the first article of what would evolve into this column: “John Harvard's Left Foot.”



Originally, the column was titled “John Harvard's Left Foot (Don't Lick Me).” That little parenthetical addition would eventually be vetoed by smarter individuals than I, but I have actually seen someone lick the shoe, so it isn't entirely ridiculous. In any case, through writing, I found a new passion and a new drive for exploring the world outside of consulting and finance and all the things that first-years swear up and down they'd never sell their souls for.

Writing gives me the same feeling I had as a child when I was convinced I would play pro soccer. The mere mention of football would get my nine-year-old heart pumping a mile a minute, and my eyes would dart around looking for

something spherical to kick about. I don't have the same physiological reaction when someone mentions writing, but that fire of childlike curiosity still burns each time I pick up the pen.

I recently read James Doty's “Into the Magic Shop,” a book on life, death, neuroscience, and just about everything in between. In the book, a line speaks to what it means to live fully: “The heart of a child is wide-open.” A lovely

“When did we stop dreaming?”

sentiment, yet it is not only the heart that is wide-open; their minds are, too. Children dream big dreams because they don't know what the real world is yet—there's something beautiful about that. They aren't limited by salary or expectations; they simply let their imagination build the future they want. And so, I asked myself: When did we stop dreaming?

We wish each other success because it's a measurable metric, and loving what you do and chasing your dreams isn't. It's funny that even my nine-year-old self, rocking the latest Tomáš Rosický Arsenal kit, with a ball at my feet, knew the difference and, more importantly, knew which one he preferred. This isn't to say you should chase dreams that aren't compatible with reality. As we all know, bills don't care about aspirations. Still, there is a difference between a dream that's been adjusted and one replaced by coffee chats and a recruiting timeline.

So, yes, I'll never play for Arsenal, but I do play for Club B—and I am so proud of that. And yes, I may never win a Pulitzer Prize, but I'll keep on writing for the Indy. Neither of those will make it into a commencement speech, nor will they pay the bills, but at least my dreams are still there, just in a different form.

So, tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

NOAH BASDEN '29 (NHBASDEN@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WANTS TO HEAR YOUR DREAMS AND WHAT YOU WOULD DO IF MONEY WERE NO OBJECT ... NO, SERIOUSLY, MY EMAIL IS RIGHT THERE ... CLICK IT ... I DARE YOU!

GRAPHIC BY LOLA SELBERG '30

How Ducks Avoid Drowning

Life is more than sinking or swimming.

By SUCHETA SRIKANTH '29

What does it feel like to drown? It takes a while for the realization to hit—you might not reach the surface again. Eventually, you gain awareness that the subtle waft of air flowing in and out, a sensation you once took for granted, is now gone. Contrary to your instincts, breathing deeper doesn't help; it only makes the choking worse. Fear has yet to sink in. You flail relentlessly, not even aware that you should be trying your best to get someone's attention. You open your eyes (stupid), hoping that if you can see someone, they will see you too. All the while, your chest grows heavy with the water filling your lungs, but you never think to stop inhaling—in any other situation, no breathing means no living. Still, that panic and utter loss of control extend beyond the water.

The first time I nearly drowned, I was seven years old. We had only been in the small Massachusetts town for about a year, eager to build community and make new friends. A neighbor had invited my sister and me to her pool party, the most popular gathering on our street at the time. All the neighborhood children attended

“The first time I nearly drowned, I was seven years old.”

every year. I wore a pink polka-dot bathing suit, one my mom had bought for me, long before I started to hate the color pink. My sister was really the one who knew people there; I was just her annoying little sister, desperate to play like mermaids and hunt for plastic torpedoes. I lay in the sun, holding onto a pool floatie, trying to tan my “untannable” skin like all the high schoolers. The next second, I was under. I felt it, the epiphany that I was going to die. I could not reach the surface no matter how hard I tried. Eventually, I closed my eyes and admitted defeat.

I did not pass out, and obviously, I did not die. My somewhat absent-minded sister had realized that I was, in fact, drowning, and she pulled me up with the help of a friend. I started crying, my face red with embarrassment. I thought I would be the laughingstock for years to come, the silly little girl who had gone in the water without knowing how to swim.

That's the problem with this story, though. I did know how to swim—years of lessons at the YMCA and vacations at pool resorts proved it. And yet, I was so close to drowning completely. That humiliated me most: the idea that something I knew so well had failed me, that it wasn't enough to keep me afloat. I have not drowned since that day—a major success in my eyes—but perhaps that is because now I try not to go too deep in the water.

Since I was little, I have wanted to be perfect, in every way possible. That is probably why even my swimming mishap affected me so deeply. I felt no pressure from my family or friends. This was an entirely personal mission. I often made mistakes, but I saw perfection as a goal to reach, not a state of being, so I was completely fine with setbacks. I had big dreams of being a top student and getting into my dream schools, and I put in the effort to get there. By the time I made it to Harvard, success felt more like an expectation than something to revel in.

At a place like Harvard, the feeling that you are falling behind is unrelenting, and from

the start, it is all too clear why. It feels like some people are built to manage it all, born to handle the never-ending pressures. As a first-year, I experienced imperfection across the board—academically, socially, physically, and mentally—and yet I was doe-eyed and hopeful that the next week, the next semester, would offer a chance to achieve the goals that once came so easily to me. Now, barely a month into my sophomore year, I still find myself dissatisfied.

I posed this concern to my father when he came to visit me for brunch. Last year, I often felt as if I was drowning, and this year there has been some improvement. I am staying afloat, but now I feel stuck as the slowest swimmer. I told him how every day, no matter how much I accomplished, I could never feel satisfied because so much remained to be done. He shook his head and set me straight. At this school, there will always be someone above you—doing more, getting more opportunities, being better-liked, smarter, anything at all. It is all about personal progress. I pushed back because, while I was no longer trying to be perfect (that was feeling more and more like a pipe dream), I still wanted to feel accomplished. And I wanted that accomplishment to feel as easy as it looked for those around me and as easy as it had been for me before—though I suppose those were much gentler waters.

“How much do you know about ducks?” he asked me. The answer, naturally, was nothing. I raised an eyebrow. What he told me next has been spinning in my mind for days.

When you see a duck, it looks majestic. They are built for the water, after all, and seem like they float easily across the surface. But underwater, it's an entirely different story. In his eyes, everyone here is a duck, paddling frantically with their feet all for some semblance of effortlessness and speed. That doesn't change the fact that ducks sometimes slow down, take breaks, rest, and recoup. But they always paddle again.

Turns out, what I thought was my father's original, sage advice is a phenomenon that originated at Stanford University. As the Stanford Student Affairs website explains, “The Stanford Duck Syndrome is the idea that students are struggling to survive the pressures of a competitive environment while presenting the image of a relaxed student, like a calm duck gliding across a fountain ... We all go through ups and downs, and it's important to acknowledge the obstacles and seek support rather than paddle furiously beneath the surface.”

While I deeply resonated with my father's advice, I take issue with the way the phenomenon has come to be known. Ducks, despite their anatomical differences, are fundamentally made for the water. They don't drown if they stop paddling. It is simply how they navigate their environment, and it's not as if they are afraid to drown. I agree with what my father said—everyone here is a duck, and being a duck is a huge part of who we are. We always will be, and that is often how we got here in the first place. What matters most is being transparent and normalizing the fact that everyone can and will paddle. That is the way we support each other, not by writing off the concept as harmful.

There is no “rather” here. Acknowledge the obstacles, seek support, and paddle furiously, trusting yourself to stay afloat.

I often think back to the first time I drowned. I wonder if I could have done anything differently. Perhaps I could have focused more on my balance instead of basking in the sun's warm rays, or stayed closer to the deck instead

“Since I was little, I have wanted to be perfect, in every way possible.”

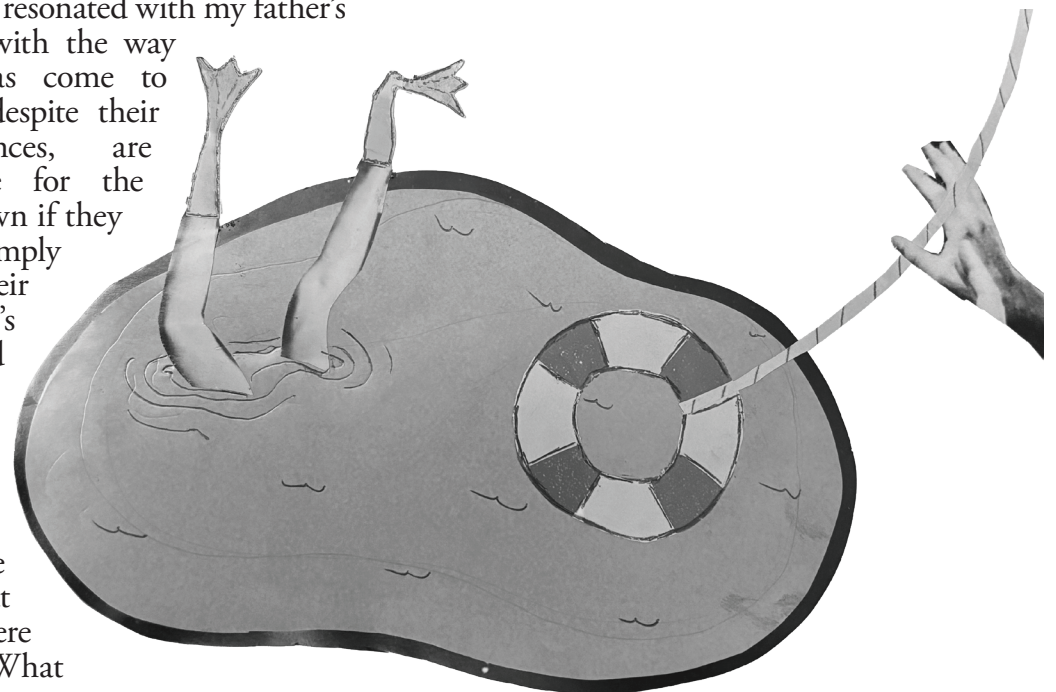
of letting myself float to the middle, where the water was deeper. Candidly, I feel the same way about the metaphorical drowning of my freshman year. I used to think that the reason I sank was that everyone else was better suited to the environment, that I was not meant to be here. When my dad told me about this analogy, I was confused at first, but eventually I understood what he meant.

Living in regret gets tiring after a while, especially when you are so focused on how others are doing. The point of Floating Duck Syndrome isn't that everyone is secretly hiding what it means to try, driven by a shameful fear of failure. Instead, the metaphor of floating ducks should stand for how everyone continuously puts in the effort needed to succeed in an environment you were made for, despite the ups and downs and shaken feathers. Any progress is a step in the right direction, no matter how far you paddle each day.

And the most important part of “duck”-hood? If I want to truly swim, I can no longer avoid the water.

SUCHETA SRIKANTH '29 (SUCHETASRIKANTH@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT” AND THANKS HER NEIGHBOR FOR THE HAZARDOUS LESSON.

GRAPHIC BY TESS HARRIS '30



Baba Yaga's Wandering Professor

The problem with adjunct professors and intro-level courses.

By MADI KANG '29

Baba Yaga is hard to categorize. Depending on whom you ask, she is a Slavic witch, a folkloric ogress, a wise and helpful woman, or a combination of all three. She travels through the forest on a flying mortar, carries a pestle as a weapon, and—most famously—lives in a wandering wooden house balanced on two ginormous chicken legs. The house is arguably just as, if not more, unpredictable as its occupant. It wanders through the forest, turning, stopping, disappearing, and reappearing wherever it pleases.

Lately, I have found myself thinking about Baba Yaga while sitting in Emerson 105.

Not because my professor is a witch. Not because Emerson Hall has sprouted chicken legs and decided to move out of the Yard. And, most unfortunately, not because I have discovered a magical alternative to learning statistical analysis and coding with R.

It is because my introduction to quantitative methods in the Government department at Harvard has felt strangely similar to stepping into a house that refuses to stay put.

I enrolled in Gov 50: Data Science for the Social Sciences expecting a “welcome to coding Gov concentrator who has no interest or experience with coding” introductory class. That last word seemed fairly straightforward: introductory. I imagined being shown the foundations of coding, having unfamiliar words and concepts broken down, and being given grace for making mistakes while gradually becoming less intimidated by the quantitative side of a

“Gov 50 doesn't seem to be a consistent experience.”

concentration that, for many of us, is otherwise firmly rooted in the humanities.

The course description seemed to promise exactly that: “no previous experience with statistics or statistical computing required.”

For a student whose last exposure to coding was HTML during sophomore year of high school, I've learned that “no experience required” does not mean “you will be fine without much guidance.” It means almost the opposite. The course is supposed to meet you where you are. Instead, I feel like I was handed the map only after Emerson 105's legs had already decided where the journey would take us.

Part of the issue is that Gov 50 doesn't seem to be a consistent experience. Students who took it in previous years describe something far different from my own encounter. Some remember a course that lacked structure and relied too heavily on AI for assignments, while others describe a far more technically demanding curriculum. The role and expectations of coding shift entirely depending on who is teaching.

Of course, professors should be allowed to teach differently. A university would be a miserable place if every classroom felt identical. But there is a difference between a course having a personality and a course having an identity crisis. This distinction becomes particularly glaring when the course is a department requirement. Gov students do not all arrive with the same academic background, and for many, this course is their first encounter with R, statistical modeling, or a mode of reasoning focused strictly on quantitative data.

I do not think that Gov 50 should be inherently easier. Yes, I believe the current course assumes too much prerequisite knowledge and does not feel like an introductory course. But regardless of course expectations, I believe the department should structure Gov 50 clearly. There is something uniquely frustrating about struggling with material when you cannot tell whether the subject itself is difficult or whether you simply haven't been given the baseline structure needed to learn it.

If a Gov 50 student spends forty minutes trying to figure out why their command is returning an error, they have not necessarily spent forty minutes learning political science analysis. I should be able to leave a class having learned something new, not with five new questions that will take 20 Google searches and two hours of office hours to somewhat understand. Technical skills have an important place, but when they obscure a course's intellectual purpose, the introductory bridge has failed. Too often, it feels as though the bridge is being built while we are already walking on it.

Further, I have concerns about how we use lecture time. Gov 50 centers on learning two quantitative languages—statistical analysis and coding. Yet class time is insufficient to teach both, so we scramble to find our own solutions for learning the latter.

Just last week, I attended my CA's study hall hours before our Monday lecture. I expected to meet a few other peers struggling with a homework problem that referred to concepts and material never explained in lecture, section, or the textbook readings. Later that day, in lecture, I learned that over 40 students attended his office hours with questions about the homework that even he struggled to understand and conceptualize. When given the chance to provide feedback and ask questions about the homework during the last ten minutes of lecture, my professor appeared confused and defensive about the negative experience most of us had with the assignment. What followed was an influx of posts on Sidechat—“Gov 50 is so heinous we are all screwed” and “Appreciating my stats prof even more after hearing about the atrocities of Gov 50”—and rightfully so.

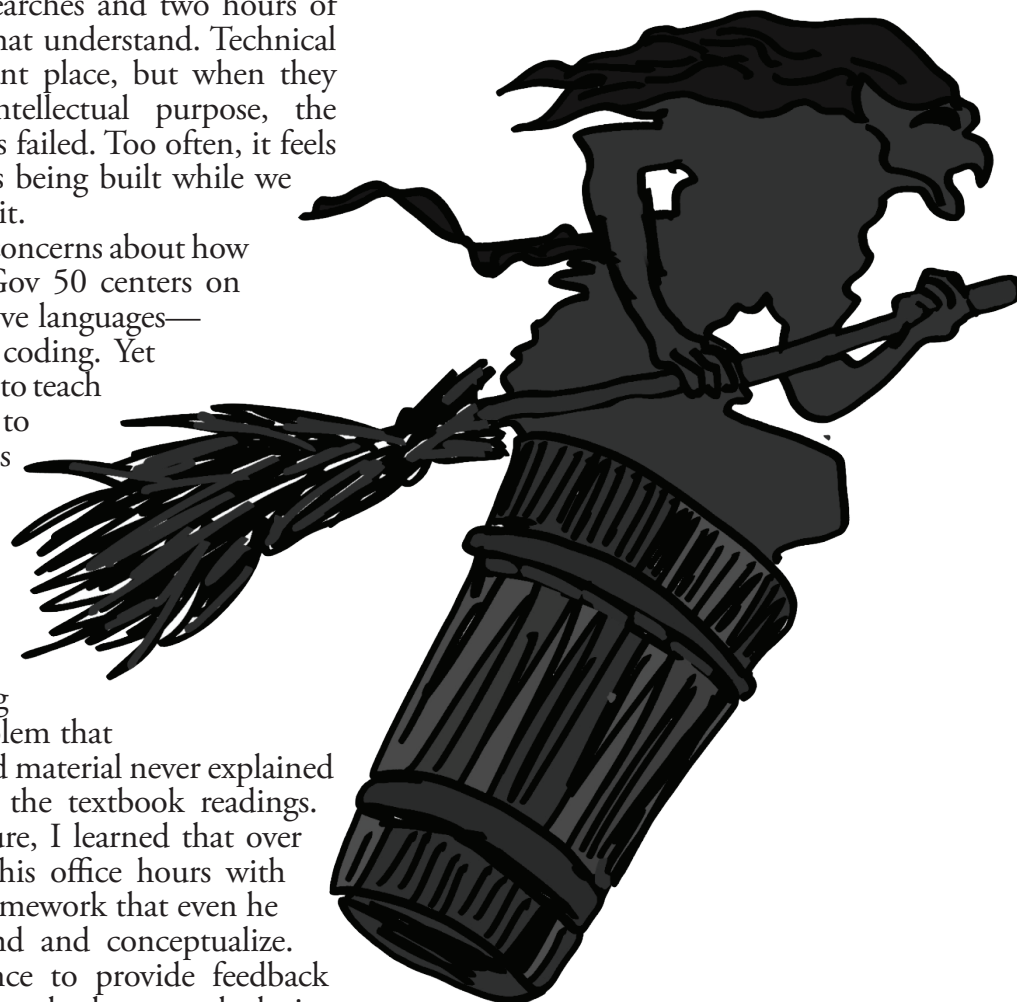
“Gov 50 is so heinous we are all screwed.”

Given the stereotypes of Gov concentrators, it is easy to dismiss these complaints as just a lack of motivation, but—I digress.

Harvard likes to tell us that learning here is supposed to be exploratory, and I believe it. But that exploration requires some direction. This is not to say that I am against adjunct professors. They are not inherently worse educators. However, placing them in introductory courses—especially when their topic and specialty are on the more niche side of the field—creates an environment where the entire class is tied to their self-interest rather than the department's expectations. These required introductory courses must be taken seriously enough that the quality of a student's

education is not entirely dependent on who happens to teach the course that year. Yes, professors should be given room to experiment. They should be given room to teach differently and authentically. But the college must establish and enforce a baseline. That baseline must set common objectives, clear expectations, consistent resources, and enough support so that students encountering an entirely new subfield are not left to fend for themselves. Otherwise, the college risks leaving students more confused after a semester's worth of lectures, without having achieved its goal of teaching skills and instilling newfound interests.

Baba Yaga's house can wander because wandering is the point. Its instability is part of the story.



A required introductory course does not have that luxury.

When I walk into Emerson 105, I do not need the walls to stay perfectly still, nor do I need every professor to teach the same way. I do not even need the course to be easy. I just want to know that when I walk out, I will have actually been somewhere.

MADI KANG '29 (MADISONKANG@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES TO ONE DAY INHERIT A WANDERING HOUSE, PREFERABLY WITH LEGS THAT DO NOT RESEMBLE CHICKENS.

GRAPHIC BY KARISHMA KODALI '29

How to Enjoy a Live Theater Performance

A step-by-step guide to becoming a good patron of the arts.

BY ELLE GUO '29

To my dismay, recent surveys show that only around a quarter of American adults report having attended a live art event in the past month. However, with the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club starting its fall season, students will have plenty of opportunities to escape becoming part of this deadly statistic.

I have too often heard arguments against attending shows: it is too expensive, it is too time-consuming, or theater was never “for them.” One reason I hear most often is that they take up a considerable block of one’s evening. And to that I

“Never let your fickle friends prevent you from advancing your artistic literacy.”

say, relax and don’t worry about your impending p-set for roughly two hours. The world does not revolve around deadlines. Frankly, people who make these feeble excuses are missing out on a lot. To encourage those who may be reluctant to go to a theater performance, here is a (semi-serious) guide to enjoying one.

Before you buy tickets, remember there is no shame in going alone. Never let your fickle friends prevent you from advancing your artistic literacy. If you show up in business casual attire with a notebook and a pen, your fellow theater-goers will assume you are someone important, such as an art critic, and may think highly of you instead of thinking “what a loser.” Even if you don’t go undercover, people will not think you are pathetic, friendless, jobless, or weird.

Watching a show with a friend can be a fruitful experience, too. When you leave the theater, make sure to loudly proclaim the complex themes and fine details you noticed during the performance so other attendees know you’re erudite. Here are some examples of pretentious phrases you can holler in the lobby: “The actor’s micro-expressions were so precise”; “I was intrigued by the director’s choice to make it feel as if we are the complicit bystanders to the main character’s descent into corruption”; or, if you are a music nerd, “I thought the pit handled that meter change exquisitely well.”

Now it is time to plan how you’ll get tickets. Especially if this is your first time going to a live theater performance, look into the main themes and topics of the available productions. However, I don’t recommend Wikipedia plot synopses for this purpose, as I have often accidentally scrolled too far and spoiled a character’s death. Instead, find publicity blurbs on a show’s official website,

or cover the bottom third of your screen as you cautiously scroll through Wikipedia.

Once you have your show in mind, now it is time to plan admission. Although a professional Broadway production can set you back over a hundred dollars, many cheaper options are available. The first option, which the “Harvard Independent” absolutely does not endorse, is “second-acting”: sneaking into a musical during intermission by confidently walking in and hoping for an unsold seat. The other option, which is less thrilling—I mean, less illegal—is to take advantage of local theater performances, which will often sell better seats for a fraction of the cost. A great example is HRDC, the on-campus theater group. Their shows never fail to impress.

On the day of the performance, I suggest dressing up—just a little bit—to feel like a real patron of the arts. Opera glasses are a little obsolete these days. Make sure to grab a Playbill on your way to your seat, and laugh sensibly at the cast’s and crew’s bio blurbs. Soon enough, the lights will dim, and you will hear a pre-show announcement asking you to turn off your mobile device, which is to be taken more seriously than your professor’s requests to do the same.

Then comes my favorite moment in all of live theater: the house lights go pitch dark, almost to the point of total blindness. You and your fellow audience members are waiting in anticipation for something to happen.

Otherwise, you can take this time to make small talk with strangers or try to work out your p-set in your head, if you’re still thinking about it.

Now for Act Two. In many shows, the second act is shorter than the first to accommodate our dwindling attention spans. Modern musicals often have a dramatic “everything goes wrong”

“Take advantage of student productions while you still live just a ten-minute walk from a theater.”

number in which the main character loses everything before reaching some sort of semi-sweet resolution. I’m a sucker for it every time.

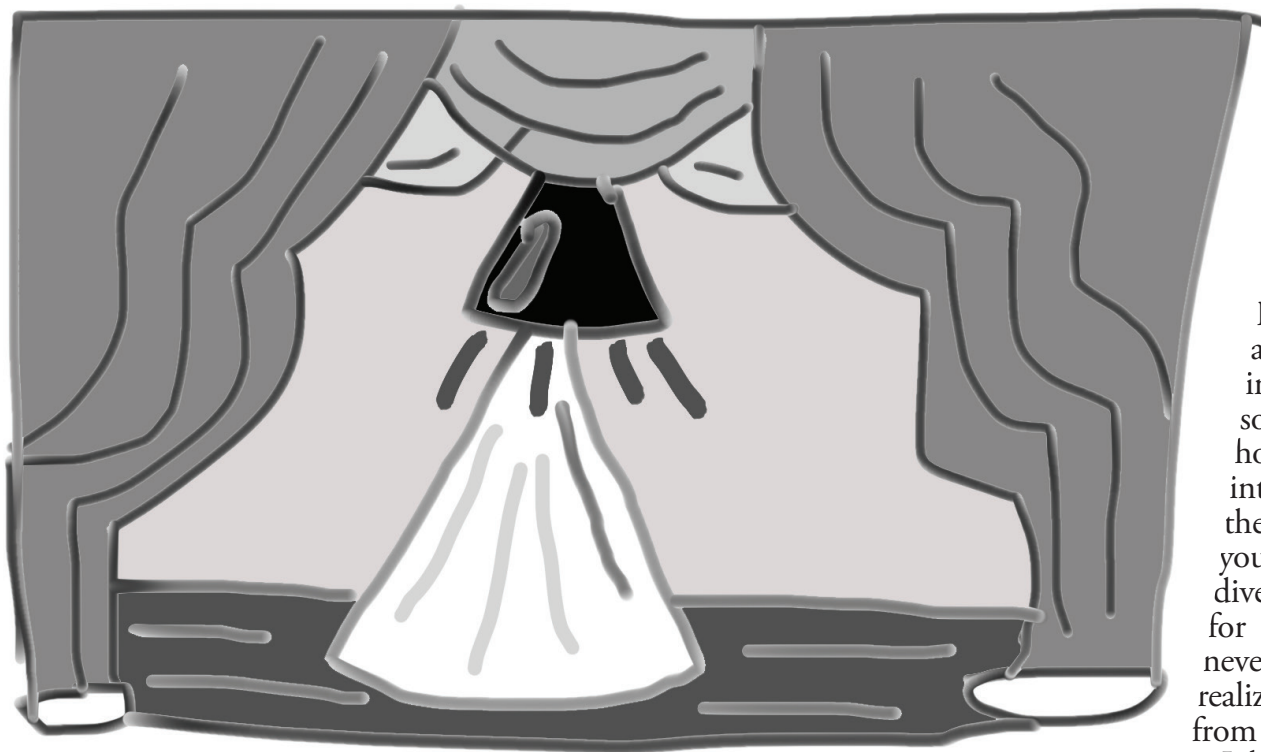
When it is time to congratulate the cast, actors will typically bow alone or in pairs. You will be clapping until you cannot feel your hands, but it is well worth it. Most shows will also acknowledge their crew members and pit musicians by gesturing to the wings and the orchestra. They are not doing some sort of aircraft safety demonstration; keep clapping and show your love for the people who work behind the scenes (that is me, so you had better).

Congratulations, you just experienced the magic of live theater. Now you can go home and thoughtfully read the entire Wikipedia page to catch up on any plot points or deaths you may have missed. Bonus points if the article has a “themes and interpretations” section so you can tell your friends how unforgettable and intellectually stimulating the experience was. And if you really want to do a deep dive, scroll through Reddit for thorough analysis you never asked for but didn’t realize you were missing from your life.

Jokes aside, theater is not inherently more artistically valuable than movies, novels, or television shows. But it is unique: there is no rewinding, pausing, or jumping ahead—comforts we have grown much too accustomed to with digital streaming. Take advantage of student productions while you still live just a ten-minute walk from a theater.

ELLIE GUO '29 (EGUO@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) SWEARS SHE'S NOT PRETENTIOUS.

GRAPHIC BY ANDREW GE '30



A spotlight. A lush orchestral overture. An actor starting to monologue.

As the show progresses, you’ll encounter mildly humorous moments you will not find extremely funny; that’s okay, because no one asked for your non-professional opinion on the show’s humor. Do what everyone else does, laugh at the top of your lungs, and move on with your day. If you feel the need to cough, sneeze, or unwrap the loudest cellophane known to man, try to do so quietly or at least during a forgettable filler scene.

Before you know it, it will be time for a brief 15-minute intermission. If you want to go to the bathroom, good luck, because the line will somehow be three times the theater’s capacity, and you’ll get to the front as soon as you hear the chime signaling the end of intermission.

“The Way We Never Were”: On View at the Harvard Art Museums

American cultural nostalgia and its tension with hard history.

By SAM PARK '29

The Way We Never Were” is a photography collection on view at the Harvard Art Museums from Aug. 29 to May 9, 2027. This exhibition features an archive selection assembled in the 1970s by sociologist and curator Barbara P. Norfleet, who earned a PhD in social psychology from Harvard University in 1957. Alongside her archival project, Norfleet was continuously involved with Harvard as a teacher, photographer, and curator. The full archive includes over 20,000 photographs from professional photography studios spanning the

domestic expansion” was lauded at the same time as American eugenics and the forced sterilization of Native American, Mexican, and Black women, as well as other marginalized groups. Photos of family-friendly youth play and socialization were put forth to codify acceptable teenage behavior out of fear of juvenile delinquency.

As we examine our past, these joyful images, built to characterize the post-war decades, actively mask the social and political tensions of the time. From the Civil Rights Movement to presidential assassinations, American life was far from the pictured stability and uniformity. However, the invention of the camera and its widespread adoption led to some of humanity’s most active engagements with nostalgia and memory. It may not have always been a conscious choice to memorialize stability over hardship but rather a product of wanting to capture our happiest moments.

The Origin of the Exhibition and its Ethos

I had the privilege of speaking with Audrey Sands, the Richard L. Menschel Associate Curator of Photography at Harvard Art Museums, about her experience curating this exhibition. “The Way We Never Were” is Sands’ first proposed exhibition with Harvard Art Museums, and it comes from an extended process of examining the photography collection of the Museums and thinking in conversation with the history of photography in fine art museums across the United States.

Sands’ goal in curating “The Way We Never Were” was to explore new ways to introduce existing permanent collections to the gallery space. The American Professional Photographers Collection, curated by Barbara Norfleet, lies within the larger mass of 90,000 photographs housed at the Harvard Art Museums. Although a quarter of the collection is Norfleet’s archive, it has not been examined as a whole since leaving the Carpenter Center and coming to the Fogg Museum (the oldest and largest part of the Harvard Art Museums) in 2002.

This archive is deeply tied to the history of visual arts and photography at Harvard. The Carpenter Center preceded other museums in its interdisciplinary and inclusive engagement with photography, thanks to Davis Pratt, the photography curator from 1965-

1972, and Norfleet. The initial photography teaching collection consolidated multiple smaller collections that focused on social documentation. This treated photography as both an art form and a scientific or historical analysis, a practice radically ahead of its time. This duality called into question ideas of “cultural memory” and “collective consciousness,” and how artists largely crafted them.

Barbara Norfleet led the photography program and collection at the Carpenter Center from 1972-2002. During this time, she traveled the country between 1975 and 1977 to gather prints and negatives from the attics and basements

“As we examine our past, these joyful images, built to characterize the post-war decades, actively mask the social and political tensions of the time.”

late 19th century to the 1980s across the United States, though most are from the late 1930s to the early 1960s. Audrey Sands, Madison Brown, and Bridget Hinz curated this exhibition.

American post-World War II commercial photography was largely defined by its power to shape public perceptions of American culture—put bluntly, a heteronormative, comfortable, structured, and unified suburbia. Through magazines and promotional images, professional photographers created a highly fictionalized yet nostalgic image of “American culture.” They did this by specifically documenting and promoting consumer products, staging photographs of “daily life,” and celebrating the triumphs of post-war America.

However, when these meticulously curated photographs are placed in their more specific cultural contexts, many inconsistencies and contradictions with reality begin to emerge. One photograph depicts a “Tupperware party,” featured in advertisements for the new polyethylene product that is “The best thing that’s happened to women since they got the vote!” While it was promoted as an improvement for women’s lives and a way to reduce waste, many would argue that these notions also kept women in the kitchen and promoted mass consumption of plastic. To give another example, in a time when sex was highly stigmatized and birth control was not yet available, photographs of newborn babies circulated in U.S. Public Health Service reports to construct a narrative of postwar domestic expansion.

These photographs not only contained inconsistencies, but they also actively masked systemic issues and cultural diversions in an attempt to create a pure, unified image. “Postwar

“This archive is deeply tied to the history of visual arts and photography at Harvard.”

of more than 25 professional studios. This large collection helped characterize the Carpenter Center and differentiate it from other museums, and therefore it was with Norfleet’s retirement in 2002 that the teaching collection as a whole, consisting of over 10,000 prints and 40,000 negatives, moved to the Harvard Art Museums.

However, despite the size of Norfleet’s archive, it struggled to fit neatly into conventional photography exhibitions. Thus, it found few opportunities to enter the main gallery spaces of the Harvard Art Museums.



“An All-American Lady”

Even though these professional photographers still had personal style and strong artistic merit, because of the widespread notion that fine art was specifically “art for art’s sake,” for many years family portraiture or images created for advertising were seen as far below and less aesthetically interesting and unique, preventing photography from being considered meaningful fine-art.

“What was populating these collections was work by named, iconic individuals who were seen to have pushed forward the art history of photography,” said Sands.

In contrast, Norfleet, who trained in sociology alongside photography, focused on images that permeated everyday life in advertisements, magazines, and family portraiture. Thus, Sands worked to draw attention to this particular thread of photography, examining it and the tension it holds with what we consider as “fine art.” She examined the collection as a whole to determine how best to present it to the public.

“It has to be something we breathe new life into ... It cannot just lie dormant,” she stated.

This exhibition, which occupies only a single bay in the Harvard Art Museums’ special exhibition space, reaches across the United States and showcases a wide range of social phenomena over time. Through this multidisciplinary approach to photography, which combines history, science, and art, Harvard’s archival wealth comes to light.

She explained that a major goal is to advocate for making art and art history accessible, making the museum’s holdings transparent, and allowing viewers to connect with the works. “We really try to look at what holdings, what deep pockets really characterized our collections and make us distinct from other museums,” she described.

The Timeliness of the Exhibition: Why Now?

Sands described how, while the photographs themselves are a narrow and idealized representation of “American life,” grounded in white suburbia, the goal in curating the exhibition was to offer new entry points into the collection.

“The task at hand is to think about how we present this collection that is filled with extraordinary and bizarre pictures that are joyful, humorous, and troubling to look at while we also present them in a way that complicates how we look at them and provide a number of pathways

they stand in and to connect with the exhibit on multiple fronts.

“Each piece comes from a cultural context of protest, of violence, of loss, of environmental degradation,” Sands described, but also from an attempt to codify American life, ritual, and social identity in a way that is playful and nostalgic, directly following a period of time that was so hard on U.S. citizens. The exhibition encourages viewers to participate in broader national conversations about how we remember our past and treat our history.

Norfleet’s archive began in 1975 with a National Endowment for the Humanities research grant, which allowed her to begin organizing the collection at Harvard. This time marked the 200th anniversary of the United States, and it featured a lot of cultural looking back that mirrors us at the 250th anniversary. Sands brought up questions regarding patriotism and “American culture” that the exhibition is infused with: “What does it mean to celebrate this nation that is so deeply divided? Can there be a cohesive picture of who we are? What makes an American individual or society?” Each question requires dual perspectives and a conscious effort to enter these “seemingly objective ways of telling.”

by curators and practitioners, did they start building photography collections. Even within

“In an art world that often tells viewers what they are looking at and how to look at it, this exhibition offers an opportunity for individuals to reflect on the cultural context of the country they stand in and to connect with the exhibit on multiple fronts.”



the “fine art” sphere of photography, this usually meant edgy, experimental pieces by “fine artists,” not the everyday personal, professionally hired photographers who captured the images in Norfleet’s archive.

**SAM PARK ’29
(SHPART@COLLEGE.
HARVARD.EDU) WOULD
LIKE TO THANK
AUDREY SANDS AND
JENNIFER AUBIN,
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
OF MEDIA RELATIONS
IN THE HARVARD
ART MUSEUMS, FOR
HELPING ORGANIZE THIS
OPPORTUNITY FOR THE
“HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”**

**GRAPHICS BY TAYLOR BIERWERTH ’29
& LINDEN MCCARL ’28**

“Through this multidisciplinary approach to photography, which combines history, science, and art, Harvard’s archival wealth comes to light.”

for visitors to look at them,” Sands said.

In an art world that often tells viewers what they are looking at and how to look at it, this exhibition offers an opportunity for individuals to reflect on the cultural context of the country

Looking back further, the art and craft of photography emerged from the camera’s first technological inventions and its ability to “capture reality,” as it were. In the art world, technology has long been a source of influence and inspiration, but also a point of tension, as it highlights issues of accessibility and class divide. This has begun to change in recent years. Whereas in the 1950s only trained professionals could manually paint and alter photographs, that process has become much more accessible. Social media has become a breeding ground for beauty standards and for opportunities to “perform” and “improve ourselves” for the camera, social perception, and memory.

Looking back at our history, we can see that throughout art, literature, and science, humanity has long faced this tension between capturing reality and altering it.

All in all, this is an amazing exhibit with playful, iconic photos that evoke a complex American history beneath its stereotypes and ideals. It is a unique part of Harvard’s incredibly robust collection, engaging multiple fields and encouraging viewers to take one or more of the many pathways into the perception world that connects past and present.

Because photography, after its invention, was quickly adopted across fields—scientific, legal, personal, and professional—the art world saw it as a threat to, or “less than,” the fine arts exhibited in museums. Thus, for a long time, museums didn’t actively curate photography, and only in the 1970s, after years of advocacy



Amelie Lima



Exploring American Hometowns: Crawfordville, Florida

What small-town Florida taught and brought me.

By TAYLOR THORNE '28

An old Florida adage goes, “The further north you go, the more southern it becomes.” The state’s northwestern region is the Panhandle. The name comes from its image as the “handle” of a peninsula-shaped frying pan. The 13 counties that directly border the Gulf of Mexico in this region are known as the “Forgotten Coast.”

Now that you have that vision, the small, rural town of Crawfordville, Florida, has been situated along this stretch since 1866—my hometown. However, calling it small may be an overstatement, as the town covers only 4.5 square miles and has a population of 4,000. With this in mind, I believe it is more fitting to discuss my hometown against the backdrop of Wakulla County as a whole. One of the 13 “Forgotten Coast” counties, Wakulla encompasses the land

football is second only to Christianity. Square dancing is on the educational curriculum, but sexual education is firmly absent.

“Only in retrospect do I realize how special it was to casually see a manatee while swimming and spend my free time in the center of nature rather than surrounded by concrete.”

If you drive just a short distance from Wakulla High School (my alma mater), you reach St. George Island, or SGI as we locals call it. It is a thin strip of land accessible only over a bridge and the site of many, many beach trips while growing up. It may have also led to quite a few days ending with blistering sunburns, but I have never regretted tanning on the pure white sand one bit.

Without excessive development and tourism, the island has remained much the same throughout my entire life. As the name “Forgotten Coast” suggests, beaches like SGI remain relatively unknown to the broader population of Florida and the vacationers who travel from up north. While other beaches like Miami and Panama City Beach are wracked with pollution, our paradise has remained relatively untouched by human hands.



that exists between the capital city and the sea. More specifically, it lies between Tallahassee and the nearest salty beaches.

I was born at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital in the blistering September heat of 2005. When I was 6, my family moved us 30 minutes away into the heart of Wakulla County. As we entered the county limits and passed cows grazing in a lush field, a large blue billboard with the phrase “Wakulla Loves Jesus” came into view. The sign was permanent and unequivocal in its message, forceful in its decree. I soon found out that this

“I soon found out that this county, much like its sign, stood unwavering and rooted in its values, such as maintaining tradition, preaching Southern hospitality, and appreciating the natural environment.”

county, much like its sign, stood unwavering and rooted in its values, such as maintaining tradition, preaching Southern hospitality, and appreciating the natural environment.

Before discussing the spirit of my small town, it is important to lay down some identifiers. Wakulla shows up in the lilting Southern accents, plentiful sweet tea, dirt roads with tire marks, and the tell-tale camo outfits that signal hunting season has arrived. Cowboy boots are a must, and

Those who have met me before are likely to doubt that I grew up in what is essentially the Deep South. I typically do not give off the vibe that I can shuck oysters or successfully guide a pontoon boat onto its trailer. Despite the Southern accents I was surrounded by, I never developed one myself, and my country vernacular only consists of the occasional “y’all.” Even though it is not apparent at first glance, Southern culture and the dynamics of small-town life still shaped me immensely. Even more importantly, I didn’t fully appreciate it until I left it behind to come to Harvard.

My hometown was full of natural wonders. Wakulla Springs State Park is one of the largest and deepest freshwater springs in the entire world. Water feeds it through a 45-mile underground river system of mapped limestone caves. This not only fuels the stunning swimming hole but also supplies a critical part of the Florida aquifer that provides drinking water to the region. Wakulla Springs was also the filming location for the famous movie “Creature from the Black Lagoon” in 1954.

The lush landscape makes the area the perfect habitat for creatures of all sorts (not just movie monsters), including alligators and manatees. And yet, to me, Wakulla Springs was simply the place I would go every weekend to swim in the icy, clear water with my friends before getting my favorite cookie dough ice cream in the lodge. Only in retrospect do I realize how special it was to casually see a manatee while swimming and spend my free time in the center of nature rather than surrounded by concrete—sorry, Boston.

Beyond its gorgeous natural features and rich history, one of the most striking things about my hometown is its insularity. Wakulla exists outside the normal bounds of time and space, maintaining its own gravitational pull over the people who live there. Once people move there, they tend to stay, and even when people leave, they eventually come back. I think that is one of the things about small towns. They seep into your body until they are as necessary as the blood that pumps through your heart. Leaving would only result in heartbreak.

Accordingly, many families are generational Wakullians, extending all the way back to the Civil War. You could often tell from a last name whether someone came from one of these historical founding families. Part of that history is difficult:

“I think that is one of the things about small towns. They seep into your body until they are as necessary as the blood that pumps through your heart.”

Wakulla was a Southern stronghold during the Civil War. Confederate troops from the county helped defend Tallahassee from a Union attack at the Battle of Natural Bridge in St. Marks. Tallahassee remained uncaptured until the end of the war and was the only Confederate state capital besides Austin, Texas, to remain uncaptured throughout the war. It is not altogether surprising

then that while growing up, I would frequently see Confederate flags displayed in neighboring yards or even on the back of trucks.

After all, Wakulla is not the most demographically diverse place. For instance, my family was the only Jewish family in the entire county. This cultural makeup is not intentional by any means, but rather a product of historical lineage and a perpetuating disdain for difference. Part of the small-town charm is maintaining a universal sense of familiarity. Everyone knows everyone. The four elementary schools filter into two middle schools and one unified high school. When people discussed building another high school, outrage ensued over the idea of splitting the football team. Like many small towns, Wakulla resists change in its construction and its mindset. When community and loyalty favor traditionalism, expecting anything else is naive.

This is not to say that my experience growing up in my Southern hometown was inherently negative or prejudicial. While some norms seem derivative of an era that no longer exists, I believe you can appreciate the positive aspects while rejecting exclusionary attitudes. This is likely the biggest change I have experienced since trading quiet slow living for the bustling city streets of Cambridge and Boston. When you are in the echo chamber of traditionalism, it is hard to imagine other places where progressive ideas are at the forefront. After you leave, you begin to understand that you can’t judge places and their communities without context.

My relationship with my hometown may be complex, but the person I am today would not exist without the place I call home. For that, I am forever grateful to the “Forgotten Coast” of Wakulla County.

I learned resilience and independence and developed an invaluable perspective. Small-town life is indeed slow, and it often doesn’t match the pace of changing times in more urban

locations. But that doesn’t always mean faster is inherently better. Many aspects of life are worth slowing down and appreciating. As I approach the second half of my undergraduate education here at Harvard (hello junior year), I plan to recall the special stillness that enveloped my hometown and take a moment to exist in the present before change envelops my life once more.

“When you are in the echo chamber of traditionalism, it is hard to imagine other places where progressive ideas are at the forefront.”

TAYLOR THORNE ’28
(TAYLORTHORNE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS ACCEPTING OPEN INVITATIONS TO GO LINE-DANCING.
GRAPHIC BY LINDEN MCCARL ’28

Cozy Pumpkin Spiced Treats to Try This Fall

By SAM PARK ’29 & ELLIE GUO ’29



“I Will Not Surrender!”: “Rhinoceros” Finds New Resonance at the American Repertory Theatre

The Eugene Ionesco play runs through Sept. 27 at the Loeb Drama Center.

By SADIE GUGLIOTTA '30

A man is sprawled before a café entrance, a white cloth draped over his face and a bottle of brandy in his hand. He sits up with a start, as though imbued with life by the sharp spotlight shining on him, and laments to the audience: “I’ve always tried to live, but life has passed me by.”

This attention-grabbing and starkly sobering image opens “Rhinoceros,” as staged by director Diane Paulus ’88, priming the audience for the emotional whiplash the show evokes. The classic Eugene Ionesco play explores how our conception of humanity is transformed under the siege of totalitarianism through an absurdist conceit: in a small French village, there is a shocking invasion of rhinoceroses!

Watching the American Repertory Theater’s interpretation of “Rhinoceros,” I often wondered whether to laugh or soberly contemplate the human condition, which captures why you need to experience this play for yourself. Though the characters are situated in a deeply absurd context, the humor and fear they respond with allow us to see ourselves in them. Their reactions are not nearly as implausible as they may seem at face value, and that’s what makes us squirm.

The disheveled man, we later learn, is named Bérenger, played by John Turturro. He stumbles into this café to meet his old friend Jean (Paul Giamatti). They discuss the importance of intellectual vitality for a full, attractive life and spirit (“You don’t exist, dear Bérenger, because you don’t think!” exclaims an exasperated but good-humored Jean).

Their jovial rendezvous is soon interrupted by the rumbling stampede of a stray rhinoceros, leaving a haze of smoke in its wake. The town square, replete with a central white chapel and a quaint grocery store on its right, is filled with a cast of confused townspeople.

However, no one except for Jean seems bothered by the incident. Bérenger suggests the rhinoceroses may come from a nearby swamp, or may have escaped from a zoo long ago and only just reemerged. An incredulous and irritated Jean insists that the rhinoceroses should be treated as a serious concern—they are an unprecedented threat to civilian welfare.

Ionesco conceptualized the rhinoceros metaphor during World War to describe the suppression of dissent pervading the status quo to accommodate fascist regimes: “But they looked upon you as an alarmist, then a nuisance, finally an enemy to be run down. They looked like they wanted to lower their heads and charge.”

By showing how dangerous ideological concession can be, Ionesco conveys the urgency of resisting totalitarianism. For example, it soon becomes apparent that this is not merely a rhinoceros invasion, but an epidemic of rhinoceritis, a condition that prompts even those ideologically opposed to violently transform into a rhinoceros.

Jean himself morphs into a rhinoceros before the audience’s eyes. He brays, “I’m all for change,” his voice distorted into a low rasp. Giamatti’s Jean becomes unrecognizable, his disposition agitated and buzzing with anger like a rabid dog. Bérenger flees his friend’s home, alarmed at how quickly and completely Jean has abandoned himself and his morality.

The cost of conformity, it seems, is the loss of one’s humanity.

Paulus’s staging lends the play an element of

unnerving realism, stripping it of some of its visual frills:

“In the original, every time [Jean] comes out of the bathroom, he has more makeup. He has more of a horn. And I thought, if we can put into

“The classic Eugene Ionesco play explores how our conception of humanity is transformed under the siege of totalitarianism through an absurdist conceit: in a small French village, there is a shocking invasion of rhinoceroses!”

Paul’s performance the transformation happening physically, vocally, then for the audience, we’re more in Bérenger’s shoes. Like, what is happening to this person, to this human?” she stated in an interview for NPR.

Paulus uses what is not shown to develop the eerie atmosphere Ionesco intended. Instead of ever showing us the rhinoceroses, smoke pervades the stage and the low wails of a rhino herd hum in the distance, signaling their gathering. At the same time, the humans onstage grow progressively more isolated and bewildered. This directorial restraint effectively situates the bizarre premise in a world theatergoers can recognize, heightening the tense tone.

At the start of Act Two, the chapel that served as a visual focal point throughout the preceding

act is suddenly overturned. The characters never explicitly address the choice, but it seems to imply an institutional overhaul and the destruction of societal anchors caused by the rhinoceroses. The status quo’s belief systems are easily trampled, and their destruction is apparently unremarkable. The world that “Rhinoceros” inhabits falls into visual disarray, mirroring the increasingly chaotic behaviors of its characters.

As Bérenger hunkers down to evade the epidemic, he clings to the last human relationships that have sustained him: those with his coworkers, Dudard and Daisy, played by Alex Ross and Tatiana Maslany, respectively. The three entertain the idea of living together, sustaining a human stronghold as the rhinoceros population around them grows. Dudard reasons that to keep living they must at least try to understand the rhinoceroses, the rhinoceroses’ way of life seems most natural: submitting to primordial instinct. Dudard swears that he will bring them down from the inside, as he races out the door.

So, Daisy and Bérenger live together in affectionate dysfunction until, in frantic fits of passion and fear, Daisy confesses her desire to experience the rhinoceros community’s protection. Frenzied, Bérenger strikes Daisy across the face. In a scene characterized by constant motion, Daisy and Bérenger pull apart, anticipation building in the abrupt stillness of their bodies.

This moment, among the show’s most climactic, is marked by uncertainty and silence, broken only as Daisy rises and stalks into the wilderness.

Bérenger, alone and afraid, questions his own humanity: “What is my language if I’m the only one that speaks it?” Turturro’s performance is stunning in its stony vulnerability. His humanness is strengthened by its uncertainty. It poses the question: Is humanity defined by how we see ourselves, or by our conceptions of and care for the world around us?

The granite-like backdrop rises to reveal a mountain of precarious stacked bedframes, uninhabited and rendered unnecessary by total societal transformation. The setting is desolate and deeply unsettling, as the realization settles that Bérenger is the only remaining human as far as we can see. The stage’s darkness is interrupted only by the glowing gray eye of a rhinoceros, its ivory horn glinting. The rhinoceros is not inherently menacing, but its hulking body contrasts with its unstated intent: unmoving, it watches over Bérenger as he brandishes a makeshift sword and yells, “I will not surrender!”

His resolve is not unwavering, but that makes his choice to remain true to himself all the wiser. His humanity shows partly in his ability to reason, argue, and listen critically to those around him. It is tested, of course, but it survives.

“Rhinoceros” is filled with humor, resolve, and timeless insight. It forces you to sit in discomfort and makes you consider questions of your own moral fortitude. I implore anyone who can to see it as soon as possible. At its core, it is about curiosity. Under a government that weaponizes political and social polarization, seeking greater connection and contending with our own fallibilities is the only effective inoculation against ideological isolation.

SADIE GUGLIOTTA '30 (SADIE_GUGLIOTTA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS COMPING THE “HARVARD INDEPENDENT.”

GRAPHIC BY ELLA COHEN '29



Cinnamon Rolls to Witches and Trolls

Quintessential fall activities to do before Christmas arrives.

By DELFIN URUNDUL '30

Rory Gilmore, orange heart emojis, pumpkin pies, cinnamon candles—if these phrases and things carry meaning to you, congrats! You are probably excited that fall is finally arriving. If you're feeling unprepared, don't worry—here is a fun, cozy list of fall activities that will bring you joy even amid the gloomy Cambridge weather (which is already triggering my seasonal affective disorder).

Binge a Television Show:

As the autumn leaves turn red and nights get longer, the best way to wind down is to sit back and chill with a good TV show. If you love a classic drama or sitcom, “Gilmore Girls” is right there. If

“Speaking of ‘Frankenstein’—reading the book is another fantastic fall activity. To immerse yourself in the novel, try gothic classical music, like Mark Korven’s work.”

animations bring you childlike joy, “Over the Garden Wall” is a cartoon with a perfect mix of cozy and eerie. Maybe you are craving a mix of dark comedy and horror—there is a reason “Widow’s Bay” just broke the record for the most Emmy wins in a single season of a comedy series. But beware: you might binge the entire season in a day and still want more, and season two probably won’t come out until 2028.

If you prefer some laid-back reality TV with great humor, the new season of “The Great British Bake Off” is about to start. Since you can’t watch “The Great British Bake Off” without craving something fresh out of the oven, remember to stop by Harvard Square first: grab a pumpkin spice latte, some cinnamon rolls, or a slice of apple pie. Tatte is my go-to bakery, with a great seasonal menu—or, better yet, use the inspiration to bake something with your friends in the common room kitchen!

Cuddle Up for a Movie:

If commitment is not your thing, go for a movie instead: you cannot miss the gothic, artsy stop-motion of Tim Burton. “Corpse Bride” is a bittersweet story about a soon-to-be-married couple in the Victorian era, and “Coraline” is the tale of an 11-year-old who discovers a parallel reality in her new home. This dark yet funny and magical production is considered a kids’ movie, though its content appeals to all audiences.

These two are my favorites, but you could also watch “The Nightmare Before Christmas” with your buddies and have a heated argument about whether it is a Halloween or Christmas movie. Also, if you didn’t see Guillermo del Toro’s “Frankenstein” (2025) last year, now is the time to watch it. Beyond the incredible acting and gorgeous costumes, the movie leans into the idea of humans playing God and explores its consequences. The visual references to “The Creation of Adam” and the creature’s wounds resembling the Holy Wounds of Jesus are among the elements that capture the “Modern Prometheus” aspect of the novel, fully titled “Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus.”

Flip the Pages:

Speaking of “Frankenstein”—reading the book is another fantastic fall activity. To immerse yourself in the novel, try gothic classical music, like Mark Korven’s work. You could even go one step further and read it in Mount Auburn Cemetery, a beautiful place to visit, especially in the fall. It is about a half-hour walk from Harvard Square, or, before it gets snowy in Cambridge, you could bike there in just over 10 minutes.

If you enjoyed Mary Shelley’s work, you may also know another iconic 19th-century female author from Bath: Jane Austen. An Austen romance might be the cure for those who read “Frankenstein” and are now scared there is a wretched creature under their bunk bed. “Pride and Prejudice” is one of her best works, and it has lovely movie and TV adaptations if you are not in the mood to read a long book (the 2005 version is the best, and I will die on that hill). If you are already a fan of the novel, “The Other Bennet Sister” is a TV show released earlier this year with a clever, humorous take on Mary Bennet’s journey to London to find love and independence.

Yet another great read for my fellow hopeless romantics is “Sense and Sensibility.” A new movie adaptation starring Daisy Edgar-Jones is coming out on Oct. 18. If you like a little horror with your romance, “Wuthering Heights” is a captivating gothic melodrama by Emily Brontë. It also has a recent adaptation that is... controversial.

Grab Some Yarn and Needles:

The coziest way to enjoy these books and movies is perhaps curled up under a blanket. If you don’t have one, you can make one of your own. Join the Harvard Undergraduate Knitting Circle—what is better than free yarn and warm company? If you are a lone wolf, you can always stay inside and knit with your favorite podcast or TV show on; it is a great low-cortisol activity to pick up as the midterm season approaches.

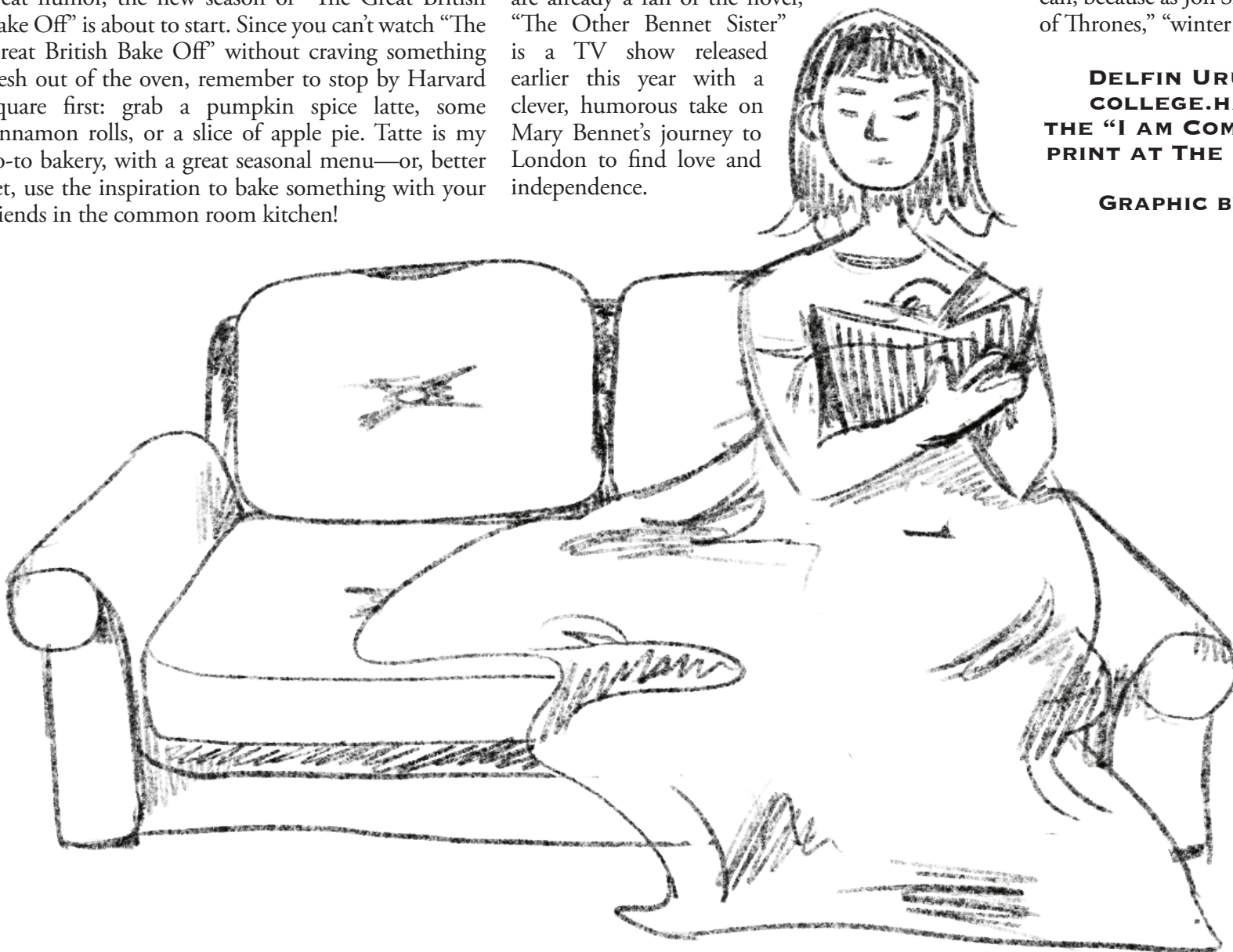
Celebrate 400 Years of Salem:

If you want to take it up a notch and unleash your witchy powers, we have the perfect place to go: Salem! This year marks Salem’s quadricentennial—the 400th anniversary of the town’s founding—and celebrations are taking place throughout September, October, and November. You can watch the Halloween Boat Parade, catch a screening of “The Witch,” or join a Puritan funeral reenactment. In addition to the anniversary events, visit the Salem Witch Museum or the Midnight Bookseller, one of my personal favorites. This newly opened bookstore, owned by two former Harvard colleagues, Chloé Holt and Mackenzie Heather, specializes in fantasy and dark literature. The Midnight Bookseller also offers whimsical items for daily use, such as bookmarks, jewelry, mugs, and various tarot decks.

Whether you prefer staying in your cozy dorm room, wandering about Harvard Square, biking in Cambridge, or traveling outside Boston, there is something fun for you to do this fall—from curling under a handmade blanket and baking something new with your friends to embracing your inner witch as you lurk in a cemetery. So soak it all in while you can, because as Jon Snow made ever so clear in “Game of Thrones,” “winter is coming.”

DELFIN URUNDUL '30 (DURUNDUL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) IS EYEING THE “I AM COMING TO THEE COTTAGE” PRINT AT THE MIDNIGHT BOOKSELLER.

GRAPHIC BY CAMERON BERNIER '29



Your 2026 Fall Reading List

Eight books to read this fall (when you should be doing your homework).

By ANNA MOGEL '30

As classes start up again (almost too quickly), it is easy to forget that reading can actually be fun. Fall is the perfect time to sit down and read for pleasure, especially when homework piles up faster than you can finish it. With books of different genres and lengths—spooky short stories, mysteries, thrillers, fantasies, and more—the “Harvard Independent” has included something for every reader.

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving

Set in the eerie, ghost-ridden town of Sleepy Hollow, Irving draws the reader into the story of Ichabod Crane, a scrawny schoolteacher fascinated by the townspeople’s spooky stories. In the story, Crane falls in love with a wealthy girl named Katrina Van Tassel, who is, unfortunately, also the object of affection for Crane’s archenemy, Brom Bones (the name is telling). On his way back from the Van Tassel farm, Crane faces one of the town’s most famous ghosts: the Headless Horseman. If he did not believe the ghost stories before, he certainly does now!

“A melancholic novel that captures Boston’s increasingly chilly nights, “The Bell Jar” is a good option if you want to read something that both disturbs and captivates you.”

“The Bell Jar” by Sylvia Plath

Esther Greenwood is a talented young woman who moves to New York City for a month-long magazine internship, hoping for a bright future. As the story unfolds, Esther begins to suffer from extreme depression and isolation, and after Esther returns to Massachusetts, she experiences a mental breakdown. Plath illustrates the unfolding of her depression through accounts of her past: her previous lover (if that’s what you would call him), her nights out with her overly outgoing friend in New York, and her career after college. A melancholic novel that captures Boston’s increasingly chilly nights, “The Bell Jar” is a good option if you want to read something that both disturbs and captivates you.

“The Guest List” by Lucy Foley

On a remote island off the coast of Ireland with spotty cell service (of course), a glamorous wedding takes place for a magazine editor and a survival television star. The novel shifts between the perspectives of the event’s central players: the bride, the bridesmaid, the best man, a guest’s plus-one, and the wedding planner. As the wedding continues, old resentments and histories arise. Before long, you realize that all of the guests are entangled in a dark web of secrets. After a murder occurs and every guest has a motive, Foley keeps the suspense high by switching rapidly between perspectives and ending her short chapters with cliffhangers. You’ll guess who did it until the very end.

“The Big Sleep” by Raymond Chandler

Chandler’s classic, must-read mystery follows private detective Philip Marlowe after a wealthy family hires him to investigate the blackmail of one of their daughters. What seems like a simple and straightforward assignment suddenly becomes tangled in murder, corruption, and the underworld of 1930s Los Angeles. Marlowe quickly discovers that almost everyone has something to hide. At only around 250 pages, it is even more enticing—“The Big Sleep” is a great choice if you want a short but challenging mystery.

“The Remains of the Day” weaves passivity and regret with love and passion, creating a moving story about a man who may have spent too much of his life serving others.”

“The Woman in the Window” by A.J. Finn

Anna Fox, a child psychologist, rarely leaves her New York City home. She prefers to live life through others rather than live in reality. It has been a year since Anna left her house, and her husband and daughter are no longer living there. Recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder, Anna struggles with substance abuse. After Anna witnesses a crime outside her window, she grapples with what to do next. The “crime” serves as the central mystery of the novel, and because Anna is struggling with alcohol and prescription medication, she begins to question if it actually happened. I absolutely love psychological thrillers, so I couldn’t put down this perfect rainy-night mystery.

“The Remains of the Day” by Kazuo Ishiguro

If you want to read about a character you want to shake and say, “Not again, why would you do that?!” then you will love this novel. “The Remains of the Day” follows Stevens, a deeply reserved English butler who devotes his life to his duties. He works at one of the most renowned

English estates, Darlington Hall. Stevens prides himself on his professionalism and unwavering loyalty, but his dedication to his duties as a butler comes at a cost to his personal life. Ishiguro follows Stevens on a road trip through the English countryside, where he reflects on his past. “The Remains of the Day” weaves passivity and regret with love and passion, creating a moving story about a man who may have spent too much of his life serving others.

“The Midnight Library” by Matt Haig

Nora Seed seems to have a dismal future. After losing her job and discovering that her cat was found dead on the street, she decides that her life is no longer worth living. She finds herself in a library that is stuck at midnight and is a mysterious space between life and death. Every book in the library contains Nora’s alternative futures, based on the choices she could have made. As Nora explores these alternative lives, she searches for the perfect one and begins to learn that that life may not exist. Haig combines fantasy and magic with a story that captures the depth of regret and the weight of a single choice. This novel is a thoughtful, emotional story about second chances, and its warm undertones make it the perfect fall read.

“Haig combines fantasy and magic with a story that captures the depth of regret and the weight of a single choice.”

“Araby” by James Joyce

This James Joyce short story comes from his collection “Dubliners” and follows a young boy in Dublin who develops a crush on his friend’s older sister. He becomes fascinated by her and builds an idealized image of her despite barely knowing her. When he learns she wants something from a bazaar called Araby, he promises to go for her and get her a gift. Joyce uses the boy’s journey to the bazaar to explore romanticism and youthful realizations. Araby is a perfect coming-of-age short story to read quickly before bed or outside in crisp fall weather.

Drawn from a list of my favorite books, these are the perfect fall guilty pleasures—if you are aiming to broaden your reading horizons, limit your screen time, or take your mind off your p-sets, check out these recommendations!

ANNA MOGEL '30 (AMOGEL@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) LOVES THESE BOOKS PAIRED WITH A CUP OF CHAMOMILE TEA.

GRAPHIC BY SOPHIA JO '29



SPORTS

Harvard Prepares to Take Down the Bears

Senior players and Harvard's head coach talk about their pregame rituals, culture, and how they deal with pressure.

By ELLA RICKETTS '28

It was a typical evening at Harvard's historic concrete bowl. The last rays of sunshine illuminated the top of the stadium while AC/DC's "Thunderstruck" boomed overhead. A couple of members of the public were attempting the infamous stadium walk, climbing and descending each section of stairs. Fortunately for my quads, I was not here to work out.

Instead, I stood on the field alongside a "Boston Globe" reporter, pink legal pad in hand, to observe practice and speak with some of the players who devote hours to this stadium. The team ran goal-line sets, the defense wearing crimson jerseys to contrast with the offense in white. Two drones flew overhead to record the drills—an extra pair of eyes alongside the arsenal of coaches pacing the sidelines.

"I like to listen to Lil Wayne a little bit before the game, and then right before we go out, I might throw on some Erykah Badu just to calm the nerves."

- Henderson '27

Practice ran like a record player, transitioning through each rhythm without ever lifting the tonearm.

Harvard will take on Brown University tomorrow at 7 p.m. in what is arguably the second-biggest game of the year besides Yale, at least in terms of student-body hype. The two have met 124 times since Oct. 25, 1893. Last year, the team cruised to a 41-7 victory, shutting the Bears out completely in the final three quarters.

Since tomorrow's game is away, students—like me—will travel to Providence primarily by commuter rail for cheap transit. A few logistical changes—hosting the game on a Friday when many students have classes, and moving the venue to Centreville Bank Stadium, about four miles from Brown's campus—may reduce the number of Harvard fans who show up. Still, support is expected to be larger than most of Harvard's games.

Curious about what the preparation looks like, I talked to senior Thomas O'Brien '27, a 6-foot-6 offensive lineman wearing No. 71. He explained what a typical week looks like for the team: two lifts per week on Monday evening and Wednesday morning, meetings and then full pad practices on Tuesday and Wednesday, a "walk-through" at 6 a.m. on Thursday, and a high-tempo practice on Friday to get their central nervous system activated and their bodies ready for a game on Saturday.

When I asked whether training intensity

increased in the build-up to big games, he said it didn't matter. "You have to treat every opponent with the same amount of respect," he stated.

For O'Brien, the victory over the Bears is personal. "Brown's quarterback was my high school quarterback. It's our last college matchup, so I'm excited. I'm 2-1 against him, so I got to be 3-1."

To stay focused during the game, different players I spoke to highlighted their techniques for getting in the right headspace. Damien Henderson '27, a defensive back from Tampa, Florida, discussed how music is his pregame ritual. "I like to listen to Lil Wayne a little bit before the game, and then right before we go out, I might throw on some Erykah Badu just to calm the nerves," he told me.

O'Brien takes a similar approach, adding that he will "try to keep it light" at least during the one to two hours before the game. "I would say about an hour, 45 minutes before we go out when everyone is dressed, they kind of have a similar mindset to me. You listen to your music, you still talk to people, but it's more of a self-reflective time at that point. You're envisioning yourself being successful out on the field."

Team captain Xaviah Bascon '27, who averaged 56.9 rushing yards per game as a running back in 2025, defined "pregame ritual" slightly differently. He described how his faith was his biggest source of inspiration. "We have a cool bible study group here called Ironman that we've had for a while, and we meet up as a group every night before the game," he informed me, exuding a confidence that made it obvious why he was voted captain. "And there's a group of about 40 of us, so it's really

philosophy. "We define our culture with three words: sacrifice, integrity, and toughness." Aurich went on to

"You have to be proud of your teammates, regardless of the outcome."

- O'Brien '27

explain each in depth, calling integrity "100% honesty going both ways" and toughness a focus on the mental aspect. "I reinforce it as much as I possibly can with examples of it, so these guys understand I'm using that in all my coaching decisions."

From the players' perspective, Henderson noted that more experienced teammates often curate a positive team culture. "It's about the senior leadership. I think every year since I've been here, all the seniors and juniors and just returning players have always been welcoming with open arms, inviting all the younger guys to different activities."

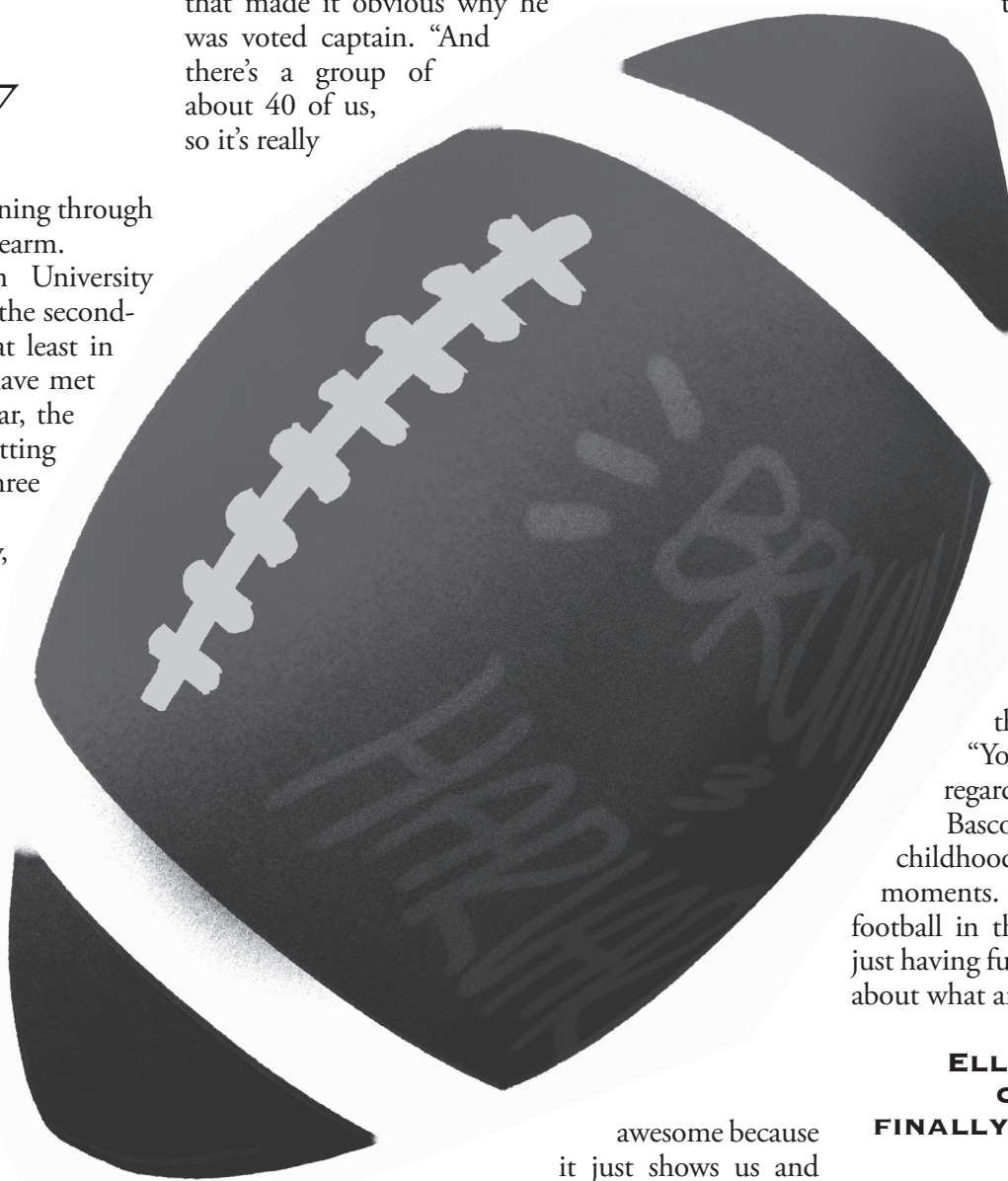
The Harvard v. Brown game will be the team's first test this season of how they will operate under pressure and handle a boisterous crowd. "We love the crowd, we love having people watch and cheer us on," Bascon noted. "But really, it's the brotherhood that we have on this field, that's going to compete together, and that's what the game's about for us, at least."

Expectations from the student body to win the matchup will certainly add stress. The last time Harvard faced Brown in Providence, the Bears made a narrow comeback that led students to flood the anonymous app Sidechat with expressions of deep dissatisfaction. When I asked players how they respond to negative commentary, O'Brien said it is easy for other students to sit in the stands and be critical, but they don't see the year-round work. "You have to be proud of your teammates, regardless of the outcome," he emphasized.

Bascon urged players to think back to their childhood to stay grounded during intense moments. "Just remember why you started playing football in the first place. Backyard football, you're just having fun, doing it for fun, and it never mattered about what anyone else thought."

ELLA RICKETTS '28 (ERICKETTS@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) WILL FINALLY BE CHOOSING THE MAN OVER THE BEAR THIS FRIDAY.

GRAPHIC BY JUSTIN MA '29



awesome because it just shows us and reminds us that we're playing for something greater than just the game of football itself."

It would seem difficult to define a broader team culture for a sport with close to 110 players on its roster, so after practice I asked Head Coach Andrew Aurich how he would characterize the program's

Weekly Sports Preview: September 24 - October 1

Your weekly what-to-watch for Harvard Athletics.

By LUCY DUNCAN '28

It's the week of Ivy League openers for Harvard Athletics, and three teams are starting official conference play. Fans have plenty of fun in store this week, with two featured games this Saturday—women's rugby at Mignone Field and women's volleyball at the Malkin Athletic Center.

Women's Rugby (2–0)

This Saturday's home game against Dartmouth, scheduled for a 2 p.m. kickoff, will pit the women's rugby team against its toughest regular-season rival. This long-standing rivalry, dubbed "Battle of the Ivies," features the two teams that have collectively secured every National Intercollegiate Rugby Association Division I national championship title since 2019. After a second-place finish to Dartmouth in 2022, the Crimson launched a historic "three-peat" championship streak, largely driven by two recent graduates: all-time program leader in tries scored and total points, Lennox London '26, and program assist leader and 2025-26 captain Tiahna Padilla '26. With their graduation, this game will be a critical test of the leadership abilities of captains Ava Ference '27, Eseta Pale '28, and Courtney Taylor '27 as they look to secure a fourth consecutive national title. For fans who make the trip to Mignone Field, this featured matchup will include food trucks, giveaways, and the opportunity to meet women's rugby's reigning champions.

Men's Soccer (1–4–1)

This Saturday at 4 p.m., men's soccer heads to Ithaca, New York, for its Ivy League opener against Cornell. After a series of tough ties and losses in non-conference tests, the Crimson will face the No. 2 Ivy League preseason pick in what will likely be one of their most difficult regular-season games. Players to watch in this matchup will include captain Andreas Savva '27, who tied for the Crimson's top point-scorer last season, and reigning Ivy League Rookie of the Year Adam Poliakov '29, who led the team in goals during his six-goal debut season.

Women's Soccer (6–2–1)

At 4 p.m. on Saturday, the women's soccer team will play its Ivy opener at Princeton, the reigning Ivy League champions. Coming off a five-game win streak, highlighted by their 6–4 win against then-No. 6 University of Alabama, the Crimson is striving to secure a statement victory early in conference play. Keep an eye on captain and Icelandic senior national team member Ólöf Kristinsdóttir '27, who, since being named Ivy League Rookie of the Year, has become one of the Crimson's leading goal and assist leaders.

Field Hockey (5–1)

At 12 p.m. on Saturday, the Ivy League preseason No. 1 Crimson will host No. 2 pick Princeton on Berylson Field. Having gone 1–0 in conference play so far after a victorious opener at Dartmouth, the Crimson will look to use this game to solidify their place at the top of the Ivy League. Watch for 2024 Ivy Tournament Most Outstanding Player Martha le Huray '28, whose dangerous corner insertions frequently set up goals and assists for teammates like Rosa Kooijmans '29. After their

second semifinal appearance in program history, a victory for the Crimson in this game will set the tone for the rest of their conference season.

"If there was ever a time to tune into your favorite Harvard sports, it's now!"

Women's Volleyball (9–0)

Another Ivy League opener will take place this week, marking the start of conference play for a team with an undefeated season. On Saturday at 3 p.m., women's volleyball will face Dartmouth at the Malkin Athletic Center. Despite a modest sixth-place prediction in Ivy League preseason polls, the Crimson kicked off their season with an incredible nine-game winning streak—the best season start in

Men's Golf

This weekend, the men's golf team will travel to Yale for the MacDonald Cup. After a two-year hiatus, this is the tournament's first iteration since Harvard last competed in it in 2023, when it tied for fifth place. The Crimson is coming off its first Ivy League championship since 2017, with Ieuan Jones '28 and current captain William Ma '28 both placing in the top five and Barry Zhang '28 ultimately winning the individual Ivy Championship. Look for Ma to grow as a team leader this weekend on the No. 1 college golf course in the United States.

Women's Golf

This Saturday, women's golf travels to New Jersey for the Princeton Invitational. The Crimson finished fourth here last year, carried by a fourth-place individual finish by Vanessa Zhang '28. Zhang, the Ivy League Individual Champion her freshman year and winner of back-to-back first-place medals in the final two tournaments of last year's season, should remain a powerhouse on the course this season, alongside notable returners Bonnie Zhai '27 and Lucy Yuan '28. Meanwhile, watch first-year Rayee Feng '30, who finished fourth at her first collegiate tournament earlier this month.

Sailing

This weekend is packed for the Crimson sailing team, which will split its roster across four different regattas. Though the splits have yet to be announced, fans can expect an exciting weekend. The Eagle Invitational, hosted by Boston College, will be a single-day event this Saturday, while the other three are two-day competitions. The team will look to reclaim its Hood Trophy victory, which it won the last time it participated in this regatta in 2024 at Tufts, and secure a Sherman Hoyt Trophy victory at Brown after a fifth-place finish last year. The Mrs. Hurst Bowl, hosted by Dartmouth, is a historic women's regatta where leaders like captain Zoey Ziskind '27 are sure to shine. In addition to the graduation of twin brothers and All-American program legends Justin and Mitchell Callahan '26, last year's Inter-Collegiate Sailing Association Open Singlehand National Champion, Robby Meek '27, is notably absent from this year's roster. With major leadership gaps to be filled, this weekend will be an opportunity for other Crimson talent to make waves as the season ramps up.

program history—and proved that they should not be overlooked as conference contenders. The Crimson lead the all-time series against Dartmouth and have won the last six meetings. This game will give Harvard a chance to ease into conference play as it looks to secure its first Ivy League Tournament berth since 2023. Expect breakout players to play a critical role in extending the team's record-breaking win streak, including first-year Kayla Nwabueze '30, who led the Crimson in kills during their recent game against Providence. Spectators who join for the team's featured "Pack the MAC" game can expect food, giveaways, and (knock on wood) a 10th consecutive victory for the Crimson.

The start of Ivy League play makes this one of the most important weeks for several Harvard teams, as they emerge from preseason to set the tone for the rest of their seasons. If there was ever a time to tune into your favorite Harvard sports, it's now!

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

GRAPHIC BY EMMA CRAGO '28



Where Did All the Love Go?

How can politicians learn from the 2026 U.S. Open?

By ZOË MACKLOWE '30

Every gym class in my elementary school ended the same way. We formed two lines and shook hands with the other team. I went to a small all-girls school in New York City. We certainly weren't professional athletes, yet our teachers repeatedly instilled in us the value of sportsmanship. Losing graciously is hard, especially at age six—and it is equally challenging not to be boastful in one's victories.

Sportsmanship has immeasurable benefits: it can nurture relationships, increase emotional well-being, and foster uncanny character development and integrity. Arguably, showing respect and sportsmanship also leads to better collaboration and results.

A study of nearly 4,700 NCAA college soccer matches found that teams with players who received a red card during a match lost 67%

“Sportsmanship has immeasurable benefits: it can nurture relationships, increase emotional well-being, and foster uncanny character development and integrity.”

of those matches. This correlation suggests a possible link between discipline and performance. “Winning is an attitude, and negative energy toward competitors will only work against you,” Nicole Branagh, a professional beach volleyball player who competed at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, told Experience Life. You gain a lot from being respectful.

Being a good sport becomes more crucial with age, yet among some of the nation's brightest and most influential individuals, respect for opponents is lacking. American politicians, for example, could learn a thing or two from sports etiquette.

For the athletes competing in the 2026 U.S. Open Tennis Championships, sportsmanship seemed to come naturally. These players had a certain eloquence that a bunch of tired kindergarteners after gym class certainly did not have.

During the quarterfinals, Frances Tiafoe won the longest match in U.S. Open history. When the referee called the final point after five hours of playing, Tiafoe did not immediately burst into celebration. He went straight to his opponent, Alex Michelsen, and embraced him. While Michelsen cried, Tiafoe held him. He paused his victory to console his competitor. Of course, Tiafoe still had his earned moment of celebration, but he put Michelsen first.

Similar camaraderie was seen in the women's bracket. As Anastasia Potapova fell and hurt her knee on the deciding point against Mirra Andreeva, Andreeva immediately ran to Potapova's aid. Andreeva helped Potapova, who was limping, to a chair. She called for ice. Andreeva ultimately won the match, but she walked off the court humbly, barely celebrating in deference to her injured friend.

The final exchange between Alexander Zverev and Ben Shelton stuck with Nate Berman

'30, who played tennis at his high school and attended the tournament. “They both, at the end of the game, walk[ed] over to each other's teams in their boxes and congratulate[d] them,” said Berman.

The players of the U.S. Open, among others, are the gold standard for sportsmanship. They are gracious and empathetic. They put their opponent before their own vanity. They are the antithesis of the behavior that covers every contemporary headline—the behavior of our politicians.

Athletes and politicians are quite similar. “Both athletes and politicians are individuals who are working towards a specific goal, whether it

as if they exist in a different universe. A public issue frequently morphs into a theatrical meltdown that my six-year-old self could have staged after losing capture the flag—again.

“I WON THE ELECTION, GOT 71,000,000 LEGAL VOTES. BAD THINGS HAPPENED WHICH OUR OBSERVERS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO SEE.”

- Trump

Our leaders need to look beyond themselves to our athletes, the players who rule the court with uncanny grace and humility. “I think that politicians could learn how to compete fiercely while still respecting their opponents and the rules,” Lee said.

“I think that politicians could learn how to compete fiercely while still respecting their opponents and the rules.”

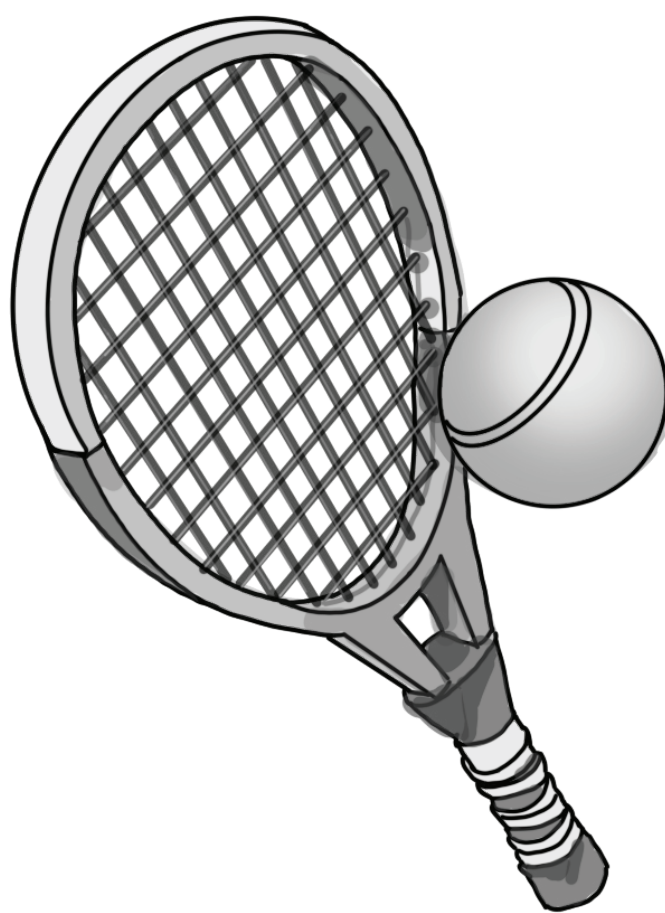
- Lee '28

“In tennis, you are expected to control your emotions, accept decisions you may disagree with, and take responsibility for your own behavior. You can compete for every point without attacking the character of the person across the net,” Lee continued. “Politics would really benefit from that same balance. They [politicians] can disagree strongly on the issues, but maintain respect, integrity, and self-control in the heat of the moment.”

All it takes is one candidate to embrace their opponent—whether the loser or the winner—to set a new standard. A small gesture can reverberate—and perhaps one day revive sportsmanship in politics.

ZOË MACKLOWE '30 (ZMACKLOWE@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) ATTENDS THE U.S. OPEN PRIMARILY TO VISIT THE FOOD COURT.

GRAPHIC BY SAGE WILLEY '29



be pushing a policy, all the way to winning an election,” Mitchell Lee '28, a player on Harvard's men's tennis team, explained to the “Harvard Independent.”

Today, it is hard to imagine that sportsmanship ever existed in politics. Most election concessions are far from graceful, as demonstrated by those of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

In 2017, Clinton made a point of telling the world that she deserved to win the election. At an event in Los Angeles months after the election, she claimed that the election was stolen from her. Much like a kindergartener, Clinton protested an election that went against her interests.

Trump took a similar approach upon losing the 2020 presidential election. He immediately sent out an all-caps post on X (formerly known as Twitter) declaring himself the winner: “I WON THE ELECTION, GOT 71,000,000 LEGAL VOTES. BAD THINGS HAPPENED WHICH OUR OBSERVERS WERE NOT ALLOWED TO SEE.” Throughout Joe Biden's presidency, Trump kept claiming votes had been counted incorrectly. He repeatedly cited his campaign's challenges to the electoral process—many of which the Supreme Court dismissed.

These responses from both parties are just two examples of the decline of political sportsmanship. There are many more. Politicians are no longer willing to celebrate their opponent. Instead, they seem to treat them with indifference,

Chug-Runs and Chiefs

How to lose your fantasy football league without losing your dignity.

By AURORA CHARBONNEAU '29

Strategies for surviving the Hot Wings challenge, the most effective tips for completing a beer mile, and the best footbridge from which to jump into the Charles. These were topics of conversation I found myself joining over the past week. Each is still hypothetical—for now. But in the coming months, some unfortunate soul may have to follow through.

Why? These prior examples are the natural consequence of one's selected group of National Football League players underperforming in fantasy football.

For those entering a fantasy football league this fall—or, more urgently, for those already worried about finishing last—consider this guide to losing with as little humiliation and campus notoriety as possible should you choose to partake this season.

Like every upstanding American citizen, I have witnessed the cultural phenomenon that is fantasy football. However, I only recently took the time to understand how this game actually works.

“Classic fantasy punishments typically include beer miles, 24-hour challenges at Waffle House (or some other ungodly location), and endless drinking on the loser's tab.”

Participants—known as managers—draft real NFL players onto imaginary teams and compete each week based on those players' actual on-field statistics, such as passing yards and touchdowns, rushing yards and touchdowns, receptions, and receiving yards.

The scale of the game is larger than I previously had assumed. According to an estimate based on Fantasy Sports & Gaming Association participation data, about 40 million Americans play fantasy football each year.

For many, money might be the most straightforward motivation for participating. Data collected from LeagueSafe places the average buy-in at about \$55 per manager. In a 12-person winner-take-all league, that would create a nearly \$700 pot before any platform or transaction fees. However, what makes joining a league a “swim at your own risk” event is a second aspect of fantasy football that has recently become popular: the price the loser must pay.

This practice, widely referred to as a “fantasy punishment,” is something I first heard about during my sophomore year of high school, after watching a member of the soccer team post a TikTok of himself pretending to run in place while aggressively lip-syncing and winking at the camera. This wasn't the usual content for this student—in fact, after swiping to the account responsible for the video, I was horrified to find it was a debut post.

When I showed my friend, she explained that this artifact could only be the result of this student losing his fantasy football league, citing

that it was nearing its official conclusion in late December as evidence.

Classic fantasy punishments typically include beer miles, 24-hour challenges at Waffle House (or some other ungodly location), and endless drinking on the loser's tab. But on a college campus, the consequences tend to get more personal: punishments often draw on the particular aspects and places central to your school.

Right now, everyone I have spoken to on campus has some kind of consequence for an unfortunate chump whose dream team underperforms. Tales range from D-Hall dates with a life-sized doll and streaking through Dunster Courtyard to less severe consequences (although debatable), such as attempting to bypass Bon Lee at Leverett dinner without your ID. Multiple nefarious acts involving John Harvard's statue have also been included (not what he died for, people).

Having recently taken it upon myself to learn more about the subject—out of curiosity and concern—I offer the following guidance on what to watch for to limit potential reputational damage.

First, I urge you to avoid any punishment too central to Harvard's campus. As a college student, your entire life fits within a one-mile radius; on-campus punishments can be particularly damaging. Most likely, everyone—teachers, future employers, friends, opps, club members, and your current p-set collaborators—will take note of your actions.

Honestly, it benefits everyone to serve your time away from school. Some of the consequences I have heard of were heinous in a way that made me feel like anyone in your league who completed them would be a loss for the whole group (do you really want to be spotted hanging around with your friend who is widely known as the Harvard Statue Stripper?)

Additionally, we should all make a modest effort to protect our University's

name, as we have already received enough attention from the press lately. The last time we collectively appeared a little too comfortable, even the “New York Times” took notice, and now I am looking into med schools in the Caribbean. If Claybaugh sees too many of us roaming Cambridge in various states of fantasy-induced disgrace, it

“Sidechat in particular seems to serve as a modern Paul Revere for these kinds of incidents, making every punishment that much more daunting.”

may be curtains for grades. So, please: keep it classy. With Harvard-Yale fast approaching—an encounter that feels like running into an ex who somehow still knows all your friends—it would not hurt to look polished, composed, and free of any behavior that could be repurposed as Bulldog propaganda.

This brings me to my next piece of advice: steer clear of punishments that involve social media (as described previously). I have already come across videos on TikTok and Instagram of punishments that took place as far back as 2016 and have since resurfaced as their anniversaries approach. Digitizing your punishment in any form means that it has no definite timeline.

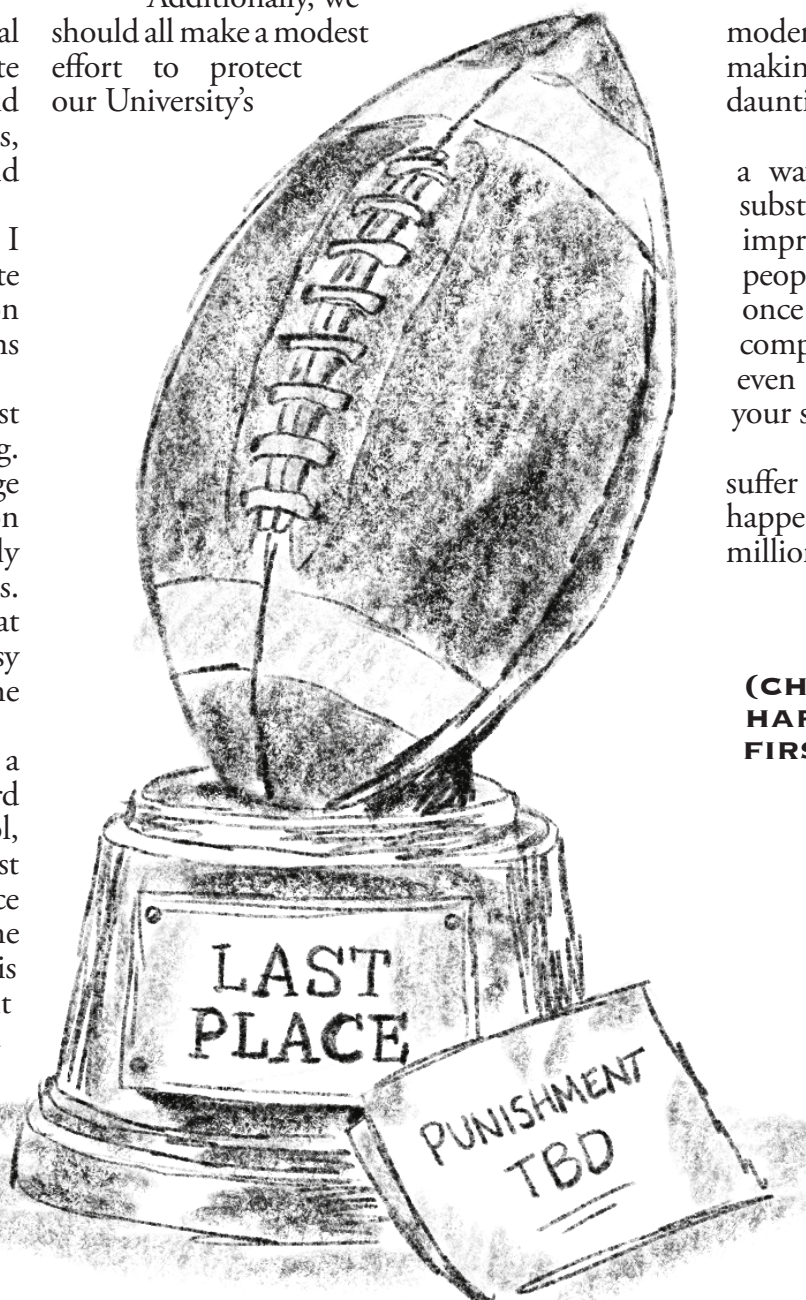
Sidechat in particular seems to serve as a modern Paul Revere for these kinds of incidents, making every punishment that much more daunting.

Finally, even in defeat, always look for a way to incorporate alcohol or some other substance into your task. Not only will this improve your experience, but it will also make people more forgiving than you might imagine once they understand that your sobriety has been compromised. It just might save your life to keep even a few shooters on you while you serve out your sentence.

As a final word of comfort to those who suffer the fate of losing this season, whatever happens, you will be in good company—at least a million losers will be joining you.

AURORA CHARBONNEAU '29 (CHARBONNEAU.AURORA@COLLEGE.HARVARD.EDU) HOPES EVERYONE'S FIRST-ROUND PICK STAYS HEALTHY AND EVERYONE'S PUNISHMENT STAYS OFF SIDECHAT.

GRAPHIC BY TRISCHELLE AFINHENE '27



Sports! Sports! Sports!

An analysis of Sydney Sweeney's Novig advertisement.

By ANIKA GUPTA '30

Lately, it seems like we've been seeing a lot of Sydney Sweeney. The blonde, blue-eyed actress has been all over everyone's feed in controversial advertisements, from Dr. Squatch to American Eagle and, most recently, Novig, a sports-betting company. Sweeney seems to lose more and more clothing as the advertisements continue, and backlash to such risqué work has increased in tandem.

For those unfamiliar, the Novig ad features Sweeney wearing little to no clothing while posing with sporting equipment including footballs, a tennis racket, a golf club, hockey sticks, and a basketball net. Sweeney describes Novig's sports gambling platform using the tagline "just sports," including a sequence where she says the word "sports" in various (suggestive) tones.

I find myself disappointed, but not surprised, by Sweeney's conduct. Many female athletes view the way that Sweeney leans into being sexualized as demeaning towards women in sports—a conclusion I certainly find to be true as she sprawls across a table, nude, saying, "I just look good here."

By acting as if the only role for women in sports is to be sexualized accessories to it, Sweeney devalues years of work that female athletes have put in to fight for equal representation, pay, and opportunity.

Female athletes already face objectification when actually playing sports—during the European Beach Handball Championships in 2021, Norwegian female athletes had to pay a fine of \$175 each just for wearing shorts instead of bikini bottoms. Sweeney's choice to appear in extremely revealing uniforms and gear makes women's presence in sports seem like a joke. Defenders of Sweeney's

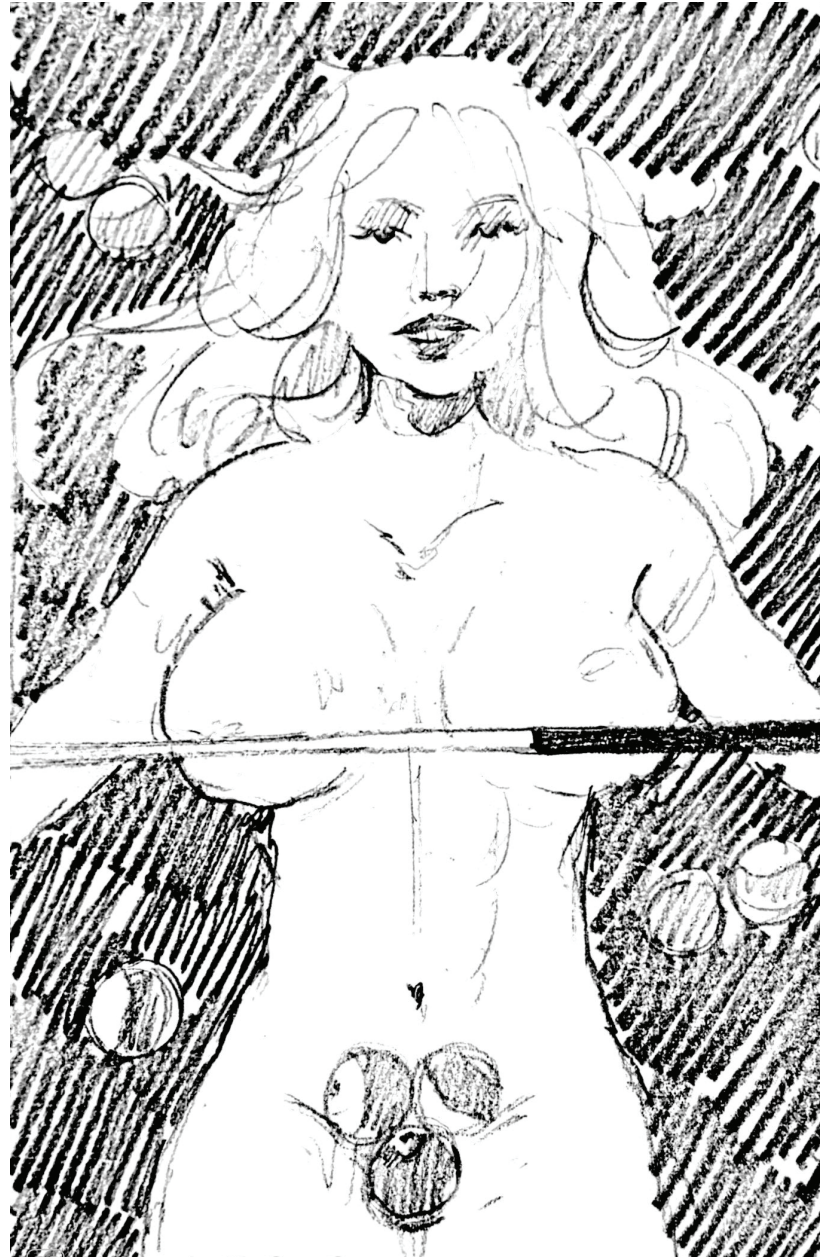
being herself. Although she wears and holds various sporting equipment, she does not act like she's actually trying to play the sports, and her lines in the advertisement are about Novig's

person. [She's] in the arts." But the arts are political, too. What we choose to represent in our shows and movies reflects the stories we think are worth listening to. Sweeney's position as a conventionally attractive, white, blonde woman gives her privilege—privilege that often allows her to ignore the consequences of her actions.

As Sweeney repeats "Sports! Sports! Sports!" for Novig, I find myself wondering: Why would any woman choose to portray herself this way? Sweeney's supporters argue that it doesn't matter why—Sweeney can do what she wants, and people are just jealous. But Sweeney isn't the first beautiful actress in the world, and her critics aren't just envious.

Even though she chooses to sexualize herself, that doesn't legitimize her actions. Not all choices a woman makes are feminist, and Sweeney certainly proves that: when she leans into sexualization, she leans into the patriarchal assumption that a woman's body can be objectified and monetized, encouraging the idea that women exist as sexy decorations to help sell things, rather than as human beings in their own right. And when Sweeney makes these choices on a national scale, it spills over—people use her to put down other women, calling women who disagree with her "crazy" and "ugly."

At the end of the day, I stand by what I said: I am disappointed, but unsurprised. Sweeney's conduct, and her defense of it, have definitely led more people to feel validated in their own sexualization of women and female athletes, but she has never really been a feminist icon. Sweeney's goal was probably to make the campaign go viral, which she did. Still, even if she isn't at the forefront of the feminist movement, that doesn't mean we can't critique her choices. The actions of rich, famous women trickle down to the perceptions



sports-betting platform, not sports themselves. In fact, I'm not entirely sure that the advertisement is particularly bad for women in sports; I think it's just bad for women in general.

Sweeney's performance in the advertisement ultimately reinforces the idea that women's bodies exist only to be looked at. The advertisement uses her body to get attention, and it worked: Novig's brand mentions jumped by 1,200% in the first four days after the advertisement, and 73.4% of surveyed male gamblers were more inclined to choose Novig. Still, it's harmful to all women when women with access to power and exposure act as if it is acceptable to turn one's body into a marketing tool.

What Sweeney says in the advertisement matters too. In a sultry tone, Sweeney says Novig is "just sports," with "No wars and no politics." Her apolitical stance isn't new: when her American Eagle advertisement, which claimed she had great "genes/jeans," was criticized for its references to eugenics, she defended herself by merely saying, "I did a jean ad."

Sweeney has a pattern of believing she can detach herself from the context surrounding her. However, there's no such thing as "just sports." Sports and sports betting are continuously informed by politics, from debates about transgender athletes to disputes over women's pay to legislative arguments about betting—which is to say, everything is political. Yet Sweeney's consistent choice of projects that distance themselves from politics reflects an ignorance of systemic injustice.

Sweeney has said she's "not a political

"By acting as if the only role for women in sports is to be sexualized accessories to it, Sweeney devalues years of work that female athletes have put in to fight for equal representation, pay, and opportunity."

choices note that female athletes have released similar campaigns, such as the nude cover Serena Williams did for ESPN's Body Issue in 2009. But this is willful ignorance: Williams posing nude as a celebration of her athleticism and the way her athletic career has shaped her body should not be equated to Sweeney being styled as a decorative prop for a sports-related product.

Ultimately, though, Sweeney isn't pretending to be a female athlete—she's just

"Even though she chooses to sexualize herself, that doesn't legitimize her actions."

of women everywhere, and it is critical that we point out she didn't just "do a jean ad" and that it's not "just sports."

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GRAPHIC BY SAM PARK '29

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