

# the liberator

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## Polarization on the Ballot

A Look at the Recent Election and America's Deep, Partisan Divides

graphics by Malena Heineman

**NIA ORAKWUE**  
**MALENA HEINEMAN** | editors-in-chief

The increasing polarization of American politics is not new, nor is it flying under the public's radar any longer. Presidential elections like the ones in 2016 and 2020, as well as the events of Donald Trump's presidency, have made these rifts very clear. Our polarized political climate is now one of the many defining factors of the 21st century thus far. Large scale political issues like healthcare, environmental protection, the role of government, immigration, national security and race are drastically more divisive than they were two decades ago.

One prominent example of this divide in recent years was the passing of the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, in 2010. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2009, when the bill was being debated, 61% of Democrats supported the bill, while only 12% of Republicans supported it. In the five years after the passing of the bill, these divides only grew. In 2015, 87% of Republicans disapproved of the law, while 78% of Democrats were in favor. Similarly, according to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, 47% of Americans said they believe it is the government's responsibility to ensure all Americans have healthcare coverage, while 50% disagreed with this statement. These numbers not only show the inability of elected officials of opposing parties to find compromise but also Americans' lack of common ground on what the role of government should be. Such deeply rooted disagreements about fundamental topics like healthcare make the successful functioning of our government increasingly difficult. It seems as if the parties are in a war of checks and balances in which neither side is willing to surrender for fear of losing power.

Both the 2016 and 2020 Trump campaigns, along with his presidency, have displayed the deep and ugly divides of our country in a way many Americans, especially younger Americans, had never seen before. His rise to power and time in office brought out the worst in both his strongest supporters and fiercest opponents. As a result of the hatred and violence, any preconceived negative biases that Americans may have already had about their opposing party were strongly reinforced. Portrayals of the Republican party as evil or the Democrats as immoral were indirectly supported by major media outlets and easily believed by the public, exemplified by the extreme responses to many of Trump's actions. These reinforced biases only push people further from the center and into their own views, contributing to the polarization of our politics. Now, as we enter the post-Trump era, the question becomes whether we will heal our political and ideological divides or if they will only grow stronger.

As President-elect Joe Biden has attempted to move into the White House with his administration following his win in the most recent election, Trump has refused to concede, citing claims of widespread voter fraud that have, so far, proven baseless as they reach the courts. Although this lengthened transfer of power may at first seem a minor delay for the presidency, it is already exacerbating the current state of polarization. The confusion and misinformation Trump and his administration are spreading have many Republicans rising to staunchly defend his right to the presidency at the expense of democracy, while Democrats continue to defend Biden and the continuing number of states certifying their election results and his win. However, as Trump incites his base to discredit the results of the national election, the rising movement to continue his presidency is gaining more legal traction. According to another report done by the Pew Research Center, Trump appointed almost a quarter of all active federal judges in the U.S., the majority of which are in the federal appeals courts. With this demographic and ideological skew of appeals judges, along with three newly elected, conservative justices in the Supreme Court, there is a highly improbable path towards overturning the election results. If Trump's presidency has taught us anything, it is that he can never be underestimated.

However, even in the face of this confusion and animosity, this year's election cycle has led to a number of historic firsts that will hopefully help to mend our divides as Congress begins to more accurately represent the U.S. population. Sarah McBride made history as Delaware's, and the country's, first openly transgender state senator. New Mexico elected all women of color to the U.S. House of Representatives, and in Oklahoma, Mauree Turner was elected as the first Muslim legislator in Oklahoma's history and the first nonbinary legislator in U.S. history. Activist Cori Bush was elected the representative for Missouri's 1st congressional district, making her the state's first Black congresswoman. And symbolic of a rising movement of progressivism in an increasingly politically active young generation, all members of the "Squad" — congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan — were re-elected.

This past election cycle has proven to be turbulent. Both the House and Senate seats are largely split, and America's differing viewpoints are no closer to détente. Even now that much of the election excitement has lessened, our path forward is still unclear. If we are to encounter a future where progress and action are prioritized over power and pride, Americans need to confront the fact that complete rejection and dismissal of opposing views is not a viable path forward.

## what's news



photo by Emma McBride

### Marching Band Returns

LASA Marching Band begins practicing in a socially distanced manner in preparation for future competitions.

see **MARCHING BAND** page 11



photo by Emma McBride

### Cheering on the Raptors

The first LASA cheerleading team finishes cheering on the football team and looks forward to basketball season.

see **CHEERLEADING** page 15



photo by Wrenny Collamer

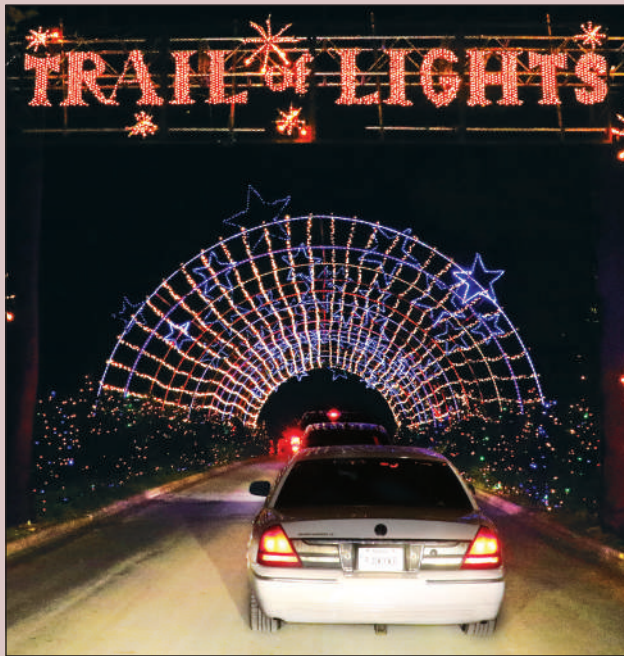
### Vendors and Spenders

The local farmers' market brings together the Austin community and local vendors in the heart of the city.

see **FARMERS MARKET** page 13

## Driving Through the Trail of Lights

**KATIE BUSBY** | staff writer



**TUNNEL OF LIGHTS** Cars line up and begin to drive through the Trail of Lights. In order to accommodate for social distancing while letting the most people attend, the Trail of Lights is only a drive-through this year. photo by Emma McBride

Candyland, lights, Santa, and more! The Trail of Lights has been an annual tradition in Austin for 56 years, spanning multiple generations of Austinites.

According to Emily Stengel, a producer on the Trail of Lights team, this year presents a new challenge. Stengel said they had to evolve their plan as circumstances changed with regard to COVID-19. The Trail of Lights team had to keep up with health regulations and work closely with officials as they had no way to foresee what this winter would look like.

"We've been planning the Trail of Lights, and usually it's year-round planning," Stengel said. "It starts with thinking of sponsors and studying the path for the upcoming year. So, because our event is in December, we have a lot of time to plan the Trail of Lights. And how we did that is through multiple contingency plans."

The Trail of Lights team had different plans that they went through as the situation changed throughout the year, Stengel said. The first plan set in place was a trail set up with space for social distancing. As the year continued and the rates changed, they realized that social distancing was not guaranteed between people and that a different plan, such as drive-through, would be a better option.

see **TRAIL OF LIGHTS** page 5

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## LASA Raptors Tennis Wins District as New Team

**LILI XIONG** | staff writer

After playing numerous matches this year, the LASA tennis team has come out on top as the district champions. Although their fall season has ended, the spring season is full of promise as players will take part in singles matches, doubles matches and mixed doubles matches.

The fall season has brought the increasing potential for the team into sharp focus. Senior Crystal Zhou, the girls team captain, has high hopes for next season, seeing as the year has started out very well for the team.



**TENNIS TEAM** The LASA tennis team consisting of (from left to right) front row: Karly Shi, Wendy Geng, Lois Lee, Darlene Lai, Jillian Evans-Strong, and Olivia Ashy, back row: Vedant Sangani, William Gu, August Bohmer, Edwin Tan, Milind Mutula, Ted Gershon, and Rishi Rajesh pose for a photo wearing their tennis uniforms. The tennis team competed for and won at districts in the 2020 Fall season. photo courtesy of Bryan Crews

"My outlook on the season is very, very positive," Zhou said. "I feel like we could have gotten a lot farther than we did, but I think we did alright. We did really good, better than any other year."

Although sophomore and varsity tennis player Rishi Rajesh believes that the team could have done better this season, he believes that with more preparation, the team can do better. He also feels like some teams that they played at the district tournament were better than they were expecting.

"I think that we did well for our first season," Rajesh said. "I feel like we could've done a little bit better. However, looking back, there were some other pretty good teams that we didn't know about. We didn't expect to lose, but next year we should be able to go further."

According to coach Vincent Vizcaino, challenging competitions like this season's are always a highlight of his experience coaching tennis, which also involves travelling to different cities as a team. Vizcaino believes that it's beneficial for the team to face difficult opponents.

"I like the competition and getting to go out and play other schools," Vizcaino said. "I like to see how our kids respond to adversity and play in difficult matches. It's great to see how we measure up to other people and how we respond."

Vizcaino believes that the team did better this year than other years because of an increased variety in the skill levels of players. A lot of LASA tennis players play tennis outside

of school as well, allowing them to get extra practice and improve their skills.

"A lot of the players at LASA have previous experience, so a lot of them come in already playing pretty good tennis," Vizcaino said. "Since I first saw the kids this season in August, especially the girls, I would say they improved a lot."

Zhou also emphasized the importance of an addition of more players to the team's roster as a factor of their success. A surge of freshmen on the team has been beneficial, as some of them have already started this season playing on the varsity team.

"This year, we have twice that amount of good super-champ players than last year, which definitely helped," Zhou said.

Although the number of players on the team has increased overall, the number of players attending team practices has been inconsistent due to COVID-19 and overlap with club practices.

see **TENNIS** page 15

graphics by Andrew Luckisinger

# editorial With Liberty and Justice for Some Is the American Electoral College Still Relevant and Fair?

Even if you lived under a rock, in the weeks leading up to the 2020 election, you would be bombarded by a constant stream of messages about the inherent flaws of each candidate, their supporters and, as in most years, the flaws of the election system itself. Unlike in many democratic countries and municipalities in the world, the United States uses a system called the electoral college to elect the president. The electoral college has been a highly debated idea since its birth in 1787. It wasn't the ideal approach then, and it isn't an ideal approach now.

The Electoral College was an idea born of compromise. In 1787, at the Constitutional Convention, the Founding Fathers had to come up with a method of electing the president that all of the states could agree on, which ended up being quite a feat. After being under the rule of a tyrannical king, many in this young country weren't keen on the idea of having Congress pick the president — they didn't know how they'd be able to prevent the country from becoming a near-oligarchy. But many high-class politicians believed that American citizens were not educated enough to be able to vote directly for the president. So the electoral college was born — a way for people to be able to choose their president, but with a bit of distance between them and the official decision.

The electoral college, at its birth, consisted of 138 votes, with each state getting a number of votes that was directly proportional to its population — or, more accurately, its population of white, land owning men. Since 1787, the electoral college has gained 400 votes. However, instead of increasing the number of electoral votes in each state as the population of the country grows, a cap has been put on the number of electoral college votes. Now, the same 538 electoral votes are divided by percentage of the population per state. Candidates win per state, meaning, in most states, the candidate with a larger number of votes in a state gets every single electoral college vote in that state.

As one can tell from the facts about the electoral college alone, there are some serious problems with the transfer of the electoral college into today's society. Too little faith is vested in the people, the system is outdated and winning the popular vote doesn't directly result in winning the presidency. With the electoral college in place, calling ourselves a democracy may even be a little bit of a stretch.

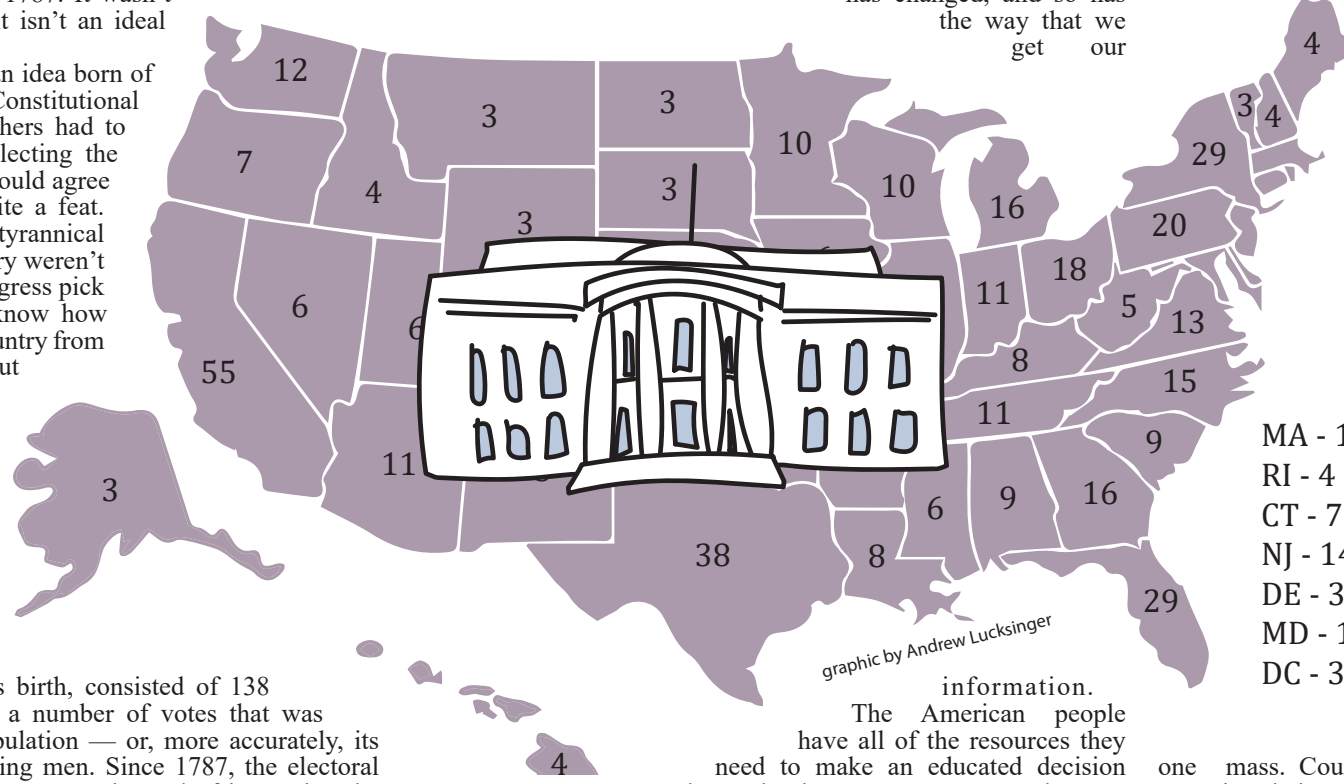
The electoral college was founded in part because the Founding Fathers lacked faith that the American people would have access to information about candidates and campaign platforms. While this may have been a perfectly understandable idea in the 1700s, we are now in the 21st century. Information about candidates and political ideas are blasted from the rooftops or, more accurately, blasted from tiny speakers on every smartphone in America. Our country has changed, and so has the way that we get our

deep within the veins of our nation. The electoral college doesn't give minority groups a fair voice. According to the Census Bureau, in Wyoming, there is one electoral vote for roughly every 177,000 voters, and in California, there is one electoral vote for roughly every 700,000 voters. Wyoming has a much higher percentage of white people than California does. This inconsistency prevails throughout the country. States with larger percentages of people of color (generally states with large cities and populations) often have fewer electoral votes per capita, while more rural states with less diversity often have more electoral votes per capita. White people are represented much more thoroughly in the electoral college than already disenfranchised people of color. And while electoral vote totals do change with populations, the fact that states are required to have at least three electoral votes each and there can be no more than 538 electoral votes overall means that there is no way that vote totals per state can ever be truly fair.

These issues beg the question of what alternatives to this system might look like. The most popular alternative is the popular vote. The popular vote is exactly what it sounds like — each person's vote is counted as the same amount, no convoluted system of dividing them or elaborately allotting them to higher powers. The candidate with the largest number of votes wins.

Many worry that the popular vote would be too complicated and make counting votes much more overwhelming and difficult for officials. However, the popular vote does not need to be counted in one mass. Counting votes can still be decided by state, each state reporting their vote total to federal election officials as usual. Not only would this result in a more accurate decision making process, it would also be more efficient, seeing as the electoral college would not have to meet to certify results.

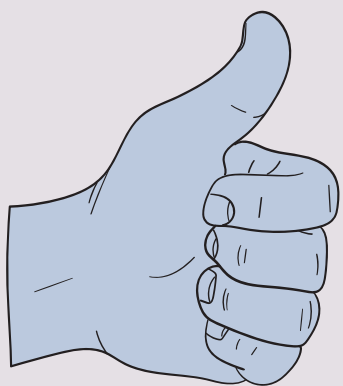
The electoral college was created for a certain set of reasons. But this set of reasons does not apply to who we are as a country anymore. Our country has grown both in number and in resources, and our system for electing the president must represent us as a people. The only true way of making sure that the values of the people make it to the White House is to listen to each person's voice, not create distance between the people and the presidency. The people must be able to decide who represents them, and if they cannot, we are not a true democracy.



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

The Staff Stance is an editorial written by the Liberator's Commentary Editors. The opinions presented in it are based on those of the Liberator staff as a collective. This story represents the majority of the staff, but the Liberator recognizes and respects opposing viewpoints.

## Thumbs Up



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

- FAFSA aid
- Dogs in sweaters
- Bad Bunny's new album
- Moisturizing
- Negative COVID tests
- Thumbs up on Zoom

## Thumbs Down



- FAFSA forms
- Couples at pumpkin patches
- Dry Shampoo
- The electoral college
- Holiday Juice Cleanses
- New Bell Schedule

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# the liberator

## Editorial Policy

Responsibilities of a Free Student Press: Serving the primary communication link within the Liberal Arts and Science Academy and between the school and the local community, this newspaper accepts the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. The Liberator staff strives to produce a professional-quality publication that follows the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. The objective is to print the news in a fair and objective way with the utmost regard for integrity.

### Editorial Content:

- The students on The Liberator staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain most complete information.
- The information will be presented in an objective, truthful and fair manner.
- When personal commentary is given it will be in good taste on issues that have been researched, analyzed and where expert opinion has been sought, and then presented with the best ability of the writer. In addition, all opinion or commentary will be clearly labeled as so.
- No material which is obscene, libelous or that will cause an immaterial and substantial disruption of the school day, according to accepted legal definitions, will be printed.

### The Editorial Boards and its Functions:

The Liberator staff will be governed by an editorial board comprised of the following individuals: editors-in-chief and section editors.

### The Editorial board will:

- Determine the content of the publication (with input from other staff members).
- Stress the editorial policy.
- Ensure the accuracy of the publication.
- Address disciplinary or other inappropriate behavior of staff.
- Vote on removal of staff members.
- Change or add policy as necessary with three of four board members voting favorably.

### Viewpoints:

Printed material which is a view of a staff member or a contributing writer will be labeled as such. These views are not intended to reflect the view of the administration of Liberal Arts and Science Academy nor the School Board of the Austin Independent School District. Viewpoints will be given in two areas in the newspaper.

Editorials: These will be determined by the staff consensus. The editorial will be unsigned and will represent the viewpoint of the publication.

Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor are accepted for topics of general interest to the readership of the newspaper. Letters must be submitted typed or neatly printed in ink and must have the signature of the writer and the writer's grade level. Editors reserve the right to determine which issue the letter goes in, with every effort made to print the letter as soon as possible. The editors also reserve the right to edit the letter for grammar, length and repetition.

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.

Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of errors, a written correction will be made in the following issue of the newspaper.

### Sources:

In general, no anonymous sources will be used in reporting. Sources from within the school, as well as those not connected with the school, will be used. Under no circumstances will gifts, including coupons, etc., be accepted by the staff members from sources or advertisers.

Note: The Liberator is an open forum.

## In Memoriam



### Scout

Beloved LASA therapy dog Scout passed before Thanksgiving break. She was an integral part of the school and touched the lives of students and faculty. photo by Alec Lippman



Have an opinion about a new school policy? Got an issue with this issue? Anything else on your mind? Email us at [lasaliberator@gmail.com](mailto:lasaliberator@gmail.com) or DM us @lasaliberator.

## Contemplating America from 250 Years Away

Would the Founding Fathers Recognize the Country We Live In Today?

NEVIN HALL | staff writer



The ship of Theseus, used on many a perilous and mythical voyage, is a famous paradox. Over time the ship rotted, and the Athenians, true to their history and traditions, replaced every single plank with a new one. Thus arises the question dissected by the ancients: is the original ship of Theseus the same as the one with all of the planks changed? It certainly is. And here's why: the idea behind the ship is still there. It isn't just any old ship — it's the ship of Theseus, the great ship that held the great warrior of yore. It would be easy to compare the old ship of Theseus to the early republic and the repaired, replaced ship to now. The founders might have this story in the back of their minds when they consider our state today.

Despite all of the changes we've seen since 1776, the great idea behind America still remains: the idea of freedom. As an addition to that idea, the founders, whilst likely noting the large quantity of change since their time, would see that the great idea of their country, the nation they founded, has been borne across the seas of time. And it has been held high and kept going, and their ideas remain the same to this day. The nation we see before us today would make our Founding Fathers proud that their great experiment is still ongoing and that their idea has survived longer than any democracy on earth.

It is clear that the framers weren't as pro-democracy as we are today. Our democracy thrives because of its connection to its constituents. It simply wouldn't function if we were further removed. And, to their credit, their moderating forces were common

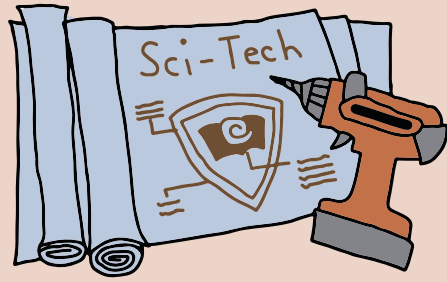
**“Our Founding Fathers endowed their children with unalienable rights, rights we fight to extend to all. And our Founding Fathers gave us the very foundation for each and every one of our accomplishments.”**

and a reasonable precaution to take immediately after a revolution. But the influence of some anti-democratic sentiments is clear in our Constitution.

There are the classic examples we learn about in U.S. history class, like the three-fifths compromise or the conspicuous absence of the word “slave.” However, the one that is most overlooked is the provision in Article 1, Section 2 that provides for senators not to be elected by popular vote — like today — but to be elected by state legislatures. This is designed to keep the influence of the people as far away from the decision-making process as possible — the opposite of our priorities today. These demonstrate that the primary goal of the Founding Fathers was to found a competent government — not necessarily one that would cater to the will of the people at whim.

There is protest about inequity on our streets and discussion about inequity in our homes and workplaces. Whether it be by race, gender or social status, politicians in the highest halls of the land claim to be utterly dedicated to levelling each hurdle to the utmost of their strength. During our time of deep and fast social change, our founders would likely not understand our attentiveness to the issue of equity.

However, the Founding Fathers endowed our forefathers with principles that, by and large, stick with us to this day. Our Founding Fathers fought for freedom from their oppressors, and we have continued that tradition en force. Our Founding Fathers endowed their children with unalienable rights, rights we fight to extend to all. And our Founding Fathers gave us the very foundation for each and every one of our accomplishments.



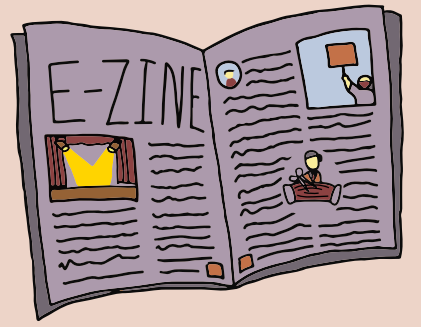
GRACE WOODRUFF | web editor

SciTech is a STEM class centered around invention and design, but it's so much more than that. Just the name of the class brings up strong feelings from students — either ardent love or passionate hatred. I think I fall somewhere in the middle. The class was difficult;

I'll be the first to admit that, but the work that my team and I did was rewarding. Seeing our device work for the first time brought unbridled joy that was almost immediately expressed in the forms of squeals, giggles and happy dances, not to mention the bonding experience. I took SciTech my first semester, and the friendships I made were priceless. So for all the good and the bad, SciTech was an experience I wouldn't trade for the world.

ZOE KLEIN | commentary editor

As a design fanatic, my expectations for Ezine were high. I couldn't wait to learn the ins and outs of InDesign, exercise my writing skills on a story of my choosing and show off my mad Newspaper student skills to all of my classmates. While it may sound like this is leading up to some major disappointment in Ezine as a class, it is not. Ezine was my favorite signature course because it was tailored to all



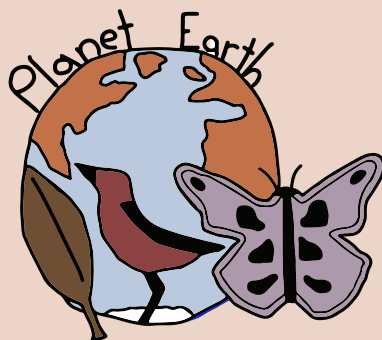
of my interests and gave me the opportunity to develop my creative vision and skills. It left me yearning for more opportunities to work with graphic design and journalism, and prompted me to develop my skills, later giving me the opportunity to be an editor for the Liberator.

## A Deeper Look At LASA's Signature Courses

graphics by Juan Carlos Ramirez Delgado

MAX DOMEL | entertainment editor

At the end of the semester, I left Planet Earth class with a deeper knowledge of how environmental processes work as well as with a greater appreciation for science. Throughout the semester, you learn about the topography



of landscapes and how they frame interactions with plant and animal life. You also go on field trips to Bull Creek and McKinney Falls State Park as well as to a local park for the Biodiversity Project. This nearly semester-long assignment involves collecting and analyzing data on plants, birds or arthropods to write a research paper. Planet Earth was a very valuable experience for me, always filled with interesting and relevant material, and was my favorite signature course at LASA.

SOPHIA CHAU | student life editor

In a time where America is at a point of nearly unprecedented polarization, Great Ideas gives us a path to walk through it. Great Ideas is the class out of LASA's four signature courses that basically functions as a Philosophy 101 course. Nowadays, it is imperative to have the skill to argue with people we disagree with in an earnest but respectful and productive manner. Great Ideas teaches that skill by forcing us to practice it through almost daily in-class discussions. I know that



I have learned very important life lessons from the other three classes, but in an unparalleled time of sectionalism and misinformation, Great Ideas might just be the most important class of all.

## The Need to Support Students with Learning Disabilities

SANWI SARODE | staff writer



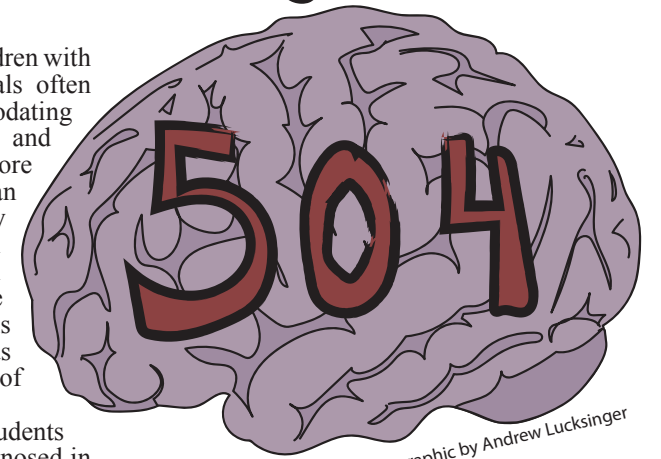
According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, one in five students has a learning disability. Knowing this, it's essential that Texas does its best to fulfill these students' needs by providing them with the appropriate accommodations to help them succeed. Although many schools do an adequate job of supporting students with 504s (accommodations) for their disabilities, that does not mean that there is no room for improvement. It is the responsibility of the State of Texas to ensure that there is funding and resources to help students succeed in their academic careers.

School districts in Texas don't focus enough energy on accommodating students with disabilities, but before they're able to do so, the State of Texas must allot adequate funding. A Houston Chronicle investigation found that the Texas Education Agency had saved billions of

dollars but denied vital support to children with special learning needs. Texas officials often dismiss the importance of accommodating students with learning disabilities, and that must be addressed. Texas is more concerned with saving money than providing kids with the resources they need to have a chance at an education that works for them. The Houston Chronicle's Brian M. Rosenthal wrote that, in Texas, "unelected state officials have quietly devised a system that has kept thousands of disabled kids...out of special education."

504s can also be hard to provide. Students must meet certain criteria and be diagnosed in a specific way to be considered to receive an accommodation. Many students don't have access to the resources to be diagnosed or seek treatment, meaning that their learning needs go unnoticed and ignored. And even once these criteria are met and an accommodation is received, many teachers aren't understanding about certain needs that aren't explicitly outlined in the accommodation itself.

According to the Houston Chronicle, if Texas provided the same amount of support for disabled students as the rest of the U.S. does on average, 250,000 more kids would be getting critical services such as therapy,



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

counseling and one-on-one tutoring. This only goes to further show that school districts in Texas should step up their support for disabled kids.

Students shouldn't have to struggle with learning or have to fight for accommodations and 504s that should already be theirs. Accommodations and 504s are a right, and it is the job of the State of Texas to step up and create pathways to provide their students with the help that they need so that all students can have a chance at learning in a beneficial environment.

## Straight Up Queer Spaces

GRACE WOODRUFF | web editor



I clearly remember the first time I went to the Gay-Straight Alliance, more commonly known as GSA. I was in middle school, and I was just figuring out that I might not be straight (childhood obsession with

Ariel, anyone?). At this time, I was also questioning my gender identity, feeling as though the dichotomy of the feminine and masculine just didn't fit me. And so I went to a place that, theoretically, would have people who were experiencing the same things as me, people who could help me out. But when I arrived, I was surrounded by cisgender heterosexuals who, despite their allyship, didn't really know how I was feeling or how to help me.

It was a uniquely uncomfortable experience. I mentioned an attraction to women, and suddenly, all eyes were on me. It seemed as though every straight person in the room was looking for a "gay best friend," and they had finally found the perfect prey. It didn't get better as the years went on. In 7th grade, I mentioned my girlfriend to a then-friend, who promptly laughed and said, "Hot. Lesbians." As unfortunate as it is, it often feels as though

the only alternative to hatred is fetishization and laughter.

I can't help but suspect that a lot of young queer people feel this way. For all the good that allies do, they also have the tendency to take up space, time and energy that isn't theirs. And I understand why allies are required, I really do. No one should be forced to come out in order



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

to join a community that embraces acceptance, but it can be so disheartening to come to a space that was quite literally designed for people like you and find that there isn't enough room for you. Or even worse, to find the space is only available for those willing to fulfill the stereotypes and be the butt of jokes.

I think that a large part of the problem is that people don't know what being an ally really means or looks like. And while I'm not the

authority, this has been my lived experience. People tend to think that just showing up is enough to be a good ally, and while that's important, there's a lot more to it. Contributing financially is part of it, but largely, it's about the attitude you have going in. Hot Rabbit, an LGBTQ+ events organizer, says it well: "It's about cultural humility. Allies should act as if they are in someone else's home."

This means that if you're not queer, it's probably best to just be quiet. Listen to the queer voices surrounding you, and don't talk over them to provide anecdotes about your one queer friend or the time you went to pride. Fetishizing queer couples or talking about a desire for a "GBF" should not be confused with allyship. It's not cute, it's not supportive — it's creepy.

Another issue is that, especially for young people, there are very few spaces that are actually designated as queer-friendly. Unless you live in a major metropolitan area, you are highly unlikely to find queer book stores, queer coffee shops or even queer bars. So if you're not a member of the LGBTQ+ community, please just leave the few spaces that there are for the people who need them.

The most important thing to remember is that these spaces aren't for non-LGBTQ+ people. Pride and GSA and queer spaces in all their forms should be centered around listening to and uplifting queer people, and that's a lot harder when they have to shout to be heard.

## Should Democrats Pack the Supreme Court?

NORAH HUSSAINI | staff writer



Climate change, women's rights and police brutality. These are three of the most pressing issues in society today. With the 6-3 conservative lead in the Supreme Court, major advancement on these issues may not be made for at least the next few decades. After the passing of iconic Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the nomination of Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the Court is tipped far into conservative favor. One of

the most notable solutions to this imbalance is court packing. Court packing is the expansion of the number of justices on the Supreme Court in order to make decisions more balanced. While it's one of the most controversial ideas on how to balance the Supreme Court, it's also arguably the most effective way.

President Donald Trump's four years in office have separated families at the border, cost us hundreds of thousands of lives due to COVID-19 and torn apart our close relationships with powerful allies. Even if President-elect Joe Biden can move forward legislation either in partnership with a Democratic or Republican legislature, the Supreme Court could simultaneously be undoing major progress on cases like *Roe v. Wade*, the Affordable Care Act and LGBTQ+ marriage rights, which are typically very important to Liberals.

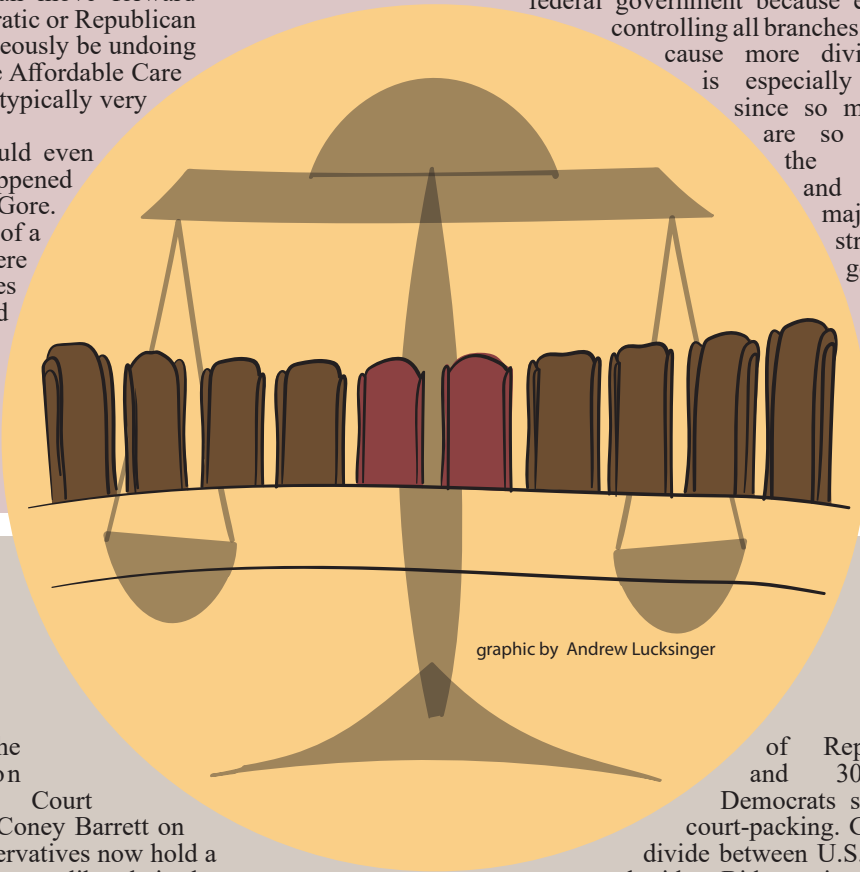
Cases decided by the Supreme Court could even affect the result of future elections, like what happened in 2000 when George W. Bush defeated Al Gore. The Supreme Court became involved because of a dispute over the vote count in Florida, when there was a small 537 vote difference between votes for Bush and votes for Gore. This ruling would determine the results of the election, because both candidates needed Florida to win. The final ruling was that the state's electoral votes would go to Bush. The Supreme Court was split even then, with four justices voting in favor of awarding the electors to Gore and

### PRO

five voting in favor of awarding them to Bush. One justice's decision determined the leader of America, and that justice was a moderate Republican and often a swing vote on the court. The court's balance gave the country confidence that the decision was nonpartisan and consistent with the law. That decision would be more difficult to accept with the current imbalance. More recently, in October 2020, around 5.1 million voting-age U.S. citizens were restricted from voting in the presidential election because of felony convictions. If the court were to somehow expand restrictions so no felons could vote, then 24 million people with felony convictions would be stripped of their right to vote, almost 15% of the number of votes cast in the 2020 election.

Critics may say that court packing shouldn't be necessary because justices are supposed to be nonpartisan. Packing the court is admitting that one of our most sacred and powerful systems has lost impartiality. Supreme Court cases and the obvious biases in important government officials' views could be the least of our problems. We need to pack the court to preserve some fairness in the

federal government because either party controlling all branches would only cause more division. This is especially important since so many issues are so fragile at the moment, and there are major partisan strain on the government.



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

EDITH HOLMSTEN | staff writer



With the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett on Oct. 26, conservatives now hold a 6-3 advantage over liberals in the court. This dilemma has sparked interest in court-packing, or increasing the number of justices in the U.S. Supreme Court above the current total of nine. However, packing the court should be avoided because it inflames division, distracts from COVID-19 and is not a long term solution.

During his four years in office, President Donald Trump nominated three Supreme Court justices. With Barrett's confirmation after the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in September, Democrats are worried that issues from *Roe v. Wade* to the Affordable Care Act will be threatened. The fear that a court that might not favor Democrats has fueled their support for court-packing, to balance out their disadvantage.

First, Democrats must consider that adding Supreme Court justices may not even be an option. Each justice has to be appointed by the sitting president and confirmed by a simple majority of the Senate. While President-elect Joe Biden has been called the winner of the 2020 election by a range of news sources, including NPR, Fox News and CNN, the Senate is still undecided. With two out of the 35 Senate seats not yet announced, Republicans hold the Senate with a 50-48 lead. Even if Democrats Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff can beat Republican incumbents Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue in the Georgia runoff elections, the Senate will be tied between Democrats and Republicans. The equal ratio could mean negative things for the confirmation of a liberal nominee, and depending on the outcome of the two runoffs, Democrats might not have the votes to confirm a justice.

Even if Democrats are able to gain control of the Senate, adding Supreme Court justices is a controversial idea on both sides of the aisle. A New York Times survey from July found that only 19%

of Republicans and 30% of Democrats supported court-packing. Given the divide between U.S. citizens on the idea, Biden trying to add a justice would only increase this division.

Controversy around the idea of court-packing could cause the process to take weeks or months of valuable time that should be used to address more pressing issues such as the pandemic. The U.S. recently surpassed over 250,000 COVID-19 deaths and is setting new records for the number of daily new infections, according to CNN. Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that about 11 million people were still unemployed in the U.S. during the month of October. Without a Congress fight about a justice approval, government officials could spend much needed time on passing additional relief for the unemployed, ensuring criminal justice reform and creating regulations to tackle COVID-19.

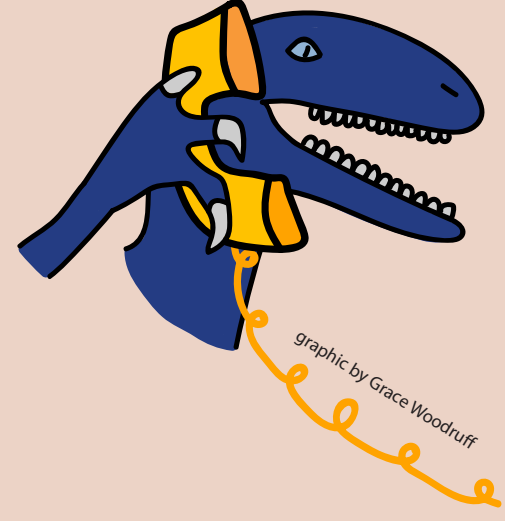
Finally, packing the court now is not a sustainable option as it sets a precedent for court-packing to be a solution to every partisan problem. If Democrats argue that it is justified to add more Supreme Court justices when they control the presidency and Senate, there is no stopping Republicans from claiming the same right if they win the presidency and Senate in years to come.

While Democrats are worried about the issue of their 6-3 ratio of Republican to Democrat justices on the court, packing the court would stoke division, distract from urgent issues and not even create a sustainable option to address the Democrats' concern. We need to be able to set aside our partisan issues, such as the Supreme Court, and focus on unifying around combating pressing challenges.

### CON

## ask the libs

### Holiday Edition



graphic by Grace Woodruff

## What Do I Get my Mom for the Holidays?

Moms are difficult to buy presents for — that's no lie. When asked about what they want for Christmas, they often say something along the lines of: "All I want for Christmas is for you to get along with your sister," or "Just a big smile, sweetheart." Maybe the issue is that I don't want to get along with my sister or that I don't want to smile on a holiday that has now become a hotspot for capitalism to take over the country, but those options are not preferable. Especially because moms give the best gifts, so the standards are high. One year, I gave my mom a mini coupon book, full of little drawings saying things like "One Morning of Breakfast in Bed" or "Alone Time No Questions Asked." Another year, I embroidered a bird on a shirt for my mom. I think the most important thing to remember when you're trying to find a gift for your mom is that it must be given with love. As the saying goes (and only applies in this situation), it's the thought that counts.

## How Do I Submit to the Advice Column?

Just DM us @lasaliberator to hear more about the things you care about in future issues of the Liberators.

ADVICE COLUMN: Every six-weeks the Liberators staff present their opinion on a series of questions written by the Commentary editors.

### GEMINI

It's easy to feel isolated right now, Gemini, but remember that your support system is only one call away. Tune into your positive energy this month — there should be a lot!

### CANCER

You've been feeling pretty grumpy recently, Cancer. Try to take a step back and appreciate all that you have. Often, gratitude is the cure to a bad mood.

### LEO

Try to think about the effects of your actions, Leo. It's easy to feel like your words don't have a true impact on others, but remember how you feel when you're hurt and try not to make others feel the same way.

### VIRGO

Stop and smell the roses, Virgo. It's easy to lose sight of purpose when you're busy, but you're doing great! Calmer times are coming.

### LIBRA

You are the light of everyone's life right now, Libra! Make sure that you're trying to be the light of your own, as well. You have more power over yourself than you realize.

### TAURUS

Take a moment to reflect on all that you've done, Taurus. Perfection isn't a requirement, and trying to push your limits isn't beneficial if you're too absorbed to stay grounded.

Make sure to listen to the opinions of others, Aries. It's easy to think that your views should be replicated by others, but being open-minded to diversity in opinion is an important part of growth.

### ARIES

You've had an exciting couple of months, Pisces! Things have been pretty overwhelming, but this is your time to cool down and refresh. Take a deep breath, drink a glass of water and let yourself relax.

### PISCES

It may seem like hard times are coming, Aquarius, but make sure to stay in contact with what is keeping you grounded. You have people who love and support you — don't be afraid to use that to your advantage this month.

### AQUARIUS

You have just come to terms with a mistake from your past, Capricorn. This month, take time to reflect on why this happened, and do what you can to reduce damage.

### CAPRICORN

You have come to a reckoning, Scorpio. You have lots of joy coming — stay in contact with the possibility of better things coming and take care of yourself.

You should get back into reading, Sagittarius. Words can provide a safe haven when things start to feel stressful. You have a lot of opportunities coming in the new year.

### SAGITTARIUS

### SCORPIO

## HOROSCOPES

ZOE KLEIN | commentary editor

# Hey There Mr. Blue Sky, Will Texas Turn Blue?

## A look at Texas' Recent and Future Political Affiliation

NEVIN HALL | staff writer

From the election of 1800 being thrown to the House of Representatives, which would take well over 30 ballots to decide, to Horace Greeley dying mid-election in 1872, most elections have an aspect the media tends to focus on. Many prominent publications, like Time and Politico, have written that they believe Texas is on the cusp of going blue in the future given the growth of the Hispanic population, both in the general and voting populations of cities. Former Speaker of the Texas House Joe Strauss believes that either party has a chance in Texas because "it would be wrong for either party to assume that the political status quo is unshakable."

According to a Johns Hopkins survey, just 42% of Americans can name their local member of Congress, a number that decreases to 20% when asked to name local members of state legislatures. From 2013 to 2014, the U.S. Congress passed 352 laws and resolutions. State legislatures passed 45,564 laws and resolutions, according to the Congressional Quarterly Inc. Judge Gamble said she is very well acquainted with how ignored and small local elections can be.

"By and large, in Travis County, the primary winner is unopposed in the general," Judge Gamble said. "So if you don't vote in the Democratic primary, you're not voting for your judges... you're not voting for a county commissioner. You're not voting for a lot of things, but judges especially."

According to the same Johns Hopkins survey, about a third of voters were not sure if absentee voting was an option in local races. The same proportion of voters did not know who they voted for past their governor, local legislative representatives and lieutenant governor. More than half of voters did not know if their state even had a constitution. According to Judge Gamble, this has large effects as people move up the food chain in public office.

"Most of the time, the people running for Congress first ran for something locally or worked in politics locally," Judge Gamble said. "So if you want to control who is in that pipeline, you have to pay attention to who's running for city council or commissioner."

Currently, two Austin City Council districts are up for runoff, Districts 6 and 10, which has not happened since the 10-1 system;

that of one mayor and ten city council districts around the city, which was implemented in 2012. This leaves lots of room for conservative movement into this formally nonpartisan local arena typically dominated by liberals, according to Brian Ruddle, the executive director of the Travis County GOP.

According to Judge Gamble, these local elections tend to decide policy for the everyday American. However, Judge Gamble also said that is not to say that statewide elections and national elections are unimportant. While Travis County is blue, having last gone Republican in 2000 with George W. Bush, Texas is not there yet. As Texas has not had a Democratic governor since Ann Richards in the 1990s. Former political operative Carlton Carl said he was not particularly surprised about the Texas presidential results.

"That Trump won was to be expected, although I think everybody on my side had hopes that it might be otherwise," Carl said. "However, I was surprised at what happened in certain parts of the state, particularly down in the valley."

Three counties in the Rio Grande valley, Starr, Maverick and Zapata counties, all either flipped their results from 2016 — in the case of Zapata — or drastically decreased the Democratic lead in the area. This is surprising given the long-held assumption that the Hispanic vote would skew heavily Democratic and stay there.

Carl said that's not the only problem for Democrats in Texas. MJ Hegar, the widely supported Democratic contender for Republican Jon Cornyn's Senate seat, was beaten by about 10 points.

"I think Democrats have taken minority communities for granted forever," Carl said. "My friends in politics decades ago talked about the need to learn from people...I think the error the Democrats have made is to presume that you go up the last month or two of a campaign and pay attention to Hispanics, for example, and try to get them to get them out to vote for your candidates. Oh, that's too late."

As much as COVID-19 has affected people's daily lives, it might not be a large political problem at the statewide level, according to Ruddle. He said Governor Greg Abbott's handling of the pandemic does not have as prominent a presence on the ballot.

"People love Governor Abbott," Ruddle said. "And there's a reason why, Governor Abbott won about seven points more voters than [Senator Ted] Cruz did that same election because even some Beto voters were saying, 'You know what, I still trust Governor Abbott, even though I'm now in line with Beto on sending Beto to the U.S. Senate, I still feel that Governor Abbott is a good leader.' Leadership is not a partisan issue. Leadership is an ability. It's a drive. It's a talent. And Governor Abbott has it."

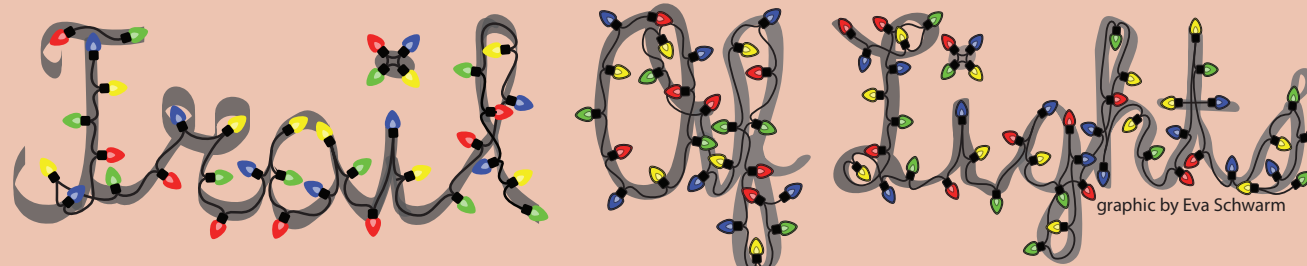
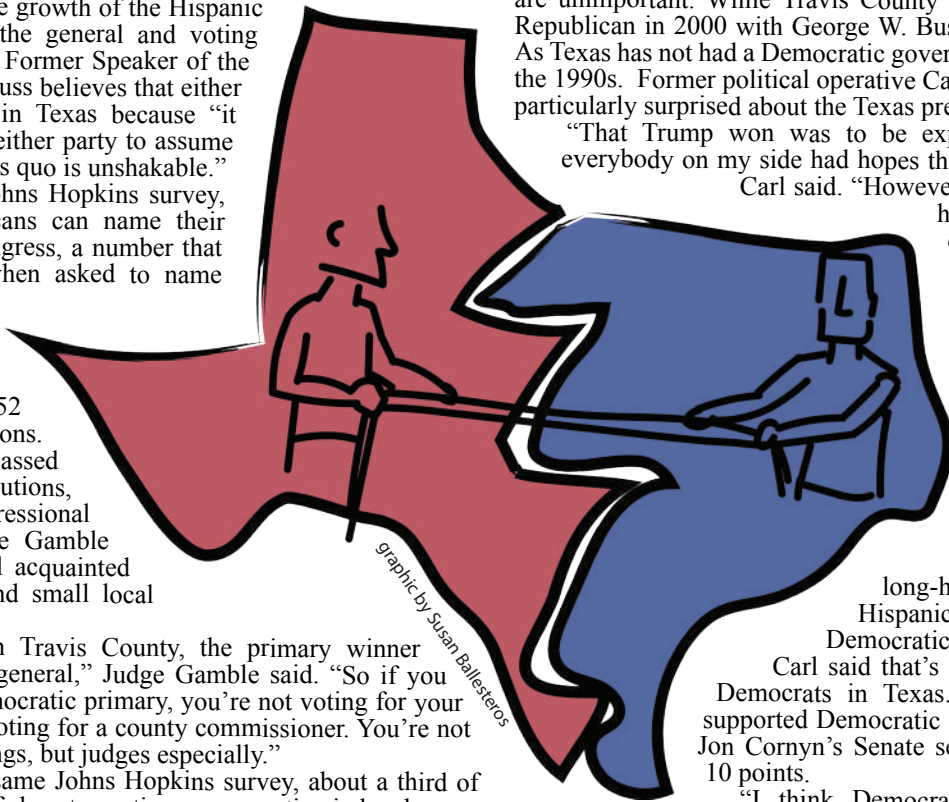
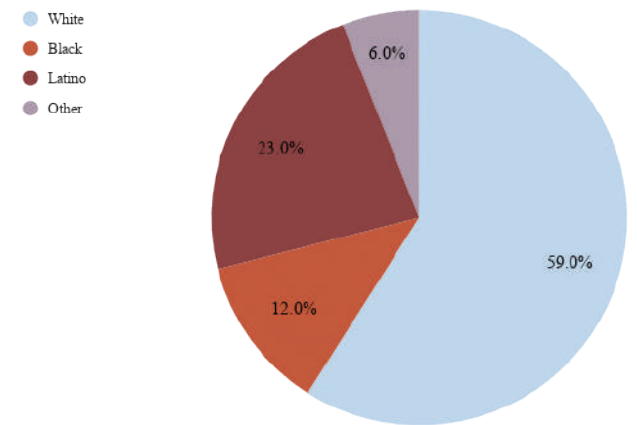
Even with the handling of the coronavirus pandemic, and the accusation and FBI investigation into Attorney General Ken Paxton, the Republican Party still looks strong in Texas, Ruddle said. This is quite a change from the past, when Texas was the brightest blue there was, according to Judge Gamble.

"When I was [in my teens], every state elected official in Texas was a Democrat," Judge Gamble said. "It wasn't until Ann Richards lost that everything went to the Republicans, and we haven't been able to get it back statewide."

According to Ruddle, the combination of Democrats taking Hispanic votes for granted and making policy choices that turn out Republican votes will do one thing. It will make it almost impossible to turn Texas blue.

"The reason that Texas has done so extremely well is that we've become a state where we focus on being business-friendly, and people vote with their feet," Ruddle said. "People are not moving to California because of the great business climate that they offer. They're not moving to New York. People are moving to Texas. And it's for a reason."

### Texas Voter Racial Demographics According to AP VoteCast Data



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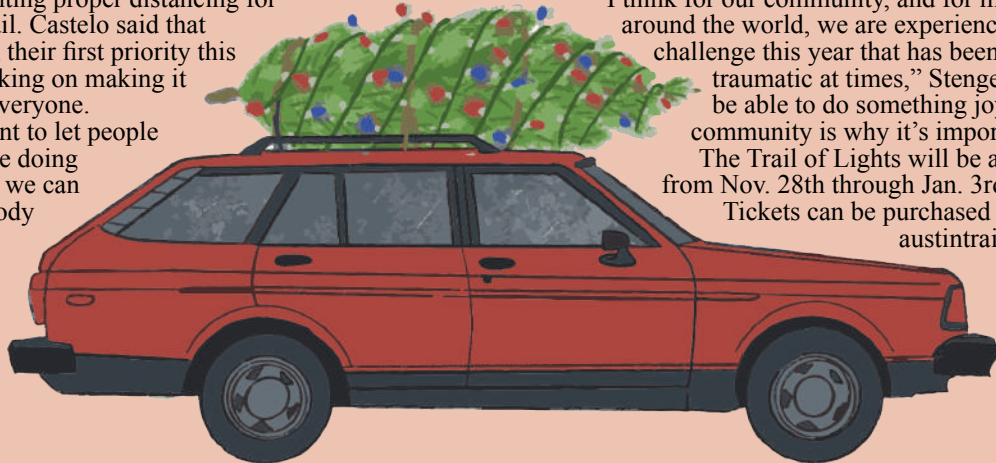
According to Stengel, they eventually decided to do a drive-through because it would ensure distancing between people in vehicles and keep everyone safe.

This year will not be the first year that the Trail of Lights will have been a drive-through. Veronica Castelo, who is on the Trail of Lights team and works with hospitality and concession, said that people are getting excited who were part of the original trail, when it was a drive-through.

"A drive-through is actually not a new idea for the trail; it actually was a drive-through for many years," Castelo said. "For people who have been in Austin for a really long time, they know it as that, so it's kind of a throwback to the old times at the trail. I can tell you, just based on what people are saying, that they're super excited about it, and that they're excited that they do get to kind of relive, for some of them, their childhood, or for adults, maybe it's what they used to do with their kids."

The Trail of Lights will change various aspects of the trail aside from its format, from taking tickets with masks on to implementing proper distancing for those on the trail. Castelo said that safety has been their first priority this year while working on making it enjoyable for everyone.

"We just want to let people know that we're doing everything that we can to keep everybody safe," Castelo said. "I know we're the biggest event in town even



though people will be in their cars, and we've taken all those precautions, not just our staff, but any interactions with anybody, we're playing it very, very safe."

Allie Hill, a Biology and Psychology teacher at LASA, said she thought that it was definitely the best way they could have done it. Hill has been attending the trail each year for the past few years since she moved to Austin.

"I just think it's nice, well number one, it's pretty, number two, I think that it's like a nice family activity, like something everybody likes to go and do, and it's kind of fun to get out and see, and it's just like a little bit of an Austin tradition," Hill said. "I think the drive-through format is actually a great change for this year because it keeps the trail alive, and it also kind of takes safety regulations [into account]."

Stengel said events and traditions like the Trail of Lights are very important to the Austin community. According to her, having something to bring the community together in times like these is very important.

"I think for our community, and for most communities around the world, we are experiencing a universal challenge this year that has been difficult and traumatic at times," Stengel said. "So to be able to do something joyful for the community is why it's important."

The Trail of Lights will be available to visit from Nov. 28th through Jan. 3rd in Zilker Park. Tickets can be purchased on the website, [austintrailoflights.org](http://austintrailoflights.org).



LIT UP LIKE A FIRE TRUCK A fire truck is decorated with lights. There are various posters on the truck, one of them reading "Fire alarms save lives!" photo by Emma McBride



CANDY DELIGHT Cars drive the entrance of Candyland. The Candyland section has various candy and bakery decorations photo by Emma McBride



SPACESUIT SANTA A santa sits in a spaceship as part of the trail. This is one of the many festive structures. photo by Emma McBride



STAR OF THE SHOW The mock Christmas tree is lit up. It is made out of lights, at the entrance of the Trail of Lights, photo by Emma McBride



CAR CRAZY Cars wait in line at the Trail of lights. The sides are cordoned off to ensure order. photo by Emma McBride

# Defunding the Police and Investing in Communities

## Mutual Aid and Abolitionist Community Organizations in Austin

EWAN MCINERNEY | staff writer

In the U.S., there have been 16 days this year where police have not killed someone, and 98.3% of killings by police in the past seven years have not resulted in officers being charged, according to Mapping Police Violence.

Madeline Detelich is the co-chair of the Austin chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. Detelich supports defunding the police because she thinks that response to crime has become too extreme.

"So many cities increase their police department budget every year so that cops can get more force and new fancy toys," Detelich said. "In the past, it was something that wasn't even questioned usually, which is why it's very satisfying this year that we have more people supporting us in trying to stop trends of racial bias and militarized police."

Aaron Booe, former Liberator editor, has worked with multiple abolitionist organizations, including the Austin Youth Liberation Movement. Booe said that while the concept of policing is not inherently bad, the contemporary manifestations of policing have come to be associated with the incidents of police brutality that have been publicized in the last few years.

"In the contemporary sense, a lot of people would associate police with carcerality and would define it as being very punitive in nature," Booe said. "There isn't much emphasis on this idea of public safety with policing currently. I do think policing could be a form of public safety, but currently they aren't very compatible with each other."

According to Booe, many people think of law enforcement as the only factor in public safety. However, they said that it is important to fund agencies that work to solve social and political issues as well.

"Something that we need to start realizing is that public safety extends to so many sectors of our lives," Booe said. "One of these sectors is addressing immediate material needs, material needs that can often push people to certain activities that we might define as criminal. So if we were to defund the police department, some of that money could start going towards things like mental health respondents and social welfare programs that work to provide public health, housing and education."

UNI Abolition is an Austin-based abolitionist group that lobbies for liberation through mutual aid and relationship-building. According to Safa Michigan, a group member, mutual aid is crucial to keeping communities alive and functional.

"Mutual aid, at its essence, is helping one another through resource exchange and support," Michigan said. "If abolition is the work of abolishing the systems that keep us oppressed, then it is important that we practice mutual aid now so we can be prepared to take care of each other and survive in a post-revolutionary, post-abolition world."

Booe said non-reformist reforms differ from a more generally known definition of reform looking to fix a broken system. Instead, they are steps working towards abolition. The Austin Youth Liberation Movement has worked with a number of progressive and abolitionist organizations on a local and statewide level, including the Democratic Socialists of America.

"We worked with Our Revolution Texas, which is the action committee that was responsible for Bernie Sanders' campaign in 2016 and 2020," Booe said. "We've also worked with Austin Justice Coalition, which is a police reformist and criminal justice reform organization in the Austin area."

UNI is also participating in several humanitarian projects involving distribution of material goods to people in need. Michigan said the group has ambitious plans for the future and plans to

become more organized.

"Every Sunday, we go and hand out supply bags to unhoused encampments after talking with folks and assessing their true needs," Michigan said. "In our work over the past few months, we've been figuring out the logistics of our distribution project as well as navigating the collective format of our group. As we move forward, we're going to be regrouping and taking a different approach which includes taking on more creative endeavors."

Detelich said she believes that more money is needed for housing and healthcare. However, she said she thinks that more needs to be done than diverting police funding to social programs.

"As a democratic socialist, I think that the government should make investments in guaranteeing basic rights for all human beings," Detelich said. "Providing things like housing and healthcare obviously does take a lot of money, and, to be honest, there's not always going to be a lot we can do on the local level to help things this way. It has to be coupled with a movement on a federal level to remake the way our money is spent in this country and get a lot more of it through policies like graduated income taxes."

According to Detelich, many left-leaning people think that the slogan "Defund the Police" is too extreme. She said that without context, it can be misunderstood to mean the complete abolition of law enforcement.

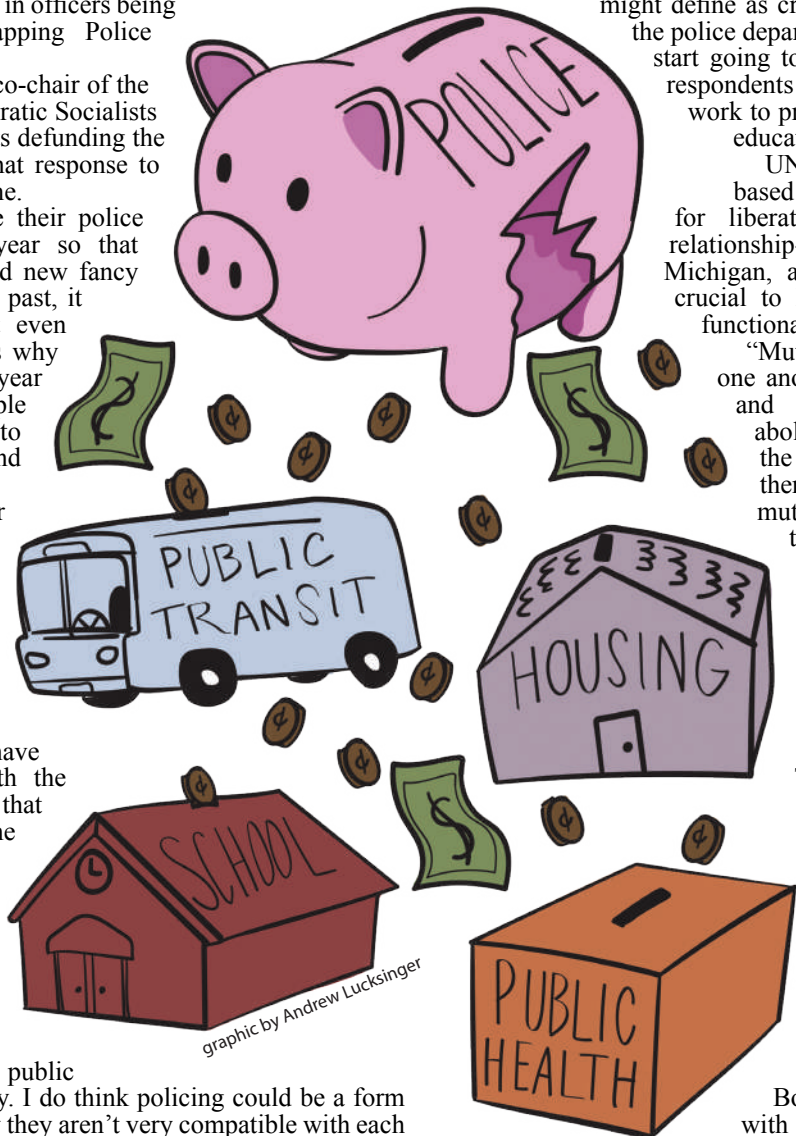
"Since the election, something that's happened is this internal warfare in the Democratic party, and a lot of people have been pointing fingers at 'Defund the Police,' saying that the slogan is too extreme and it's costing them votes," Detelich said. "That slogan is not something that was cooked up in the think tank — it's an emotional cry from millions of people that have taken to the streets because they realize that police reform is needed."

Protests and rallies for reform in police funding have been greatly affected by COVID-19 as well as the 2020 presidential election. Detelich said that, ultimately, the events of 2020 have reinforced abolitionists' message.

"There's definitely been an added drama to the protests with COVID," Detelich said. "I didn't expect to see massive protests during a pandemic because, after all, the left are more likely to be taking COVID seriously. The virus just heightens it all because people are willing to make this calculated risk, and they're deciding that it's worth it for them to be on the streets. The election contributes to this feeling as well because the atmosphere is just that much more politically charged."

According to Michigan, a system that does not rely on punishment and oppression is important to people's ability to treat each other with respect. She said that relationship-building is an important step on the way to abolition.

"A world without police and one with enough resources for everyone to live would be a beautiful one full of love, care and community," Michigan said. "It would be one where people honor the humanity in one another and address harm in transformative, healing ways."



graphic by Andrew Luckinsinger

# Looking for Extracurriculars? Join the Club

MADELINE VAN SLYKE | staff writer

## Activism Club

When: Wednesdays from 4-5 (Zoom)  
Contact: @Lasa\_Activism on Instagram

According to a study done by Tulane University's School of Social Work, feelings of isolation as a result of the pandemic are causing people to feel as if they can't do anything. Sophomores Jaelin Su, Chole Kwan and Aviva Shaveel formed Activism Club this year to help raise awareness of important issues to the community around them and offer opportunities for people to work on issues they are passionate about.

According to Kwan, since there are so many different issues to care about, such as LGBTQ+ rights or the COVID-19 pandemic, the club works to let every team work on what they personally want to. Kwan said this is what allows every voice to be heard.

"We work to offer opportunities for people to work on projects for the issues they care about," Kwan said. "A lot of people have different issues they are interested about, so often we talk in one group and split up into different projects according to them."

Club leaders work to make the projects they do relate to what is happening in the world at that time. Along with community service, Shaveel said members work to inform people about current events in the community, such as a teacher who may be fired, and what can be done to work to prevent this. Shaveel said the club has done so through social media posts, writing emails and various other project opportunities.

"We made an infographic about the importance of the flu vaccine, how it relates to COVID and why it's important you should get it," Shaveel said. "We also made a video stating your rights when you get pulled over by a police officer. We are planning on doing many more little projects like that to spread awareness to people."

The club meets weekly, and members collaborate outside of meetings to complete projects. Su said she is glad it has given her opportunities she wouldn't otherwise have known about. The club gives students something meaningful to do as well as a way to connect with friends, according to Su. "It's fun to hang out with them, and it's almost like when we do something, it gives us a sense that we can do something to change issues," Su said. "I think a lot of people feel kind of helpless about different issues, so when you're able to work in a group to do something about it, it makes you feel better."



TEAM BRIEFING The entirety of the Activism club meets to discuss topics and strategies in taking part in community activism. The club allows members to work together and independently on ways to combat injustice. photo courtesy of Jaelin Su

## Charitable Change

When: Wednesdays from 4:15-5 (Zoom)  
Contact: @Lasacharitablechange on Instagram

According to the Charities Aid Foundation of America, charities and nonprofits are facing hard times amid prolonged lockdowns and a floundering economy. The Charitable Change club has been working to help others during the pandemic, according to its founder, sophomore Pallavi Gokul.

According to her, the club was started this year because of the pandemic and the way it has impacted charities' abilities to find volunteers and donations. Gokul said the club does not have a focus other than helping people.

"The idea for the club came because my neighbor runs a nonprofit, and she mentioned that she was having a lot of trouble finding volunteers due to corona," Gokul said. "Obviously, I know a lot of people who want volunteer hours, so I thought it would be a good solution to connect my friends to volunteer organizations — that way everyone benefits... In the

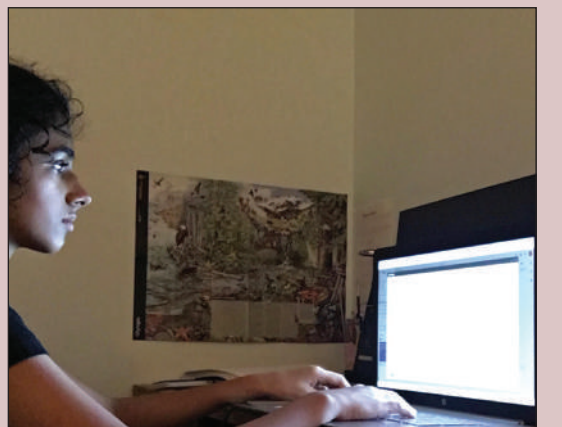
future, we're planning to do a coat drive, and the clothes will go to Austin Allies, which is another nonprofit that doesn't have enough volunteers and supplies."

Charitable Change is working during weekly meetings and in their own time to find ways to help different charities. The club also works on more personal projects within the school community, according to freshman member Tarushi Tripathi.

"We have lots of projects," Tripathi said. "Recently, we had a tutoring project where we were going to tutor students in subjects we were interested in teaching. I thought that was really cool because I usually wouldn't be doing much to help others during corona, but the club gives me the chance to."

Freshman member Emily Lucas said the club has given her a purpose and opportunities to meet new people during the pandemic. Lucas said that, pandemic or not, members are all getting to know each other for mostly the first time.

"I like how I get to meet new people, especially with the pandemic, where it's been so hard," Lucas said. "I think that's really fun, and I like how we're all here because we care about things and want to enact change."



REACHING OUT Founder and club member Pallavi Gokul started the club in order to try and help local charities find young volunteers. photo courtesy of Pallavi Gokul

## Environmental Club

When: Mondays at 4-5 (Zoom)  
Contact: @Lasaenvironmental on Instagram

Campuses around the country have made changes to work towards sustainability. Junior Marta Knoll said members of Environmental Club work to educate themselves and others on the threats our environment faces while working towards a more sustainable LASA campus.

"We do lots of projects around our campus and communities to work to help the environment," Knoll said. "We also really like to have group discussions about environmental problems that we think are interesting, so we like to do a balance of those two things."

The club has offered activities such as a campus clean up in early November and a chance to collect compost and recycling. Senior officer Sophie Newmark said she has participated in many different projects over the years.

"Last year, we started a partnership with the National Honor Society to pick up compost and recycling from the hallways and paper towel compost from the bathrooms," Newmark said. "The year before, we did an Earth Day event where we had a bike race and local environmental

organizations tell us about their work. And we've done a couple of campus cleanups too."

The club opens up a place for students to talk about the environment and the specific issues they believe in, Knoll said. According to her, it also helps her learn lots of new things. For example, a few months ago, she learned how to make a compost bin and has since been using it routinely.

"I like being in the club because I get to talk about environmental issues that I think are interesting, and there's a lot of like-minded people there," Knoll said. "I also get to learn new things about making the world a better place and becoming more green."

The club has hosted various other activities and projects in the past years, from a speaker on the impact of consuming animal products on the environment to hot chocolate parties and several trash cleanup projects. Senior Gaelila McKaughan said she works closely with other clubs and organizations to create opportunities for students to engage with the environment.

"We work to promote campus sustainability, diverting waste through student-led recycling and composting efforts and organizing regular cleanups to keep our environment healthy," McKaughan said. "We also think it's really important that our club is an intersectional community space, tying our natural environment to our school environment."



CAMPUS CLEANUP Club members Gaelila McKaughan and Ethan Estrada participate in the annual campus cleanup hosted by environmental club. The club also partnered with NHS and gave out volunteer hours with this opportunity. photo courtesy of Gaelila McKaughan

## Studious Siblings Tutor Students Seeking Help

NORAH HOUSSAINI | staff writer

In April, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) went virtual. No student in the district entered school buildings, from elementary to high school students. A national study from the American Psychological Association showed that parents with children under 18 at home were markedly more stressed than non-parents. It was for this reason that siblings freshman Travis Edwards and junior Sally Edwards founded Beyond the Classroom, a free tutoring program for elementary school students.

"For parents, it may be a really hard thing to balance, dealing with their children's school, dealing with their work, and trying to maintain somewhat of a normal lifestyle," Sally Edwards said. "I thought that we, as students, could try to bridge that gap and try to solve that problem."

Beyond the Classroom tutors students in whichever subject they would like. Tutors first meet with the students and parents and then help them in the requested subject through practice problems, looking at past assignments and explaining concepts.

The program picks tutors through a nominating process, which was started in October. 12 students were nominated, and 10 of them are currently working with the program. One of these tutors is senior Madelyn Madiedo. "I personally really like working with children," Madiedo said. "This opportunity is so cool, and it's really good that we get to help out kids who need some extra help in different subjects. It's also nice to talk and interact with students because, in this pandemic, kids probably aren't getting a lot of social interaction. I think it's good to do something nice for them."

Madiedo had past experience in similar programs such as the Peer Assistance Leadership Service (PALS) program available at LASA, which she said led to her decision to tutor with Beyond the Classroom. This prior tutoring experience is shared throughout



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

the tutors. Sally Edwards and her brother also previously volunteered with an orchestra tutoring group, K2K Strings, which she said helped prepare them for current tutoring.

"We're really lucky to have people who have had past experience with tutoring," Sally Edwards said. "People who have been in other tutoring programs or people who've tutored on their own for their siblings or with younger children in the community."

The tutors go through training created by the Edwards siblings in order to be prepared for the kids' needs. This training establishes ground rules and provides resources and techniques for tutors to come up with their lesson plans. Sally Edwards said they have learned how to keep students engaged, motivated and focused while providing kids with other resources such as social interaction.

"We're not only an academic resource — we're also a social resource for these kids who may not have siblings or may not be able to talk to their friends as much," Sally Edwards said. "It's good to have that kind of social connection that they might be missing to adapt to the way they're handling school right now, especially younger children, when this time is such a formative one in their growth and experience."

Both Edwards siblings said they want the parents and students to feel comfortable as a part of the tutoring process. Parents have access to recordings of sessions and are allowed to attend sessions if they would like.

The siblings said the accommodating structure of the tutoring sessions gives students have the opportunity to take a quick minute to relax, talk about their day and settle down before starting their session.

"We really wanted to structure the sessions in a way so it wasn't just all about teaching the kids what they should know," Travis Edwards said. "We want the tutoring sessions to be a time where the kids feel excited to come because their tutor seems excited to be there."

The Edwards siblings started the service online to help kids and parents as a result of the COVID-19 quarantine order in the spring. Although it started for pandemic-based reasons, both Sally and Travis Edwards said they want to take the program to the next level.

"We all have the capabilities to do well in school, and we feel that we should be sharing those capabilities, especially now," Travis Edwards said. "We're hoping that this tutoring service will go beyond being virtual. Later on, we may do it in person when it becomes safe."

**"This opportunity is so cool, and it's really good that we get to help out kids who need some extra help in different subjects"**

-Senior Madelyn Madiedo

## Working for Nourished Communities with Food Justice

MALVIKA PRADHAN | staff writer

According to non-profit organization Feeding Texas, approximately one in seven Texans are food insecure. In central Texas alone, 17% of residents are food insecure, according to the Central Texas Food Bank. This means they cannot reliably access enough nutritious food to feed themselves and their families.

There are many organizations around Austin that help with food insecurity, including the Sustainable Food Center (SFC), Austin Community Gardens, Urban Roots, Black Food For Thought and Meals on Wheels. Jennifer Stevenson, who works at Austin Community Gardens, described the concept of food justice as the consideration of the effects of racial and economic inequality on a person's ability to nourish themselves or provide food for others.

"Food justice is a structural perspective of the food system that acknowledges the impact of race and class on food access and food production," Stevenson said. "Food justice advocates work to improve equity and food sovereignty. Food justice work is diverse. Some examples include the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, farm workers who organized to demand fair wages and safety measures. The ongoing work of the United Farm Workers is also part of food justice... Seeds and seed diversity are another aspect of food justice for gardeners and farmers."

Urban Roots is an Austin-based nonprofit that teaches young people about farming and food. According to Program Manager Teresa Orduno, the issue of food insecurity is widespread.

"About 16% of people in Austin are food insecure," Orduno said. "And many barriers go into play: low proximity to food retail, low household income, people not having access to transportation and less affordable healthy food availability. There are 13 zip codes in Travis County that do not have a full-service grocery store."

According to Stevenson the COVID-19 pandemic hasn't helped these numbers. She said many people across Austin have lost their jobs, making it harder for them to pay for nutritious food.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for many people in our region," Stevenson said. "The Office of [Federal] Sustainability established a weekly food access call at the beginning of the pandemic to help different emergency food providers communicate with each other and provide food to more people."

The main demographics targeted by this issue are low-income communities and communities of color. Hilda Gutiérrez, the People and Operations Director at the SFC, said food justice is important to the health of a community.

"I think that if we are going to have a thriving community, we need to, especially for people of color and low-income communities, center those individuals," Gutiérrez said. "I think what we're seeing right now is food apartheid: certain folks get access to good food and get to live long and healthy and successful lives, and those folks look a certain way, they have certain incomes, et cetera."

Community gardens are one of the main ways that people can

grow their own food, according to Stevenson. Community gardens also support food sovereignty, the idea that the people who grow and consume food should be able to control their food system.

"Community gardeners are also able to grow culturally important foods that may be hard to find or expensive in grocery stores," Stevenson said. "For example, at the Festival Beach Community Garden, there are gardeners from Myanmar who grow hibiscus plants and harvest the leaves for use as an herb. It is easy to find hibiscus flowers, also known as sorrel and jamaica, in Austin grocery stores, but it's harder to find the leaves... [Food justice] is important because food, like water or shelter, is a necessity that people shouldn't have to be without because of economic status, race, et cetera."

People who are able to can also garden in their homes. Gutiérrez said she's seen some people grow their own food to share with their neighbors.

"Maybe they grow gardens in their homes, but they built them in the front of their home, so that their neighbors can go and take the harvest," Gutiérrez said. "So that's also really awesome, because then, people can just pick from your trees because whenever you grow food, you have so much, you have like pounds and pounds of things that you don't even need."

Getting the food is only one step of the process. After that, people need to know how to cook it. The SFC teaches cooking classes, and Gutiérrez said people can help out by giving neighbors or friends healthy recipes.

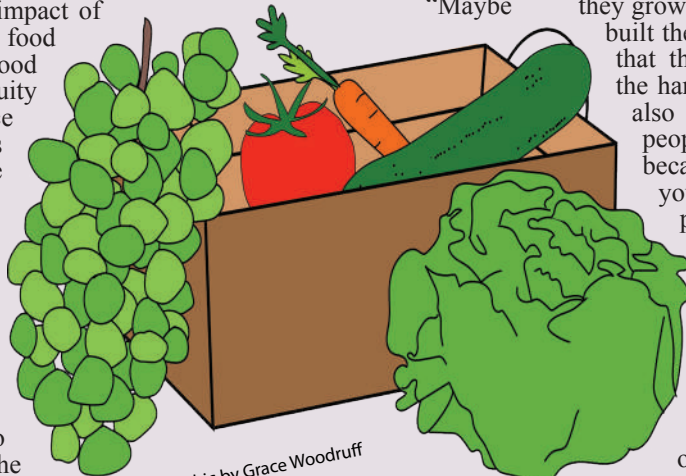
"I think that is a thing that a lot of people don't know how to do," Gutiérrez said. "Helping people around you that are like, 'Hey, how did you make that recipe?,' Those are small things that make a big difference in people's lives. It really transforms their way of thinking of how they can prepare food because a lot of people are like, 'Oh, I just fried or microwaved it.' That's not healthy, but it's really hard to understand what the skills are to make food."

There are many ways that people can help those who are food insecure. One way is to reduce food waste, though, according to Orduno, there are many other ways.

"[You can] volunteer at organizations that are promoting healthy, affordable access to food, donate to organizations like Urban Roots, Serafina, Meals on Wheels, et cetera so their work can continue or get involved in what's happening in your community and find out where you can donate food," Orduno said.

Gutiérrez said that even sharing where food comes from helps, along with pushing state policymakers to support policies that help local farms and farmers. These policies would support the farmers and help keep money within the community instead of large companies.

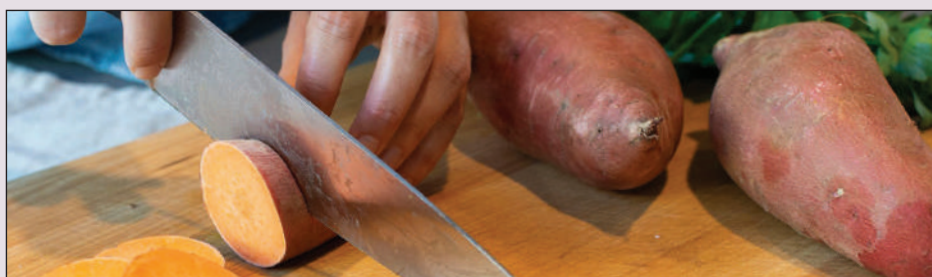
"If we had more people sharing where our food comes from, putting more pressure on legislators to provide subsidies or support for local farmers to grow food that our people can consume," Gutiérrez said, "I think that we'd have an entirely different community."



graphic by Grace Woodruff



ROOTS Interns thin radishes and weed at Urban Roots. This is an extended paid internship. photo courtesy of Allison Turpen



COOKING CLASSICS cook demonstrates cutting sweet potatoes for a class. Sustainable Food Center hosts free cooking and nutrition classes to increase accessibility to healthy cooking. photo courtesy of Sustainable Food Center

# NEWS BRIEFS

## Global News

Nov. 27

Retracing back to the beginning of this year, it was proven that the very first clusters of COVID-19 in Europe were found in ski slopes and mountain resorts in the Alps. Almost a full year later, these same locations face a new question: whether or not to open their slopes for the winter and spring ski seasons. As of right now, countries like Italy, Germany and France are choosing to keep precautions heavy, and ski slopes have remained closed.

Nov. 30

The Arecibo Telescope in Puerto Rico was one of the largest observatory telescopes for over 57 years, according to the BBC. The telescope had two broken cables in August and was in the process of getting these repaired. On Dec. 1, three more fallen cables caused the entire telescope to collapse and sustain sufficient damage. Officials have said that to be fully repaired, the telescope must be fully dismantled and rebuilt, which is being heavily pushed for in the scientific community.

Dec. 1

For the first time since the 1970s, a Chinese spacecraft was able to successfully land on the Moon and bring moon rocks back to Earth. The probe, which is named Change-5, is part of a larger-scale space program that the Chinese government and military have been pouring billions of dollars into with a larger goal of sending humans to the Moon by 2022.

## National News

Dec. 1

On Dec. 1, an earthquake with a deemed magnitude of 6.4 struck rural parts of southern Alaska. With recent follow-ups, there have since been no reports or any evidence of a tsunami, according to the New York Times. More particularly, the earthquake was reported at around 7 a.m. local time, just about 24 miles southeast of an island named Nikoloski, which is minimally populated.

Dec. 1

Since March 2019, the U.S. women's soccer team has been in a legal battle with the United States Soccer Federation in a fight for equal pay and treatment in comparison to the men's team. They asked for around \$66 million in response to the Equal Pay Act and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They have since gotten the USSF to provide them with equal chartering and equal treatment in terms of preparation for games but are still in a fight for closing the pay gap.

Late Dec.

Research and results on recent testing for a vaccine for COVID-19 have heavily advanced in the past months, and starting as early as late December and the beginning of 2021, the U.S. and other countries around the world are preparing for a distribution of such vaccines. Two so far have been proved to have over a 90% accuracy rate and are FDA approved. These two are from Pfizer and Moderna, both large pharmaceutical companies.

## State News

Nov. 26

University of Texas engineering students have worked together to create a self-watering soil in order to help farmers stuck in dry regions. The soil is developed by being able to pull water from the air and distribute it to the plants through other elements artificially added into the soil called super moisture-absorbing gels. They said their incentive is to both help farmers in need but also create an agricultural community where less water is needed in order to combat climate change.

Nov. 30

As of Nov. 30, the Hewlett Packard Enterprise, a tech company, will be relocating from California to Spring, Texas, just outside of Houston. In the announcement made by Governor Greg Abbott, he said the headquarters will be able to provide jobs to many in the Houston area in a brand new state-of-the-art campus which is set to open in spring of 2022. The company already has locations in Austin, Plano and Houston.

## Local News

Nov.

Recently, the Austin Latino Coalition has begun a new initiative of delivering personal protective equipment (PPE) to the doors of low-income communities and minority families that may live in areas with a high COVID-19 case numbers or positivity rate. The coalition said it has started personally distributing PPE and other precautionary equipment due to the skewed impact the pandemic has had on the Latino community. According to the coalition, as of Nov. 24, 232 Latinos had died due to contracting the coronavirus out of 484 COVID-19-related deaths in Austin.

# To Teach or Not

## Faculty Forced to Resign



**WRITING ON THE WALL** Protestors tape posters to the front doors of AISD's main office in a demonstration on Oct. 4. Staff and students traveled to AISD's headquarters in order to protest the reopening of schools amid the pandemic. photo courtesy of the Austin History Center

**SOPHIA CHAU** | student life editors  
**AVA DE LEON**

LASA graphic design and Ezine teacher Jill Giulietti started off this school year excited. But because teachers were directed to return to campus on Nov. 2 or face losing their jobs, that mood didn't last forever.

"I started this year excited to be here, excited to be working with my students, and this kind of hit me out of left field," Giulietti said. "I really don't feel like I had any other choice but to resign."

Giulietti is just one of multiple teachers all across the Austin Independent School District (AISD) who will have to resign this school year because of the district's policies mandating that teachers who don't have an accommodation return to campus Nov. 2. These accommodations do not include teachers who live with people who are at risk due to COVID-19. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) requires that all districts provide an in-person option, and AISD has committed to providing a virtual option for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year, according to AISD's assistant director of public affairs and operations, Scott Thomas.

"Given that the situations on our campus can change daily and the need for restoring important in-person support for students, we are asking staff to work from the campus or district facility," Thomas said. "Staff with approved accommodations will continue to teach or work remotely."

According to KXAN, more than 900 teachers whose accommodations were approved for the fall semester will no longer have those accommodations, possibly putting teachers at risk. Ken Zarifis, the president of Education Austin, Austin's largest teacher's union, has concerns about the safety of students and staff returning to campus. Teachers returning to campus means that they may be putting their students at risk.

"As teachers, in our code of ethics, we have committed to not knowingly bringing kids back into an unsafe environment," Zarifis said. "The district is forcing us to break our code of ethics. How can we embrace that? It's wrong."

According to Thomas, AISD has taken these concerns into consideration. The district has implemented safety measures for all campuses.

"We've implemented procedures all across the board to protect students, to protect teachers, to protect staff," Thomas said. "Including, obviously, masks across the board, the hand-washing and disinfection stations that I'm sure you've seen at your campus, all the signage that we have as well as the increased disinfection and sanitation procedures."

Nevertheless, Zarifis said that safety has to be at the forefront of all decisions, even if that means having fewer people on campus. According to him, learning isn't easy when people are at risk.

"Kids have to be safe. They have to be healthy. Teachers can't be sick if they are going to teach," Zarifis said. "You can't learn if you are dead."

However, according to LASA principal Stacia Crescenzi, even safety isn't as easy as it might seem at first glance. Having fewer teachers on campus also gives rise to other problems which have

been seen in many elementary schools.

"They're having to put more students in one room, which is unsafe because they have so many teachers out on leave," Crescenzi said, "so schools can't prioritize health when this many teachers are on leave. And when you talk about health, physical health is absolutely important, but so is social-emotional health, and if kids can't come back so they can't interact with other children, they can't interact with these nurturing adults in an educational setting that they need to because the teachers aren't here, then you're sacrificing their emotional health."

Safety isn't the only reason some teachers have decided to stay home. McCallum High School English and Literary Magazine teacher Daniel Myers decided to stay home because it's what his community and the scientific community asks of him. Myers also has to take care of his children at home.

"I have a 4-year-old who needs me here to take care of her. When I'm [on campus], it means my wife is taking off the whole day until I get home to take care of our daughter, and then when I get home, she starts her 12-hour work day," Myers said. "It's just unmanageable."

Because Myers does not have an approved accommodation from AISD, if he stays home, he will be forced to resign. After hearing of his situation, McCallum senior Olivia Navarro decided to make a Change.org petition that garnered over 17,000 signatures as well as media attention from the local press.

"When Mr. Myers told us that he was at risk of losing his job by the end of next week, I was in shock," Navarro said. "He could actually be leaving us, and I just decided to make a petition to try to stop that from happening."

After the petition, Myers found out that he has a condition that may grant him an accommodation, and is pursuing that route. LASA math teacher Ruchi Varma has been forced to take family medical leave because of a similar situation. If the situation continues, Varma will be forced to resign because she is currently taking care of her mother in Los Angeles and cannot physically return to campus. According to LASA junior Sohail Saffari, who is one of Varma's students, she should be able to continue teaching virtually.

"No teacher should be forced to choose between their job and their family, especially because she's proven that she can do her job while even online," Saffari said.

Saffari also decided to make a Change.org petition for Varma in order to advocate for her job. The petition gained over 1,500 signatures and media attention from CBS Austin.

"TEA says, 'We're doing this for the students, we're doing this for the students,'" Saffari said, "so if the students come out and say otherwise, then TEA loses their ground to stand on in this situation."

Navarro also echoed similar sentiments. According to her, there are many people who want to see a change in AISD's policies.

"There are a lot of students and parents of the community who backed this cause and want AISD to change its policy, and it's not

just a small number of people," Navarro said. "We are not going to ignore that our teachers are at threat here."

According to Zarifis, only about 25% of students have returned to campus, even though many teachers have returned in person. These numbers clearly show what families in AISD are thinking, according to Zarifis.

"That indicates a very clear message from the families in AISD that they are preferring the virtual option," Zarifis said.

Myers would like to see AISD give campuses more flexibility in how they choose to return to school. According to him, teaching is a unique job that requires people to make split-second decisions.

"There are rules, but rules are deemed through the lens of people's actual lives, and as a teacher, you bend rules every five seconds based on the life of the human you are dealing with," Myers said. "I would like to see the school district seeing the teachers in the same light that teachers are seeing their students. We are human beings with complicated realities and maybe the rules need to be interpreted through the different realities because we're dealing with human people."

According to Thomas, the number of teacher resignations and retirements between March to October has changed from 570 in 2019 to 587 in 2020. However, it's worth noting that these numbers may not cover November, the period in which most teachers would likely separate because that's when they were required to return to school. Thomas was not able to provide November's numbers by press time. Zarifis predicts that AISD may experience a rise in resignations.

"What we anticipated happening is when people got to the point where you got to go back, it's at that point they're forced into a decision, 'Am I going to stay or not?'" Zarifis said.

According to Crescenzi, there isn't a simple solution to this problem. Every option seems to have trade-offs.

"There's no good solution. If we let any teacher stay home, we're sacrificing kids' education," Crescenzi said. "That's a terrible position to be in. If I put kids' education first, then I'm potentially sacrificing good teachers. I hate both of these options."

Zarifis is hoping to work out a solution with AISD. He and Education Austin have been talking with AISD to roll out a pilot program that would allow principals more flexibility on how to deal with staffing on their campuses. The pilot will first roll out to Bowie High School, Ann Richards, Burnet Middle School, Cunningham Elementary and Padrón Elementary.

"We're hoping that this pilot will help us understand what creative ways meet the student needs with the employee needs in keeping everybody as safe as possible as the overriding priority," Zarifis said.

The pilot will have each school come up with a plan based on, among other metrics, how many students are coming in and how many teachers are willing or able to return to campus. The schools will then present their plans to AISD, and the district and those campuses will move forward from there. Zarifis hopes that this will increase the amount

of flexibility on each campus.

"We're not saying that this is going to be, 'All of a sudden everybody is going to have the ability to not come to school if they don't want to come to school,' that's not it," Zarifis said. "It's trying to find the greatest amount of flexibility as possible that we can find for every campus and for their workers on that campus."

Zarifis pointed out that he doesn't want to force campuses into this model and that schools who think the current plan is the best will be able to continue with that plan. According to Navarro, schools aren't the only ones that need more flexibility.

"I think the TEA needs to realize that Texas is a very large state and that there are different districts that are in different levels of safety with COVID," Navarro said, "and they need to be more accommodating with districts and not threaten with cutting funding because it strengthens districts to make decisions that are negatively affecting the students and teachers within the district."

Giulietti also raised the possibility of more flexibility. According to her, that's an important thing the district could offer to teachers.

"I've heard this from a lot of different teachers; the feeling is that we're disposable," Giulietti said, "and I think just a little bit of flexibility on their part would completely remove that assumption."

**"We are not going to ignore that our teachers are at threat here."**

- McCallum senior Olivia Navarro

## Teacher Talk

### Two Educators Give Opinions

"Finding out the exact reasons why medical accommodations across the district were denied from Facebook and KXAN as opposed to from a district employee is a bit of a gut-punch." - English teacher Lauren Williams

"Teachers who are medically high-risk, like me, had their medical accommodations easily approved for the fall. However, for the spring I was denied with a generic message." - English teacher Lauren Williams

"I think that it's absolutely heartbreaking." - English teacher Lauren Williams

"I'm extraordinarily sad for my peers who felt their only option was to resign." - English teacher Lauren Williams

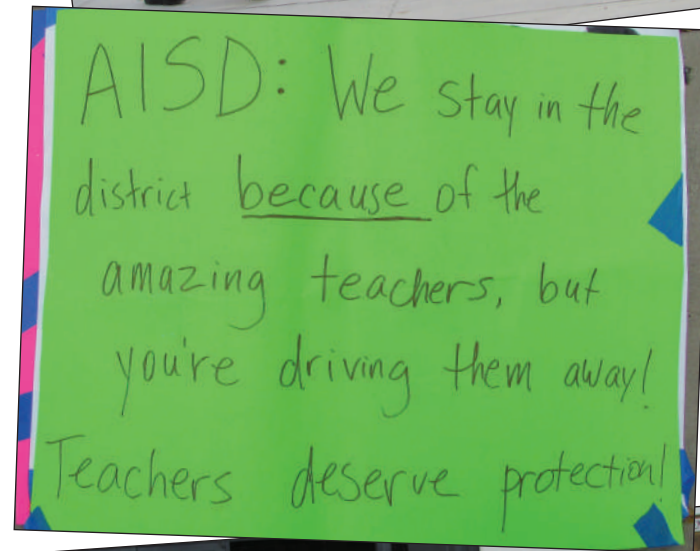
"It's a terrible shame when someone needs to choose between doing what they love and the wellbeing of their family." - Math teacher Kevin Crow

"I hope that every effort is being made to retain passionate and experienced teachers during this difficult period." - Math teacher Kevin Crow

graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

# Not to Teach?

*Due to Mandatory Return*

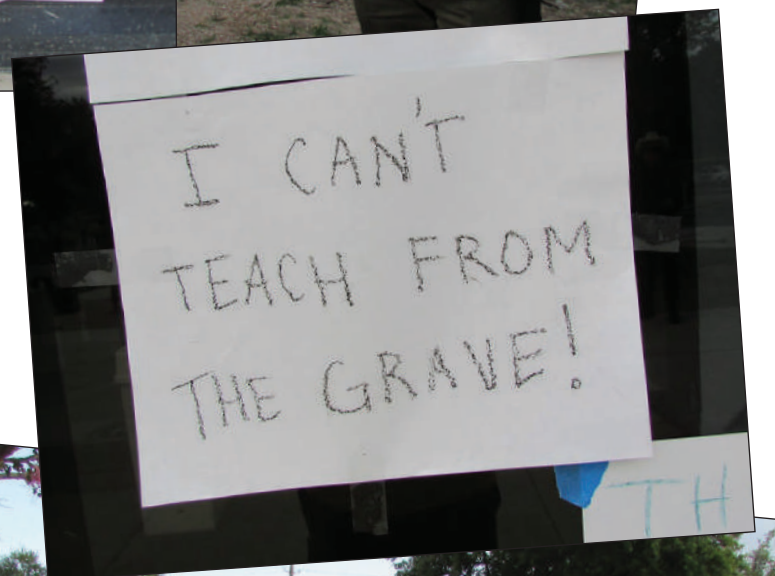


## Supporting the Staff

On Oct. 4, teachers and students drove to the Austin Independent School District (AISD) headquarters in downtown Austin to protest the reopening of schools. According to Zarifis, whose organization, Education Austin, organized the protest, there were 100 to 150 cars caravanning to the central office. Once the cars got to the main office, students, teachers and parents taped protest signs to the doors.

"There were at least 600, 700, 800 messages taped to the windows of why people were concerned, plans, worries. It was really quite a beautiful moment to see," Zarifis said.

The following Monday, Texas State Associate Professor John McKiernan-González went to the dumpsters behind AISD's main office and found the posters. He then donated them to the Austin History Center, where they now reside. Anyone interested in further research should contact the Austin History Center at [library.austintexas.gov/ahc/contact-austin-history-center](http://library.austintexas.gov/ahc/contact-austin-history-center). photos courtesy of the Austin History Center



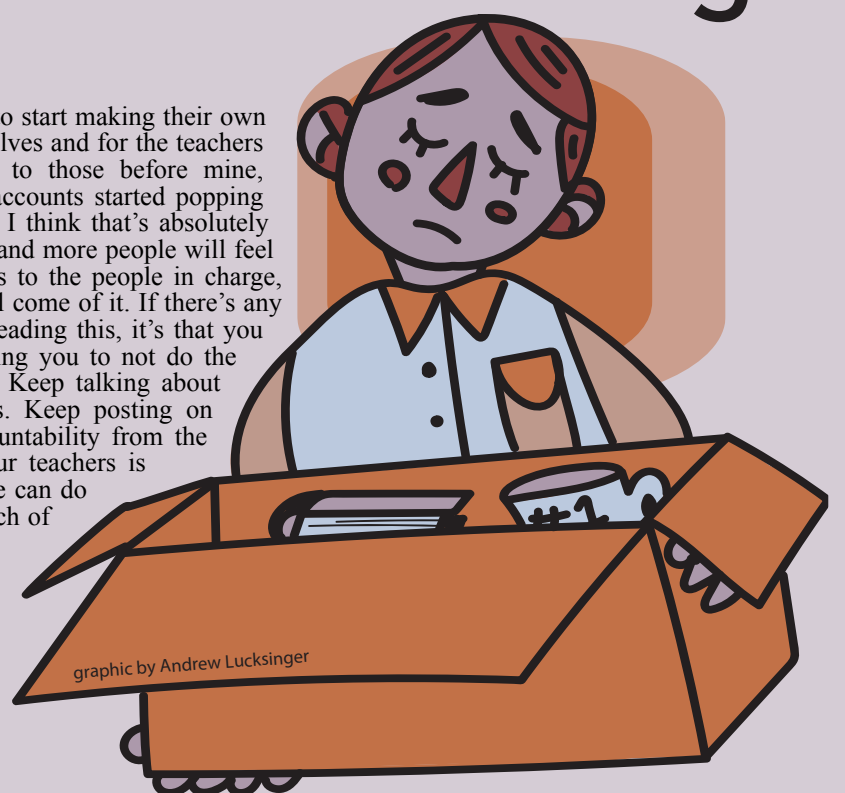
## Opinion Teachers Shouldn't Have to Resign

SOHAIL SAFFARI | club contributor

LASA math teacher Ruchi Varma is currently in Los Angeles taking care of her sick mother after being forced to choose between staying at home to care for her mother or teaching in person during a pandemic. Her decision to stay in Los Angeles is one we all would make, but her job at LASA is at risk because of it. To give my support, I started a petition that has close to 1,800 signatures and spoke on CBS Austin to try and get the Austin Independent School District (AISD) and others to listen. I thought it was the least I could do considering how much effort Ms. Varma puts in to teach her students, something I would know about since I had her classes for two years.

When I first heard about her situation, I was angry, I was devastated, and more surprisingly, I felt like I had to do something. Imagine that — a lone 16-year-old with a laptop and a recorded Instagram video thought he could make a difference. Well, I did something because my teachers are being faced with the decision to resign or come back to school and put their family members in danger. This is a policy that I, like most other logical people, have a distaste for because it forces teachers to do something that could potentially destroy their lives or the lives around them. I don't really want to be seen as someone who did something special; I want my actions to reflect what the average student can do. I represent the idea that anyone can make a difference with a bit of luck and a good enough message. I did what I did because it was the right thing to do, that's it. Plain and simple. I didn't want the attention or the expressions of gratitude — I wanted to see a teacher I care about not get taken advantage of during one of the darkest periods of modern American history.

I think it helped inspire others to start making their own methods of standing up for themselves and for the teachers they care about, as, in addition to those before mine, other petitions and social media accounts started popping up shortly after mine was posted. I think that's absolutely fantastic because over time, more and more people will feel comfortable voicing their opinions to the people in charge, and hopefully something good will come of it. If there's any takeaway you should have from reading this, it's that you should never listen to people telling you to not do the right thing because it's too risky. Keep talking about what's happening to our teachers. Keep posting on social media and asking for accountability from the people in power. The fight for our teachers is far from over, and it's the least we can do for the people that sacrifice so much of themselves for us.



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

## Finding Ways to Celebrate in a Pandemic

ANNABEL ANDRE | staff writer

As 2020 comes to an end, students and staff are finding new ways to safely celebrate the holidays. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, people are struggling to carry out some of their usual holiday traditions, making it difficult to get into the holiday spirit.

For Thanksgiving this year, freshman Aurna Mukhejee went to Corpus Christi with her family. Originally, she and her family were hoping to have Thanksgiving with her cousins but ultimately decided it was unsafe.

"At the beginning, we were thinking of just having our cousins come over for Thanksgiving break, and we would wear masks around other people but not with each other," Mukhejee said. "But after a while, we decided that that wouldn't be very safe, even if it was with our own family. So in my family's case, I think we're just trying to be careful around everyone."

Mukhejee used to live in California near her cousins, but since she has moved, she doesn't get to see them as often. She wishes she could see more of her family and friends but believes in the importance of staying safe until it's no longer needed.

"We lived in California for seven years, so it's definitely a bit of a challenge to not see my cousins every now and then," Mukhejee said. "After COVID's over, I hope we can see each other again. I wish there was a little bit more flexibility to see people and not have to constantly wear masks and all that, but obviously, right now, we're in a situation where that's quite important."

Like Mukhejee, sophomore Pallavi Gokul opted to change her holiday plans in order to stay as safe as possible. This year, she was unable to do the holiday activities she usually does, and instead of seeing friends and family for Thanksgiving, she utilized Zoom to see her relatives.

"Usually we meet with friends for Thanksgiving, but this year, we can't do that, so we're having to social distance and do a Zoom call," Gokul said. "We usually go do holiday activities like see lights, but this year we're not doing that, we're just staying at home."

English teacher Caroline

Pinkston's plans also had to change due to the pandemic. She was no longer able to see her parents for the holidays. She hasn't had a holiday season without her parents in several years, and according to her, it will be

difficult to not see them, but she and her husband will still have Thanksgiving with her in-laws while practicing social distancing.

"I haven't seen my parents since February of last year, and it was a really hard choice for me not to go," Pinkston said. "It's been so long since I've seen them. And then my in-laws are lovely people, but, by nature, they like to hug, and they like to be close, and so we will just have to be socially defensive. I know we will all be doing our best to be as distant as possible, but we all have to be reminding each other a couple of times."

Pinkston has made plans for the holidays so that she can see some of her family while being safe, but she worries how safe others are being. She hopes that people will try and be as safe as possible and that they modify their holiday plans accordingly.

"I hope that people are staying safe," Pinkston said. "I keep reading these news stories saying that a really large percentage of Americans actually seem to be planning to just have their holidays as normal, and if that's true, then I definitely don't agree with that. But I hope it's not true. I'm going to have dinner with my family, but it's going to look different. And it's going to be structured in a way that you can do it safely, but I hope that other families are doing the same thing, and even if they're still getting together that they're modifying their plans so they can be safe. I definitely am worried that a lot of people are not modifying their plans enough."

As we enter the holiday season, Pinkston feels she needs to warn students and staff to stay safe. She thinks if people aren't safe over Thanksgiving and winter break, then LASA may need to shut down again due to COVID-19 cases.

"I hope that our students and teachers will keep in mind that if we all go to see a bunch of other people over the break and then come back into the same classroom after the holidays, then we're setting ourselves up for a situation," Pinkston said. "So I hope everybody is taking that seriously as we go into the holidays."

## I Wouldn't Walk 500 Miles Students Try to Learn Driving



SUSAN BALLESTEROS | staff writer

COVID-19 has taken away in-person school and socialization, but it cannot take away driving. Despite the pandemic, students at LASA have continued to work towards getting their licenses.

In order to get their license, students must first get their permit, complete a driver's education course either online or through a physical school and practice for a certain number of hours both during the day and at night. Then, finally, they must pass an on road driving test approved by the Department of Public Safety (DPS) office. The experience varies from person to person, including the reasons for learning to drive, but the overall guidelines remain the same. Freshman Sofia Francis recently started to learn how to drive.

"I haven't done legitimate driving lessons, and my parents have been pretty strict about actually driving on roads," Francis said. "The closest I've gotten to it is me on a ranch and driving around, so basically no obstacles, just learning to accelerate and brake smoothly."

Francis plans on taking the driver's education course at either the Department of Public Safety (DPS) or McCallum High School once she turns 15. Senior Andra Key has also recently started learning how to drive, but she has been taking an online driver's education course called Aceable instead.

"The amount [of driving] I've done isn't the most, but I've really been enjoying it," Key said. "I'm excited for when I finally get my license because most of my friends by now have their license, and it's really freeing to be able to go places."

According to sophomore Samantha Mason, Aceable offers videos and slideshow presentations on rules students need to know while driving, followed by multiple-choice questions to make sure the information was learned. Mason has been taking Aceable on her computer and then practicing driving with her dad.

"I got my permit like a month ago, so I have five more months of required time for my permit," Mason said. "If I finish the rest of the curriculum and the required number of hours in five months then I can get my license then, but the lessons don't take very long, so I'm sure I'll be done in a month or so."

Junior Sadhana Kumar is also taking the Aceable course. Currently, her driving lessons are focused on the practicing aspect, and she occasionally drives her parents for practice.

"The first part where you just learn the parts of the car and you drive in circles in the parking lot, it's not that fun, but once you actually get to drive on the road, it's fun," Kumar said. "You feel very independent."

Kumar also mentioned that, directly following the quarantine order in March, there were fewer drivers on the road, which helped with her practice. Key also spoke of other differences and similarities between learning to drive before and after the quarantine order.

"I do know that I didn't need a VOE...to get my permit," Key said. "In terms of driving lessons, my dad is doing it with me, so it wouldn't have changed for me, I think, if it wasn't during COVID it would be the same."

While COVID-19 may not affect online driver's education, it does affect in-person learning. Francis mentioned being unsure when she would start learning if it is still not safe to go to in-person school by the start of next semester.

"I would start driving school in February, assuming that [COVID-19] is dying down and I can do it safely, but if I can't, then who knows when I'll start driving for real," Francis said. "Maybe whenever we can legally go out and stuff and feel safe doing so."

Mason has more experience with actual driving. She said she enjoys it and especially looks forward to being able to do it on her own.

"I really like driving," Mason said. "I'm really excited to get my license and not have to drive with a parent in the car."

Junior Pete Bates has already gotten his license and described what it was like to take the test. According to him, it was easier than expected.

"I just did the lessons and then signed up for my driving test after practicing driving for seven-ish months with my parents in the car," Bates said. "Then I sent in all of the forms to the DPS through email and got the driver's license 10 days later, there wasn't really a lot of drama, which is surprising. It was nerve-racking, but if you practice driving for a long time, even with your parents in the car, you feel like you're somewhat confident in it. I didn't like being tested on it, but I understood that it was integral."

This nervousness is common among students still learning to drive, including Kumar. According to her, there are also positives to driving.

"Sometimes, it's kind of scary because you don't know what you're doing, but once you get the hang of it, it's actually kind of fun to drive around everywhere," Kumar said. "You feel in control of something, and it's a nice feeling."

SciTech teacher Amy Moore said that asynchronous time has allowed students to think more about the engineering process. They now have more than just in class time to contemplate their work.

"If you're at home, you're just gonna keep doing it until you can get it to work, so we couldn't focus so much on the outcome," Moore said. "We had to focus on the process of it and the testing."

The varied process of each build has also caused a change in group collaboration. Instead of students working together to complete one challenge over months like previous years, SciTech student and freshman Jonathan Renk said his class conducted peer reviews on five shorter, independent projects.

"We would show what we designed, and then we could get feedback from each other on what we could change to make it more efficient," Renk said. "I think it has been very helpful."

Ezine, SciTech, Planet Earth and Great Ideas have experienced adaptations in either group collaboration, curriculum or software. While adapting courses has been challenging, Walker said there are positive aspects to the changes.

"While there are a lot of things that are real bums about teaching remotely," Walker said, "we have discovered some things that we'll probably continue to incorporate in our course."

## Signature Courses Among COVID-19

EDITH HOLMSTEN | staff writer

LASA's signature courses are known for their unique ability to develop group collaboration, creativity and analysis. However, the prevalence of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has forced teachers to adapt their curriculum.

LASA requires freshmen to take Electronic Magazine (Ezine), a graphic design and writing class where students create a magazine, and Science and Technology (SciTech), a class that develops critical thinking through engineering challenges. Meanwhile, sophomores take Planet Earth, a research class focused on geology and a biodiversity project wherein students collect data about organisms around Austin, and Great Ideas, a class focused on philosophy. Restrictions to in-person gatherings and the shortened semester forced entire lessons to be cut, students to learn new software and teachers to re-evaluate their goals.

Planet Earth teacher David Walker said his curriculum has adapted to concerns around in-person research. Instead of collecting data as a group at local parks, students now collect data individually to reduce their number of in-person interactions.

"We made a lot more variants in terms of the level of commitment that students would be required to have in their parks," Walker said. "There are certain projects where students are going out to a park every week and collecting data. There are other projects where students are going out fewer times to their park and doing a lot of the data mining of resources that are already online."

With fewer students gaining data in parks, the Planet Earth teachers shifted some research to iNaturalist, a platform for people across the globe to post organism photos and identifications, which other users can comment on. Sophomore Skyler Jones said iNaturalist helped her learn about her parks of interest from knowledgeable nature enthusiasts in her community.

"It is interesting to see that some people who aren't in that class still are able to comment and say, 'This is the right observation, or this might be different than what I have seen,'" Jones said. "I think that is really cool that there is a community like that."



**DISTANCE DATA** Sophomore Aviva Shaevel collects data for the biodiversity project. Students have to take data alone this year because of COVID-19. photo courtesy of Aviva Shaevel

Similarly to Planet Earth's venture in utilizing new platforms for data collection, Ezine teacher Kate McGuire said her class began using the graphic design platform Lucidpress to create the layout of its magazines. McGuire has enjoyed Lucidpress because it allows her to track her students' progress, but she said that the platform is less advanced than InDesign, the software used by Ezine classes in previous years.

"I can easily go in and take a look at every kid's design, see where they are," McGuire said. "I like that aspect, but Lucidpress does not have some of the tools that InDesign does, and it makes it a little more difficult to export spreads and have them compile the magazine together."

As the magazine technology adapted, Ezine's atmosphere has changed due to the tighter schedule. McGuire said that she has cut out some creative elements of Ezine, such as typography and Photoshop, to ensure that students complete their magazines, which she regrets.

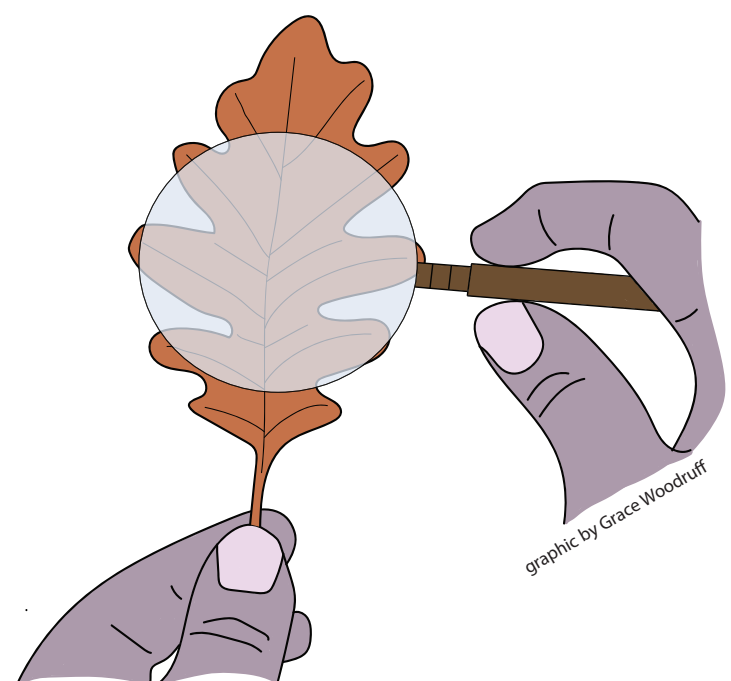
"We've had to completely get rid of those assignments because the kids have to focus on getting their magazine done," McGuire said. "That has to be the end goal."

McGuire has cut curriculum to focus on magazines, and Great Ideas teacher Shaw Vallier said that he cut parts of his curriculum too. Vallier took out the Media and Aesthetics units because of past feedback regarding discussions and student interest.

"We tended to go for what we thought facilitated more discussion or the things that got the most positive feedback in recent years," Vallier said. "Any works that kids particularly enjoyed, we didn't trash those."

While curriculum has been cut in the Great Ideas class, there is still a lot of content. Vallier said that the aspect of asynchronous work has been beneficial to allow students the time they each need to understand topics.

"Since these works are very dense, it gives you time to just think about it, marinate on it, and then you come back the next day, hopefully, with more ideas," Vallier said, "because usually we don't get our best ideas or our best reactions right after we read something or hear it."



## Austinites Leave 2020 for the Middle Ages at Renaissance Festival Popular Activities Like Jousting Resume with 50% Capacity

MALVIKA PRADHAN | staff writer

The Texas Renaissance Festival (TRF), the largest festival in the country took place this year from Oct. 3 to Nov. 9. The festival was started in 1974 by George Coulam, who also started the Minnesota Renaissance Festival, and is currently in its 46th season. The festival is meant to be set during Renaissance times, so attendees wear costumes and speak Middle English. There are many activities to do at the fair, including watching jousting tournaments and solving an escape room adventure.

The festival has specific plays and activities just for kids. Marlena Solomon, the marketing communications manager at the Texas Renaissance Festival, said there is an activity for every age.

"There are over 400 vendors, including artisans and foods from around the world such as Italy, England, Germany, France and Poland to name a few," Solomon said. "There are over 20 stages with world-class musicians and performers and a joust arena where jousting activities take place four times a day and full armored combat takes place twice a day. There is literally something for everyone at the festival – families with young children, teenagers, seniors, couples."

Solomon said that having a renaissance festival is important because there is a strong bond between festival-goers. Since the festival is the largest in the country, Solomon said people from all over Texas and the U.S. attend.

"For many people, the festival is a home away from home and a second fair family," Solomon said. "It is really a strong

community both for the participants and patrons, such as TRF ambassadors, clans at the campground and other online groups who have regular meetups during the festival or camp together."

The LASA Choir attends the festival almost every year. Choir Director Deric Lewis said that while the students go to have fun, they also compete in different singing competitions.

"There is a madrigal competition which is for a smaller ensemble, so it's still period music," Lewis said. "There's also a smaller ensemble group and a larger ensemble group, so we've done all three: madrigals, small ensemble and large ensemble."

Junior Devon Hobbs said she really likes going as part of the choir. She said they get to spend a lot of time doing a wide variety of different activities, like arts, crafts and sports.

"Most of the time, we get at least five or six hours to just do whatever. Bring money, buy stuff and they have a lot of interesting food there," Hobbs said. "I had cheesecake on a stick last time, which was fun. They have a lot of things that you can't find anywhere else."

Lewis said he thinks the students especially enjoy getting to dress up and do unique activities. He said some students have ridden elephants or camels and participated in axe throwing.

"There's also a whole jousting thing," Lewis said. "They go into the arena and they watch people dressed up as knights. They have all sorts of competitions, they have singing. There's a lot of food involved...and they love to shop, and that's a huge component too because there are all kinds of crafts and things you can purchase as souvenirs."

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Solomon said the festival has had to make a lot of changes. For example, capacity has had to be limited to 50%, which is around 22,500 people per day.

"We require face masks when entering the festival and when social distancing is not possible throughout the festival ground," Solomon said. "We installed over 200 hand sanitizers throughout the festival grounds, have designated face mask break areas and have marked seating at performance venues for social distancing."

While the general festival remains open, days designated for students, or "school days," have been cancelled. This means that the LASA choir will not be attending this year.

"It makes sense; it's basically the exact type of situation to try to avoid in COVID," Hobbs said. "I'm disappointed, sure, but it's not like I'm upset. I don't blame anybody."



**MASKS ON** Austinites enjoy some time outside at one of the festival's many communal spots. This year, renaissance fans present were required to follow various COVID-19 safety policies. photo courtesy of Steven David



**WALKING OUT** Senior Andra Key plays the mellophone designed with a protective cover to try and regulate the spread of COVID-19. Key and others have largely been practicing individually with a new format of digital recording submissions. photo by Emma McBride



**JUST BEAT IT** Drummers in the LASA Band play in front of the theater on campus. Instruments have special covers to help meet sanitation necessities with COVID-19. photo by Emma McBride



**THE BAND IS BACK TOGETHER** After a long, virtual hiatus, LASA Band has started to return to campus for weekly practices. Members are required to space out across the LBJ front lawn. photo by Emma McBride

## LASA Band Marches On Virtual-Outdoors Hybrid Adopted

REBECCA SCARAMUZZI | club contributor

Because of quarantine and Austin Independent School District (AISD) COVID-19 regulations, LASA Band has gone almost completely virtual. Band directors are still trying to continue with some of the normal activities done in the beginning of last semester and are also introducing a few new things to the band.

Senior Andra Key plays the mellophone and the French horn. She said that the start of this school year has been unconventional for the band because of its decreased physical activity.

"In terms of marching band, it's totally different," Key said. "We didn't get to have a marching season at all, so we didn't get to have the marching show that was planned for this year. Instead, we've been working on a video compiled of a bunch of different people's audio and visual recordings."

Junior Sophia Schlaud plays flute and has been a part of the LASA Band for two and a half years. New virtual and online resources have been introduced to the band to help students learn the music and communicate with each other as best they can.

"We're doing a lot of stuff virtually," Schlaud said. "We had a whole virtual summer camp, virtual leadership camp and we've been using Zoom and Smartmusic to learn our show and our choreography."

With these online endeavors, new challenges have come up. Freshman Surabhi Karighattam, who plays the flute, said that technology introduced difficulties she had never thought she would have to deal with.

"Finding a good microphone and finding where to put it so your sound sounds really nice is difficult because for me my flute always sounds really screechy and ugly in recordings," Karighattam said. "It's really difficult to figure out where you need to put your phone: are you going to use your phone or your computer? And whatever you get is

not going to be your best sound. You can hear it, and it sounds fine, but it sounds terrible in the recording. There are some good things, though. You get to rehearse for concerts and stuff. Your recording is going to be your best recording."

Technology isn't the only challenge; there are some things that just can't be done virtually. One of those things is being able to play together, according to Karighattam.

"I think that it's just not as interactive," Karighattam said. "You feel really detached from everyone else. It's kind of lonely to just sit at home, at your desk, just playing your instrument on mute and just sending in a recording. It feels really isolated and alone, and you just lose that sort of togetherness that you get from being in in-person band."

However, band members still have time to connect with one in-person rehearsal a week to prepare for competitions like sectionals. The band has also been together at two football games so far.

"It's just a sectional where we work on show music and stand tunes and stuff like that," Schlaud said. "It's mostly about getting ready for the football games. The football games are pretty different from normal because we only do stand tunes, so we don't do a show at halftime. It's still pretty fun, the football games at least. We still do most of our normal stand traditions and everything."

There are still risks of going in person with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as the New York Times reported that Travis County had surpassed 38,000 positive cases on Nov. 29. According to Karighattam, since the togetherness and power of playing in a large group can't be replicated virtually, she wishes there was a better way to connect and play with other people in the band.

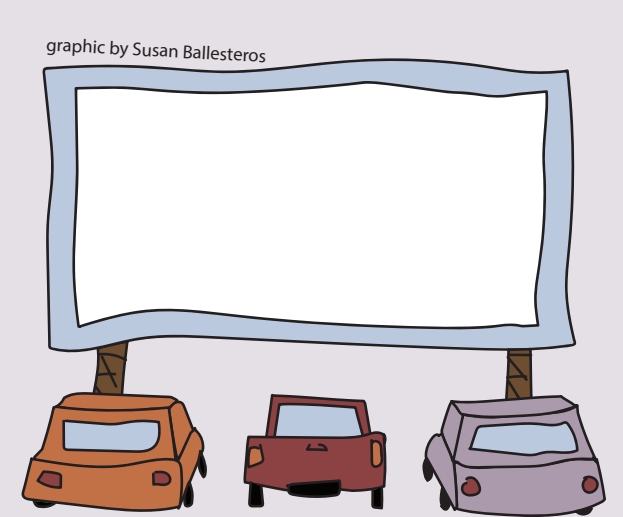
"On Zoom, it's okay," Karighattam said. "But in person...having that chaotic energy of 100 high schoolers out on a football field would just be so much fun, and I'm really sad I had to miss that."



**JOUST VIBING** A knight at the Texas Renaissance Festival mounts a horse with weapon in hand ahead of a jousting event. It is one of the festival's more popular attractions among attendees. photo courtesy of Steven David



**MIDDLE AGES CATERING** The Texas Renaissance Festival hosted over 400 vendors this year, including many spots with food from across Europe. Most signs for these shops at the festival are stylized in middle ages-looking text. photo courtesy of Steven David



graphic by Susan Ballesteros

## The Blue Starlite Provides for the People as Drive-ins See Resurgence

JUAN CARLOS RAMIREZ DELGADILLO | staff writer

As of October 2019, there were only 300 drive-in theatres in the U.S., and attendance at drive-ins was outmatched by the numbers at regular theaters. However, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the once-unpopular option for a moviegoing experience has now gained some unexpected popularity with the accessibility and safety it provides.

The Blue Starlite is the first mini-urban drive-in in Austin, with 10 years of operation under its belt already, and leaves 15-40 spaces for cars each show depending on location and screen size available. The local drive-in shows a variety of "childhood favorites, drive-in classics, indie films, art house, cult and Gen X/Y pop culture faves," according to the drive-in's website.

Ben Roberts, the longest-serving employee at the Blue Starlite, said he has had lots of fun working there. Even with COVID-19 affecting job security across the country, working at a drive-in seems to be a job that hasn't been affected too badly, according to Roberts.

"It's the best job I've had," Roberts said. "The environment is super chill, and I get along with my co-workers."

The Blue Starlite largely divides up its diverse catalog based on the season. Movie genres fitting each season's aesthetic are then shown at their respective times.

"We have a canister for different movies," Roberts said. "Summer movies, winter movies, we play movies based on the season...for example our fall movies are from September through October. We usually play horror movies."

Senior Abby Greendyk has gone to the Blue Starlite drive-in before and said she has enjoyed it. She said she appreciates how it feels that she gets to be around people, even if socially distanced.

"I went to go see 'Back to the Future' with a friend at Blue Starlite," Greendyk said. "It was a super cool and intimate way to enjoy a movie while still feeling like a part of the community."

While other businesses like grocery stores and restaurants have had to redesign almost all interactions with customers,

**"It was a super cool and intimate way to enjoy a movie while still feeling like part of a community."**

-Senior Abby Greendyk

drive-in theatres like the Blue Starlite have only been affected by government mandates like wearing masks and social distancing.

"It's crazy that we are one of the few places with not a major difference in how we operate," Roberts said. "For starters, we don't have a physical concession stand anymore. We give them whatever they ordered at the gate...the nature of a drive-in really works well with COVID restrictions."

With the rising popularity of drive-in theatres, there have

also been many upgrades, such as an increase in the number of screens so there can be a greater variety of movies. Even with all these upgrades, some things, like parking spaces, had to be blocked or removed to restrict the number of people in the area.

"Demand has been higher, and it's reflected in how a lot of movies are sold out," Roberts said. "Weekdays were pretty full during the summer. Currently, in our main location, we have five screens, [where] we had three before COVID, and we also have two other locations in downtown Austin and in Round Rock."

The "window up policy," which allows attendees to keep their car on if their windows are up, has been set in place due to COVID-19. According to the Blue Starlite website, windows must be at least 75% up if passengers are not wearing masks.

"One of the biggest things is to stay in your car the whole time," Roberts said. "Don't walk to us, there are text options for a reason, it's not hard to follow."

Now that the winter season has begun, movies now expected to be on the Blue Starlite big screen towards the end of 2020 will revolve more around Christmas. Showing options will also continue to include regular indie movies during the holiday season.

"Recently, we have been showing new movies like 'Fatman' and 'The Dark and the Wicked,'" Roberts said. "We have been playing 'Harry Potter' recently since the fandom is pretty big. But as we go to Christmas, expect movies like 'Gremlin' or 'Home Alone'. We are just following the seasons at this point."

Some more movies that are expected to show are movies like "The Goonies," "Stardust," "The Muppet Christmas Carol," "The Thin Man," "Elf" and many more. Tickets for the Blue Starlite drive-in are available online and must be reserved; no walk-ins are currently available due to COVID-19.

## Lib's Picks Music Videos

### "Attack of Panic"

By Aly & AJ

GRACE WOODRUFF | web and media editor

When Aly & AJ released "Attack of Panic" on Feb. 7, 2020, they wouldn't have known how representative it would be of the year that followed. The music video is directed by Aly's husband, Stephen Ringer, who does a wonderful job of working with the women to highlight both them and the music. The song is, as the name suggests, about a panic attack, but the music video takes that idea and runs with it, one YouTube commenter describing it as "anxiety, but make it sexy." At first glance, the music video is nothing special — just two women prancing around Berlin in leather and bright colored blazers, surrounded by neon lights. But for those with anxiety, it perfectly captures the strange mixture of emotions associated with a panic attack. Even if you don't have anxiety, since this year is basically one long panic attack, you should be able to relate. The quick cuts of the camera combined with the haunting vocals and techno beat create a sickening sense of adrenaline that makes you want the song to last forever.

### "Until I Bleed Out"

By The Weeknd

WRENNY COLLAMER | entertainment editor

The Weeknd's album "After Hours" is arguably his most cohesive record to date, giving fans a deep — and dark — view of his life in the spotlight as a veteran pop frontrunner. The music video for "Until I Bleed Out" crystallizes many of the album's themes, highlighting an unhealthy relationship that The Weeknd has with his stardom. Rattling visuals and slow-motion chaos disorder a scene of celebration as The Weeknd drifts through a swirl of confetti and lights, lost in the spotlight. The video breaks down the gloss that coats The Weeknd's night out, concurrently dissolving the deceiving gloss of his glamorous lifestyle. "I keep telling myself I don't need it anymore," he sings as he fights against being dragged away from the spotlight. A final shot of empty eyes underneath a bandaged face confirms that the idol's fame has only left him lost and damaged.

### "Me Myself and I"

By De La Soul

MALENA HEINEMAN | editor-in-chief

When iconic hip-hop trio De La Soul released the music video for "Me Myself and I" in 1989, they solidified their legacy as a group that pushed the boundaries of music and fashion. Set in a high school classroom, the group sustains jeers and ridicule from their classmates, who are identically clad in chunky gold-chains, tracksuits and wraparound sunglasses, which starkly contrast the trio's baggy pants, funky patterns and Afrocentric leather necklaces. After being pushed to conform to traditional, image-driven hip-hop norms, at the end of the video, they receive drop slips from their mirror images who emerge from the back of the class and stand defiantly to throw the slips in the professor's face and leave. Maintaining a humorous and eclectic mood perfectly reflecting the conscious lyrics and upbeat groove of the song, the video is a testament to the power of individuality and the role freedom of expression plays in allowing full creative potential, something that maintains its relevance even in 2020.

### "Compensating"

By Aminé

MAX DOMEL | entertainment editor

Few are as creative and versatile as Portland artist Aminé, who yet again showed off his clever artistic style with the music video for "Compensating," featuring Young Thug, from his August album "Limbo." It logically opens with a short skit of two of Aminé's friends discussing whether Jesus or Baton Rouge rapper NBA YoungBoy have more money in front of a tennis court. Tennis is a recurring aspect of the video, whether Aminé's face is CGI'd onto a tennis ball while he raps, or he dances on the court or in an attic covered in rackets with his close friends. The video also pays great attention to detail with the use of dynamic shots of words for each bar of Thug's verse, as he was unable to attend the shoot. Scenes like Aminé relaxing in a marble bathtub that looks like it's full of Pepto-Bismol or randomly riding a stationary bike covered in sweat in an empty mansion room keep the video entertaining and lighthearted. Ultimately, it's a fun celebration among Aminé and his friends who have been with him every step of the way.

# Austin Studio Tour

## How Austin Artists Are Adapting to COVID-19



**HARD AT WORK** Artist Brian Johnson, a long time EAST contributor, works in the studio that he runs with two other artists. He didn't participate in the tour online or in-person this year because of difficulties posed by COVID-19. photo courtesy of Brian Johnson

ANNABEL ANDRE | staff writer

Due to COVID-19, many annual events faced logistical challenges this year. The Austin Studio Tour was no different. In the studio tour's 18th year, many artists struggled to interact with Austinites in the same ways they are used to.

The studio tour, run by the nonprofit organization Big Medium, changed to accommodate the pandemic. This year, for the first time, the East Austin Studio Tour and West Austin Studio Tour, which usually would take place in the fall and spring respectively, were combined into one event. West Austin Studio Tour was postponed earlier this year due to COVID-19, and the two events were staged together from Nov. 14 through Nov. 22. Artists were encouraged to do virtual shows of their art and outdoor exhibits while wearing masks and practicing social distancing, but many reported not being able to share their art as successfully as they would on a normal year.

Andy St. Martin is a painter on the east side of Austin and has been a part of the studio tour for 18 years. He was in the catalog this year, but he found it difficult to hold virtual events and had no way to have an outdoor exhibit. Although there wasn't much he could do this year, St. Martin said participating in the tour is a tradition for him.

"I've been in all of them, I've been in the tour every year since the beginning, I'm a part of the community," St. Martin said. "It's almost like a holiday or a family ritual or something at this point. When you've done it 17 times every year at the same time, with a lot of the same people, it feels odd not to do it. This year is so different, it's really hard to say what's going to happen. I'm actually almost more eager to do it this year because the year has been so unsettled."

As someone who has been an artist in Austin for decades, St. Martin has seen the city's art scene and the tour develop. According to him,

there are more artists who want to be in Austin and the art is taken much more seriously now. He said that the tour is supported by more art lovers every year.

"Back then there were just fewer of us," St. Martin said. "It was a little more rough around the edges. It seems like there are less freeloaders [now], people just looking for free drinks and snacks, and more serious art patrons and viewers. There's also more people, and a lot of people who were strangers are no longer strangers. It's matured in the ways you might expect."

Similar to St. Martin, Brian Johnson, an artist who works mostly with wood and resin, has also been participating in the studio tour since it began in 2003. Johnson runs an art gallery called Cloud Tree with two other artists. Their gallery was in the catalog this year, but they didn't participate in this year's tour. Instead, they did their own show the following weekend.

"In the catalogue, there's an image of my work, but there's really not much to connect with without going to my website and seeing what I do," Johnson said. "My studio, Cloud Tree, is an art space and gallery space. We are doing a little open studio tour: a friendly, very safe, open studio,



**EMPTY** Canopy, a typical hub for artists during East Austin Studio Tour, was empty on the first weekend of 2020's tour. This year, artists were less centralized, spread out across the city in more personal spaces. photo by Wrenny Collamer



**GALLERY** Painter Andy St. Martin wears a mask as he sets up art in his gallery space. St. Martin was in the tour's catalog this year. photo by Annabel Andre

the weekend after Thanksgiving, on the 28th and 29th. But that's a completely separate thing from the studio tour that Big Medium generally puts on because they don't want to be associated with any kind of in-person contact."

Johnson wasn't able to do much for the tour and said he feels that many artists are in the same situation as him, but many decided not even to be in the catalog. He said that may be because it's hard for people to plan virtual shows or outdoor events.

"They are not participating because they're not really sure how to wrap their heads around what it means to be in a virtual tour," Johnson said. "I had a show right at the beginning of COVID in the spring of this year. It was interesting to engage with, but it ultimately didn't give me much traffic, and it was a lot of work. The virtual tour is not the most beneficial way to get people to see your work. The ability to put on a virtual art tour is still in its infancy...there's no comparison to the two experiences that are so different."



**POTTERY** Morgan Gray is a part of Feats of Clay, a ceramics studio off of Burnet Road. They hosted a garden tea party for the tour, with various stations of different themed teapots. photo courtesy of Morgan Gray

## Hitchcock Hype at LASA

### LASA's Unique Class Spotlights the Filmmaker

EWAN MCINERNEY | staff writer

"Psychological Makeup of Hitchcock Characters," aka "Hitchcock," is a course at LASA where students watch and analyze movies created by the legendary director Alfred Hitchcock.

Hitchcock, born in England, directed over 50 films throughout his career and helped shape the suspense and thriller genres in film. He was known for his pioneering use of camera angles and effects to create suspense and to allow the viewer to witness events from the characters' perspective.

**"I'm a big fan of Hitchcock, and I've watched a lot of his films before I took the class, so I was excited to find out more about his history and the films he made."**

-Senior Hobbs McAllister

The course is taught by Chloe Cardinale, who also teaches Great Ideas and has taught English II and Contemporary Fiction. It is open to sophomores, juniors and seniors as an English elective, and the course is yearlong. According

to Cardinale, she got the idea to create the class while teaching one of Hitchcock's movies in Great Ideas.

"In Great Ideas, we were teaching 'Vertigo,' and I have such an obsession with watching movies, especially old movies," Cardinale said. "I thought watching and analyzing old movies would be a cool concept for an elective class. It's kind of my passion project."

Another reason why Cardinale started the class was to expose students to older movies and how they were created. She said that, ordinarily, most people today would never get to see classic movies made by directors like Hitchcock.

"I don't think that most young people would go out and seek a lot of movies on their own," Cardinale said. "That's why it was cool to see so many people signing up for the class when I created it."

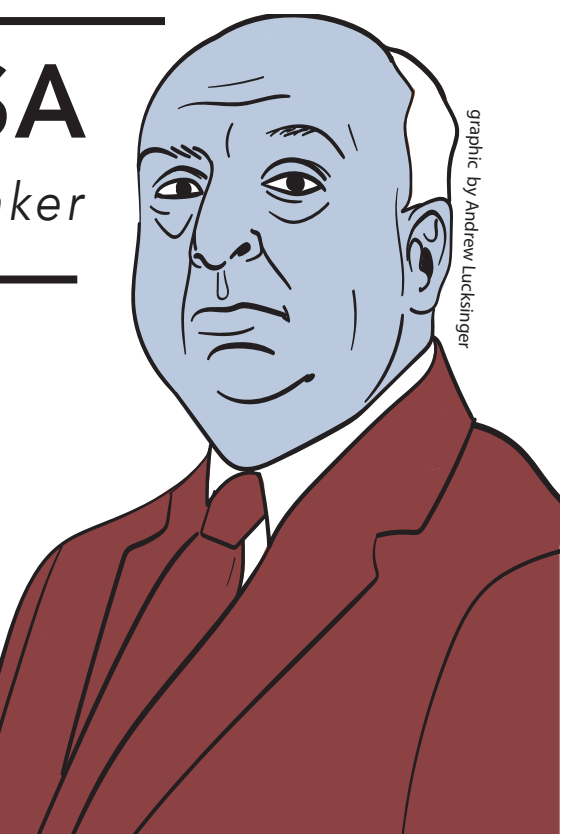
Senior Hobbs McAllister took the class last school year. He said that he chose to take the class because he wanted to learn about techniques and styles used in older movies.

"For me, the purpose of the Hitchcock class was to learn more about older films and filmmaking," McAllister said. "Personally, I'm a big fan of Hitchcock, and I've watched a lot of his films before I took the class, so I was excited to find out more about his history and the films he made."

According to McAllister, the structure of the course is relatively simple. Most of the class is spent watching and studying films.

"It's really not that complicated," McAllister said. "Every day in the class, we come in and talk to Ms. Cardinale for a couple of minutes. We decide what movie we're going to do next and spend most of our time watching it. At the end of every film, we take a quiz about the plot of the movie. We also analyze parts of it and talk about how the styles used relate to Alfred Hitchcock."

Senior Olivia Gonzalez also previously took the course. According to



graphic by Andrew Luckinger

Gonzalez, at the end of the year, the Hitchcockian styles and techniques the class learned about are all put together into a final project.

"We were supposed to create our own Hitchcock movie as a final activity," Gonzalez said. "We were writing our screenplays and getting ready to film our movies, which was going to be super cool, but unfortunately, that couldn't happen because of COVID. That's definitely something for future classes to look forward to after the quarantine ends, though."

Gonzalez also took the Audio Video Production (AVP) course last year, which is a class focused on digital filmmaking. She said that the Hitchcock class allowed her to approach film from two different angles.

"It was really interesting to see from both perspectives in terms of filmmaking, between how you create the movies in AVP and the dynamic of mood or suspense that is the final result in Hitchcock," Gonzalez said. "I've always found that really fascinating."



**CREATIVE OUTLET** Senior Rhea Jain runs an Instagram account centered on bullet journaling. She made this spread to represent an "academia" aesthetic. Her Instagram can be found @bujowithrhea. photo courtesy of Rhea Jain



**PEACH AND PINK** Spreads can use graphs to track personal data like sleep, daily mood or screen time. This spread was inspired by the song "100 Letters" by Halsey. photo courtesy of Rhea Jain

## Bullet Journals Hit the Mark

KATIE BUSBY | staff writer

Bullet journaling is a more flexible form of planning that has become popular among LASA students. Bullet journaling is commonly used as a creative outlet, while some simply use it as a place to structure their time and organize LASA's heavy workload.

Bullet journaling involves two-page layouts called spreads. Spreads can focus on various goals and tasks, but the most common type is the weekly spread, which gives bullet journalers a space to lay out their schedule for the upcoming week.

Senior Lilli Gordon said that making spreads has helped her organize her schedule in a way that is aesthetically pleasing. She eased into the process of bullet journaling, at first writing her tasks down in a journal and then moving into the process of making artistic spreads.

"I had already been disorganized in my head, so I was like, 'I should start writing things down,'" Gordon said. "At first, it was just kind of writing stuff in a journal, just random stuff that I needed to do, and then I started not liking how it looked, so I wanted to make it pretty, so I started making actual spreads. It really helped my cognitive function."

While some people use it as a creative outlet, bullet journaling can also be used as a more functional planning system that allows people to find different, personalized ways to organize the tasks that lay ahead of them. Junior Eli Clark said that they use their journal to plan and organize.

"I mostly use it as a system of planning," Clark said. "Most of my bullet journal is my weekly spread of separating the days and having the tasks. I try to clarify for myself by either putting things on the day they're due or when I want to work on them if there's a farther-out due date and also putting events I have coming up."

The bullet journal presents more flexibility than the traditional paper agenda. You can plan

your own personal layouts for organizing what you want to keep track of. Senior Rhea Jain, who runs a bullet journaling Instagram account, said she enjoys the freedom that bullet journaling permits.

"I've always loved using something physical to plan, and for a long time, that was a typical agenda," Jain said. "A friend introduced me to the idea of bullet journaling and I loved the flexibility it had. I like that the journal serves a productive purpose, but at the same time, I don't think

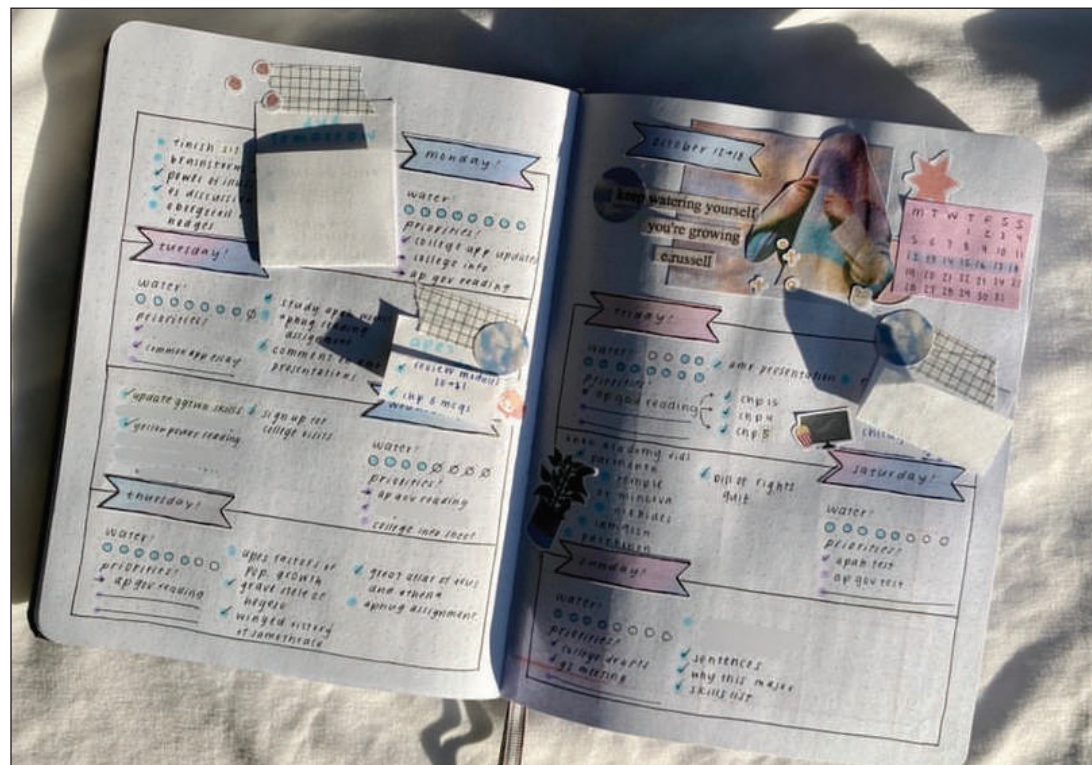
everything we do should be productive, so I also use it as a creative outlet."

Gordon said that the workload at LASA can sometimes become overwhelming. She said that having somewhere to organize all her due dates and plan ahead for large projects helps her stay organized.

"I do think it helps with procrastination and better organization," Gordon said. "Just because the workload is always going to stay the same, but the fact that I'm able to split things into days that I'm supposed to do them and self-deadline really helps me split up the workload and get it done in a timely manner."

Bullet journaling can also be a tool to monitor personal growth and progress. Jain said she appreciates that bullet journaling has encouraged her to reflect on what she has done.

"I would definitely say that bullet journaling has made my life a lot better," Jain said. "It's not just a planning system, but, as the name suggests, also a journaling system. I feel like I've gotten to better understand myself, especially when it comes to taking care of myself, because now, I recognize my limits but also my achievements because the system has made me more reflective."



**ORGANIZE YOUR WEEK** Bullet journal spreads are often weekly layouts to help with organization. Senior Rhea Jain used stickers, colored markers and printed photos to create this spread. photo courtesy of Rhea Jain

## Downtown Farmers' Market Bright Spot for Vendors



**HUSTLE AND BUSTLE** The Republic Square Farmers' Market was busy on a Saturday morning in November. The market enforces COVID-19 safety protocol and has local products from vendors in Austin and the surrounding area. photo by Wrenny Collamer



**TAKE YOUR PICK** A client picks from the persimmons that Lightsey Farms has on display. Lightsey Farms is a local grower located in Mexia, Texas. photo by Wrenny Collamer

ELIANA LEGATT | staff writer

The Sustainable Food Center's (SFC) Austin Downtown Farmers' Market has a homey environment, helpful people and local vendors. It is a delightful way to spend a Saturday outdoors. There is a large array of food choices, and some vendors even leave out water bowls for dogs. Vendors sell bread, produce, animal products, clothes and candles, among other items.

The SFC is a nonprofit organization in Central Texas that brings together local vendors and producers to sell their products. They support regenerative agriculture and work with small and mid-sized family farmers and other small business owners.

Casper Fermentables, a fermentation business that was established in 2016, has been selling at the farmers' market downtown for three years. The business was established by Ben Hollander, who is also the head brewer for the company. Casper Fermentables mainly makes kombucha and fermented vegetables but has recently started selling bread as well. The kombucha is made from hand-harvested, farm-direct tea from Nannuo Mountain in the Yunnan province of China.

Hollander, who received a Bachelor's degree in microbiology from the University of Texas, said that fermented drinks can be good for your health. While Casper Fermentables used to sell its products to restaurants, the pandemic has caused financial hardships, and the farmers' market has been a saving grace for Hollander's business. Casper Fermentables can be found at the SFC Farmers' Market Downtown, the Lakeline Farmers' Market, the Mueller Farmers' Market and the Pedernales Farmers' Market.

The Austin Honey Company is another vendor at the market. Its bees live on farms within a 30-mile radius of the downtown area. The bees pollinate the city as well as the farms they are located on. Their relationship with farmers is a symbiotic one, meaning that both the bees and the farmers benefit. The bees are offered a healthy lifestyle, while the farmers get fertilized plants, and on top of that, the honey company gets honey. The Austin Honey Company sells various products that originate from the bees, including honey, lip balms and candles. They can also be found on Etsy.

Sanford Sourdough Bakery is owned by Dave and Meriann Sanford and operates frequently at the market. They report having spent years perfecting their bread recipe, owning a wild yeast starter for over 14 years that moved with them from San Francisco. Sanford Sourdough Bakery makes and sells many baked goods, but their focus is San Francisco-style sourdough. They are found at many farmers' markets in Austin and at

a permanent location in Round Rock. The bakery opened on Jan. 10 of this year.

Joe Diffie is the founder of Joe's Microgreens. The company started by turning urban food waste from local restaurants into usable compost. In the last few years, over 200 tons of urban food waste has been kept from landfills because of the work of the company. The business expanded to agriculture in 2015 and now grows microgreens using sustainable techniques, such as ebb-and-flow benches, to be able to reuse water.

The SFC Farmers' Market supports small businesses, the environment and its customers with many healthy foods. Many vendors solely rely on the farmers' market for income, making it an ideal place for Austinites to support local businesses. Masks and other COVID-19 regulations are well-enforced for both vendors and customers. It is located in Republic Square at 422 Guadalupe St., 78701 and takes place on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

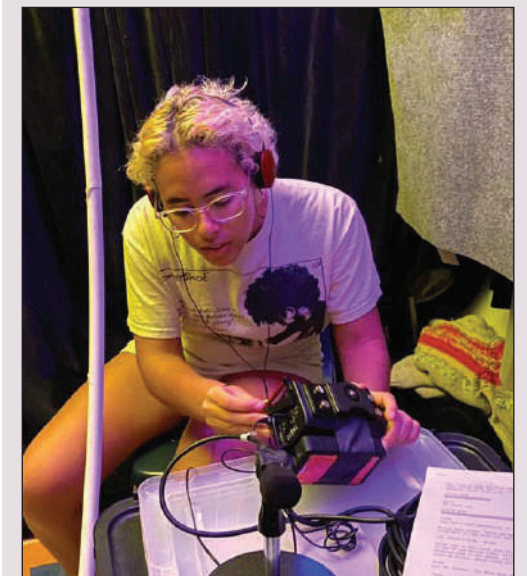


**FERMENTED FRESH** Casper Fermentables has many of their products on display. They produce their goods out of the Sustainable Food Center in East Austin. photo by Eliana Legatt



**GREENS** Joe's Microgreens has on display a varying number of their microgreens. They are an urban grower located in East Austin that uses food waste to raise their crops. photo by Wrenny Collamer

## AVP Adapts Film Class Makes Changes for COVID-19



**HANDS-ON** Practicum AVP student Senior Gaelila McKaughan gets familiar with sound equipment. Hands-on film making experience is prioritized in higher levels of the class. photo courtesy of Gaelila McKaughan

LILI XIONG | staff writer

Traditional film classes involve face-to-face communication and collaboration, and the Audio Video Production (AVP) class at LASA is no exception.

This class is an elective with three levels: Beginner AVP, Advanced AVP and Practicum AVP which are all based around the art of filmmaking. COVID-19 has made it harder for students to work and film together, but the class has found ways to overcome these obstacles and continue to express themselves through film.

Beginner AVP has been focusing on writing stories this year, according to AVP teacher Vanessa Mokry. She said that COVID-19 has given students more time to write as opposed to filming or learning how to use equipment.

"So far, we've been able to spend more time on writing and developing ideas for the stories," Mokry said. "It's nice too because we don't usually get to spend quite as much time developing the stories that we end up trying to produce."

Freshman Ana Garfield is enrolled in Beginner AVP. She said her class has been learning aspects of filmmaking before getting to actually produce films.

"Recently, we've been learning how to write scripts," Garfield said. "Other days, we watch other students' work or professional work, and we discuss the different things we liked and the stuff we didn't like about it."

Advanced AVP students have worked on outdoor productions, and Practicum AVP students have participated in two internships this year. Gaelila McKaughan, a senior taking Practicum AVP, said she has been busy with her internship for the class.

"For the past two months, we've been doing an internship off campus," McKaughan said. "A typical day has actually been me in a Zoom meeting with the people who I was doing an internship with. We would be running through plans, and we also had to produce Zoom events... it would be 2-3 hour meetings with these adults."

The internships the Practicum AVP class participated in are with Junior Achievement, a non-profit organization that helps kids with financial literacy and aims to promote success in a global economy, and WP Productions, a film production company in Austin. Mokry said that she believes that teaching is at its best when students get to learn through hands-on activities.

"The best way to learn, usually, is to get that time with the equipment," Mokry said. "Normal Audio Video Production class in the building would have everybody interacting quite a bit, touching equipment and touching each other and doing different kinds of activities and just getting your hands on things a lot more."

However, the class has adapted to online learning. Mokry tried to get all the students cameras before the total lockdown last semester and sent iMacs with editing software and various creative applications to students who requested them.

"The district also purchased Adobe Creative Cloud for all the students to be attached to your personal school email so you can actually install it at home on your computer," Mokry said.

Practicum AVP has only four students, so they share a class period with Advanced AVP even though they're technically separate classes. McKaughan said she enjoys the creative energy of the students in her class.

"The creativity of the class is incredible, you've just got so many people with different stories they want to tell," McKaughan said. "It's just a lot of fun to be around that creative space."

Mokry enjoys being able to help her students share the stories they want to tell. She is fascinated by the unique experiences of each student that makes their stories special.

"Hearing their special brand of story they tell is always enjoyable," Mokry said. "Sometimes, the stories are similar things since people are going through a lot of the same things, but then there's just slight variations. Sometimes, it's just out of the blue, or it could be some story that really affects you. I get to help them figure out how to make it work, talking stories with them every day and figuring out what we need to communicate to the world."

# Running Raptors Rule at Regionals

MADELINE VAN SLYKE | staff writer

Although this is the first year that LASA has had split athletic departments from LBJ and COVID-19 posed changes throughout the season, the girls cross country team has pulled through to win the UIL Region 3-5A championships as a team and qualify for the state meet.

Senior and girls varsity captain Abby Goff believes that through the tumultuous season, the girls found confidence in each other which allowed them to stay focused and committed. According to Goff, the team also found comfort and stability in being able to run with the team



**TROPHY, MEDALS AND SMILES** Lasaraptors girls varsity cross country team poses with their first place medals and first place trophy at the UIL region 3-5A regional championships on November 9th in Huntsville, Texas. Top left to right: Senior Abby Goff, Freshman Sheridan Wallace, Senior Emily Thompson, Junior Lane Loudamy, Senior Helena Lara, Senior Elyse Hall, and Sophomore Sophia Dale. photo by Jonathan Cunningham

everyday.

"We still work very hard as a team, which is what the sport is about," Goff said. "There is a slightly strained social aspect because of the pandemic, obviously, but we work well together and have gotten ourselves far. I'm grateful we got to run this year."

The threat of COVID-19 and rising cases over

the summer presented the question of whether the cross country season would be held at all. After that, the question became how to train and race together safely, a concern which has evolved over the season.

"I remember in the summer, all the seniors were really worried because we knew that this would be our last season, and if it was cancelled, that would've been very sad," Goff said. "I believe UIL finally said we were good to go, and then we were worried about how to keep everyone as safe as possible and make sure we followed every guideline AISD and the CDC recommended."

According to senior and boys varsity captain Philip Metcalf, not only did COVID-19 force the team to be more cautious, it also caused a great deal of uncertainty in practices and races during the season. According to him, with cases rising daily and new information discovered constantly, races became a constantly-changing playing field.

"This year, specifically, there was just that added stress of if something goes wrong at any time, they could just shut us down, and everything could end," Metcalf said.

According to Metcalf, the constant changes that brought instability made for some mental challenges that the athletes had to grapple with along with their hard training. The runners agree that it was difficult to balance training hard and training safe.

"We're training hard basically every day in the morning, which we always do, so there's obviously the physical and athletic side of it, but just this year, trying to balance training well and training safely was really hard to do," Metcalf said. "You're always trying to chase the person in front of you, but this year we were trying to distance ourselves from each other. It's really hard to do sometimes."

The team has worked very hard to follow COVID-19 guidelines and stay as safe as possible. Freshman and girls varsity runner Sheridan Wallace has come into a season where everything has to be thought over several times to properly address safety precautions.

"We have to wear masks, obviously, when we're running or just standing around," Wallace said. "When we get to practice, we have a screening where we fill out the AISD health form, and our coach takes our temperature with an

electric thermometer. We also socially distance as much as we can when we run."

According to Metcalf, the girls team, specifically, was more dedicated than ever amongst the many changes to the season. Outside of school practices, the girls run an additional 4-5 days a week with the Born To Run track club under coach Paul Carrozza.

"The dedication is really there on the girls team, and I mean on the guys team as well, but you can see it more on the girls, who just won region," Metcalf said. "They all just really committed to taking it really seriously, which is awesome."

After winning regionals on Nov. 9, the girls

an unusually long cross country season that tested each athlete's mental and physical stamina.

"The season started early," Goff said. "Corona pushed back the start of school, so we had been training in the summer, and it got more intense then, and we have been training basically six days a week at least since early August."

The whole girls varsity team and the majority of the boys varsity team began training with the Born to Run track club in 2018. Since then, workouts have intensified, mileage has increased and dedication has only built up.

"We changed the way we train a couple of years ago, and I think we are really seeing the

**"The dedication is really there on the girls team. I mean, on the guys team as well, but you can see it more on the girls, who just won region. They all just really committed to taking it really seriously, which is awesome."**

-Senior Philip Metcalf

cross country team ran the state meet on Nov. 23. This comes after the team also qualified for state last year by placing third at the regional meet.

"Our girls team last year really set themselves up to be really successful this year," Metcalf said. "We could tell last year because they went to state last year as well, so we knew going into the season this was gonna be a big one for them, where it all came together. It's really cool that it has."

The girls team has been training hard 6 to 7 days a week since March for the cross country season after pivoting from track when the outdoor track season was cancelled last spring. Goff said meet postponements at the beginning of the cross country season and lack of a track season created

payoff of that now," Goff said.

According to Goff, having an outside club team to practice with and another coach to rely on is what pushed the girls team to another level this year. Both Goff and Metcalf agree: it's one thing to train two times a week at LASA over the fall, but to come together and dedicate almost every morning for more than six months is what helped the team win regionals and advance to state.

"For the team as a whole, we meet two days a week and train in the morning from 6:30 to 7:30, but with the club, we do workouts six or seven days a week and work really hard," Metcalf said. "I think that a lot of the actual improvement came from really taking it seriously on our own time."



**WORKING TOGETHER** Seniors Elyse Hall and Emily Thompson are followed by freshman Sheridan Wallace at the district meet on October 29th. The girls pace together to push each other and make sure that they are settling pace and pushing pace at the right times. photo by Fernando Camargos



**THE START LINE** LASA girls varsity cross country file on the starting line, hear the gun sound and begin their race at the district meet. The team won first place at the district meet which qualified them for regionals. The team also placed runners individually 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, with the others placing 6th, 12th, and 26th. photo by Fernando Camargos



**RUNNING IS HARD** Senior and Liberators sports editor Helena Lara and Junior Lane Loudamy pass the 1 mile mark at the district meet. At this point in the race runners have begun speeding up to ensure their mile times decrease throughout the 3 miles. photo by Fernando Camargos

## Bouldering Popularity Climbs

SUSAN BALLESTEROS | staff writer

The Austin Bouldering Project (ABP) opened for climbing on Springdale Road in 2016. Since then, the popularity of climbing as a sport has increased, and it even has been included in the Olympics.

Many LASA students have begun working out at the ABP. Junior AJ Leigh has been climbing for about five years and regularly uses the space through his membership.

"I've been climbing there for a while, so I've gotten to know all the people there really well, and that's kind of the reason why I got into the sport... it's because of that gym, so I'm really thankful that it's there, and that I've been able to get into the sport and do things competitively," Leigh said. "In general, I like that it's a mix between outdoors and indoors, and all the people are always really nice and outgoing... at the Austin Bouldering Project, it's really easy to make new friends or just meet new people."

According to Leigh, different classes and equipment, like fitness classes and weights, are offered at the ABP, but currently a few facilities like the showers are closed due to COVID-19. Junior Charlie Sernovitz has also been going to the ABP for four years and agrees with Leigh that the atmosphere in the gym is what attracts many people. According to him, however, sometimes there are too many people climbing at once, which is a reflection of the increased popularity of the sport.

"What I dislike is that it can get very crowded, and a lot of the features that

make it great are less of a benefit when lots of people are crowding the facility," Sernovitz said.

The North Austin Rock Gym has also gained traction in the past years and served as a place for beginners to learn about climbing. Owner Erica Wilson has owned the gym since 2006 along with her husband, and, according to her, bouldering's popularity has increased because of its high accessibility.

"Bouldering is one of the easiest ways you can get into climbing because you don't need a lot of equipment," Wilson said. "Essentially, if you can climb a tree then you can boulder, whereas when you get into technical climbing or sport climbing there's a lot more involvement."

According to Wilson, mass-made climbing walls for indoor gyms has led to an increase in interest in, and accessibility of, bouldering. Leigh believes that this may be a reason for an increase in the number of people climbing that he has noticed over the past four years.

"I would definitely say that there are way more people climbing now, especially now with free solos, it's a pretty big field, and climbers are getting into the news," Leigh said. "It's just in the media. People see it more, so they want to do it more. Definitely a lot of more younger people getting into it, like a lot of my friends for example, and just a ton more people at the gym than there used to be."

In Austin, there are currently three climbing gyms. The ABP has been around for four years now, both following, and in a sense pioneering,

an increase of bouldering popularity, according to Sernovitz. He mentioned that time, while affecting the popularity of climbing, hasn't affected the popularity of the ABP.

"It has absolutely become more popular, but I think that's at a larger scale," Sernovitz said. "In the five years since the Austin Bouldering Project opened, climbing has become more popular nationally, but the Austin Bouldering Project has been popular since the day it opened. Austin just happened to be a few years ahead of most other cities."

It's not just high school students and adults that are bouldering — younger kids are getting into the sport as well. The increasing demand for bouldering facilities and coaches supplies the money that's invested into bouldering infrastructure.

"Bouldering is also getting more competitive, and a lot of kids are starting from young ages; they join youth teams," Leigh said. "Also, in general, there's been more money poured into the competitive side, they just see more people doing it, and they're making more money."

In addition to climbing recreationally, bouldering has also increased in popularity as a competitive sport. Climbing will be included in the Tokyo 2021 Olympics for the first time.

"Bouldering has definitely attracted more eyes, definitely a lot of more younger people getting into it," Leigh said. "It's definitely growing as a sport, and it's going to be in the Olympics. I think it's just going to keep growing and growing."



graphic by Andrew Lucksinger

# Two, Four, Six, Eight, Who Do We Appreciate? LASA Cheerleaders!

SANWI SARODE | staff writer

This year, LASA has established its first ever cheerleading team in the wake of the recent UIL split from LBJ. The new team has had to learn a new fight song and create new dances to start laying a foundation for future LASA teams.

Senior Audrey Trujillo is one of the co-captains of the cheer team and previously cheered on the LBJ team for two years. Trujillo decided to continue cheering with the new LASA team because she wanted to take part in the team's inaugural year.

"I really wanted to help make a foundation for the new team because I thought that would be really exciting," Trujillo said.

Cheerleading coach Olga Alvarado said that she is excited about the new cheer team and is looking forward to coaching it. Like Trujillo, Alvarado is excited to establish new traditions for the LASA cheerleading team.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity for the teams to start building new traditions for LASA," Alvarado said. "I love it because we're getting to establish ourselves, so that's kind of neat, especially with a brand new program. You can kind of set the direction for it, and that really excites me."

The team learns dances, performs stunts and cheers at football and basketball games. Most of their practices are done through meetings on Zoom due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have online practice every Monday and Wednesday for two hours," Trujillo said, "and that's our time to go over any events, like football games or homecoming, which is coming up soon."

According to sophomore Lola DeLeon, a new member of the cheerleading team and one of its co-captains, learning new moves over Zoom isn't easy. DeLeon said that it is often hard to communicate, and that consistent internet connection is not guaranteed.

"There's so much lag on Zoom," DeLeon said. "Everyone's doing different things at different times, and it's really confusing.

It's harder to learn because it's harder to teach things over Zoom or to clean things up over Zoom."

According to DeLeon, despite technical difficulties the cheerleading team has been working hard to learn their routines and cheers. DeLeon is proud of how far the team has come in their first year.

"We're not doing too bad for this being our first year as a cheer team," DeLeon said. "Things will definitely get better, and we'll learn and improve."

DeLeon said that even though the team hasn't met together in person that often, they are getting to know one another as best as they can. The team has been able to form a strong bond and work together at football games to hype up the crowd.

"We've done pretty good at being each other's friends considering we're on Zoom," DeLeon said. "We listen to each other, and everyone's super nice. I think we're lucky to have been put together so nicely."

Trujillo said that it was nerve-racking to meet each other for the first time, but they've managed to build a strong team dynamic and grow close to one another. According to her, the environment with the other girls is very fun.

"The team dynamic is very fun," Trujillo said. "Everyone is just really welcoming. When we all met each other, we were all kind of scared because we were all like, 'Oh, I don't know anyone.' I think I only knew one person on the team, but then within the first football game, we were all really close, which was really cool. Everyone wants to get to know everyone."

Trujillo appreciates the hard work that the team is putting in this season. She believes that her fellow cheerleaders' tenacious and adventurous spirit will pay off in the future.

"I've never met people who are as hardworking in cheer as this team," Trujillo said. "They always want to learn new things and make more content for the team, which I think is going to be very beneficial in the future. You have to work hard for cheer and be dedicated because it can go wrong really easily. Having all new girls who were really invested in the team was really good. You can

rely on them, and they're like a sisterhood and family to me."

Alvarado also said that the girls make a good team. According to her they are flexible with scheduling and have a great attitude when it comes to cheer.

"They're so involved with each other when it comes to cheering that they've created such a great atmosphere that everybody feels a part of," Alvarado said. "I just like their attitude, and they're just so excited about doing things. I think their flexibility in the program has by far been one of the biggest strengths that they have displayed. The girls have been up and ready to cheer even if there's a game canceled or in the beginning of the week I find out there's a game in the middle of the week, and they say, 'Yes coach, we'll be there.' It's just great to have a team like that."

Although cheerleading is a physical sport that involves dancing and stunt work, DeLeon said it is a common belief that cheerleading isn't a real sport. She explained that it's frustrating to have her sport invalidated by others.

"When I was younger, there were definitely some dumb arguments from people who were like, 'Oh, cheer isn't a real sport,' and I'd get all worked up and try to explain myself," DeLeon said. "It's definitely been annoying. If you ever look at competitive cheer and what they do, it's just so cool, and so few people can do it well. You really can't deny that [it is] a sport."

Trujillo said she has also heard comments negating the legitimacy of cheer as a sport. She said that people shouldn't say cheer isn't a sport without going through it themselves.

"I've heard comments, but not strictly to my face," Trujillo said. "It does bother me, because we put in so much hard work to make our dances and our cheers look nice and pristine, for someone to say it's not a lot of work."

Although the football season is over, the basketball season is just starting. The cheerleading team will cheer at LASA's home games and will continue to bring their energy and spirit to the sidelines.



POMS UP The LASA cheerleaders wave their pom-poms at the crowd. The cheerleaders do a series of dances and cheers at games to hype up the crowd. photo by Emma McBride



SHOWING SUPPORT The cheerleaders turn to face the football field to hype up the football team. The cheerleading team attended all of LASA's home games. photo by Emma McBride



NUMBER ONE Tennis players Crystal Zhou and Milind Mutula accept their trophy after winning districts. This is the first year that the LASA tennis team has won districts. photo courtesy of Bryan Crews



GO TEAM The boys and girls tennis teams pose with their trophy. The team won the district tournament for their 2020 Fall season and plans to play more matches in the spring. photo courtesy of Bryan Crews

## TENNIS

from page 1

Vizcaino feels that the inconsistency practice turnout is not ideal, but is relieved that players have been practicing on their own.

"We didn't always have our best players for one reason or another," Vizcaino said. "The fact that most of the kids aren't coming to school, the fact that most of them are not on campus hurts us as far as training and being together as a team. Some of our kids live far away from campus so it's difficult for them to commute to come to practice on a consistent basis. Building that cohesion that we need was definitely not as good as I wanted it to have been." Rajesh attends daily tennis club practices instead of school practices, but has gone to one team practice so far. School tennis practices don't usually involve anything other than playing matches and working on skills.

"During practice, we play a lot of the time; we actually hit balls," Rajesh said. "We do some fitness, but for the most part, we actively play tennis."

Scrimmages are practice matches played against other teams in order to prepare for tournaments. Zhou believes that scrimmages are important to the team's performance in matches as they help players get game experience.

"Overall, tennis has been really good compared to previous years," Zhou said. "And we've got more scheduled scrimmages instead of just districts which is really, really good."

According to Rajesh, COVID-19 has not impacted the tennis team drastically. Some new changes mandate that players are required to wear masks while playing and are expected to maintain social distance during practices.

"Tennis, out of all the other sports, isn't as affected by COVID-19 since it's not a contact sport, and you can play it while social

distancing," Rajesh said. "We have to do an online check-in and answer some questions about if we're experiencing symptoms, but other than that, there's not much difference."

As for next season, player recruitment is one of the team's major goals. Rajesh believes that adding players to the team will help them go further next year.

"For next season, we're hoping to get more freshmen to join the team," Rajesh said. "As for performance, we want to go to the regionals, so that would be two more wins than we got this season. We think that's possible, but we're going to have to add some people to the team."

Based on the team's performance in the fall season, Vizcaino feels they have a good chance of doing well next season. He hopes that the players will continue to improve and that some players will be able to play in regional tournaments in the spring.

"Especially come spring, I think we have a very good chance at getting a lot of our players to either win the district or finish second, which qualifies them for the regional tournament," Vizcaino said. "Based on their ability, I'm going to put them in the best place where they can excel and hopefully we can do well at regionals and maybe get a few of the kids to go play at state."



graphic by Zoe Keen

# Volleyball Bumps, Sets and Spikes Their Way Through Season

JUAN CARLOS RAMIREZ DELGADILLO | staff writer

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's volleyball season proceeded as normal, and LASA was able to have a successful, first-ever volleyball season.

This is the first year that LASA has had its own volleyball teams due to the recent UIL split from LBJ. LASA has three volleyball teams — varsity, junior varsity (JV) and a freshman team.

Junior Jennifer Ramirez is a member of the JV team. Ramirez said that at practices, the team mostly does drills to sharpen their skills ahead of games.

"Practice would start with junior varsity and varsity arriving 15 minutes before to help set up and then do warmups," Ramirez said. "We would do some drills, all wearing masks."

With COVID-19 still prevalent in the United States, mask mandates require volleyball players to wear masks while playing. Volleyball is not a contact sport, making it safer to play than other sports such as football, but players are still required to stand near each other on the court.

"Volleyball, overall, is such a fun sport," Ramirez said. "Working out with the masks got tough sometimes because it made it more difficult to play. I think that, despite COVID-19 slowing us down with conditioning and training, we all made it work and kept a really positive attitude."

Although new restrictions are causing difficulties this season, JV coach and LASA English teacher Julia Gritte still enjoys coaching the team. Gritte enjoys seeing her and her players' hard work pay off in games.

"I have had such a great time being the JV coach this year," Gritte said. "Coaching takes a significant amount of time and

energy, but the players reimburse me for that when they work hard to improve in practice and fight for the wins. Particularly during this year, it was a relief to get to see players in person and remind myself why I do what I do."

The amount of fans that are able to attend volleyball games this year is limited due to COVID-19. However, in previous years the games often had large turnouts, especially on nights like Senior Night.

"This year is an odd one because of COVID, so we did not have many fans during games," Gritte said. "We often had between 20 and 40 fans, except on Teacher Appreciation Night, Parent Night, or Senior Night. Those were special nights."

Volleyball games take place primarily on Tuesday and Friday nights and often overlap with football games, meaning that fewer fans attend volleyball games. However, according to Gritte, volleyball games are much more exciting to watch.

"Volleyball games are way more fun to watch than football," Gritte said. "The pace is quick, each play is rewarding with a kill or ace culminating in a point."

Due to the UIL split, LASA is having to build up their athletics department from scratch. Gritte hopes that the split will bring more support to athletics, especially from students and staff.

"I would love to see our school come and support each other in each sport more than we have in the past, especially now that all the players are LASA students," Gritte said. "I am excited to see how this UIL split brings out new talents in our students, enhances school spirit, and encourages unity."

All three teams played their last game on Nov. 13 and plans to keep improving next season.



PEP TALK Freshman team coach Lacy Murphy gives the team direction and advice between sets. Murphy is also the coach of the Girls Freshman basketball team. photo by Emma McBride



SET IT UP Freshman Holly Adam sets the ball up into the air in the freshman team's match against Anderson. Adam sets the ball so another player can spike it. photo by Emma McBride

**"Despite COVID-19 slowing us down with conditioning and training, we all made it work and kept a really positive attitude."**

-Junior Jennifer Ramirez

# Catching a Lucky Winter Break

*Safe Outdoor Events to Check Out this Holiday Season*

**EMMA MCBRIDE** | photo editor

If you are looking for outdoor events this winter break, Mozart's Christmas Light Show, the Trail of Lights, Fortlandia at the Wildflower Center, and the Zilker Tree have made the proper COVID-19 accommodations and are open to the public during the upcoming holiday season.

**Mozart's Christmas Light Show: Dec. 2nd-Jan. 6th**

For the last eleven years, Mozart's Coffee Roasters has been holding an annual light show on their outdoor patio, and this year is no exception. The combination of the intricate light show, festive, live music, and hot chocolate make for a great way to start the holiday season. Get your tickets while you can because they sell quickly!

**The Trail of Lights: Dec. 1st-Jan. 3rd**

The Zilker Trail of Lights has been a winter staple in Austin for almost thirty years. This year, it's looking a little different due to COVID-19

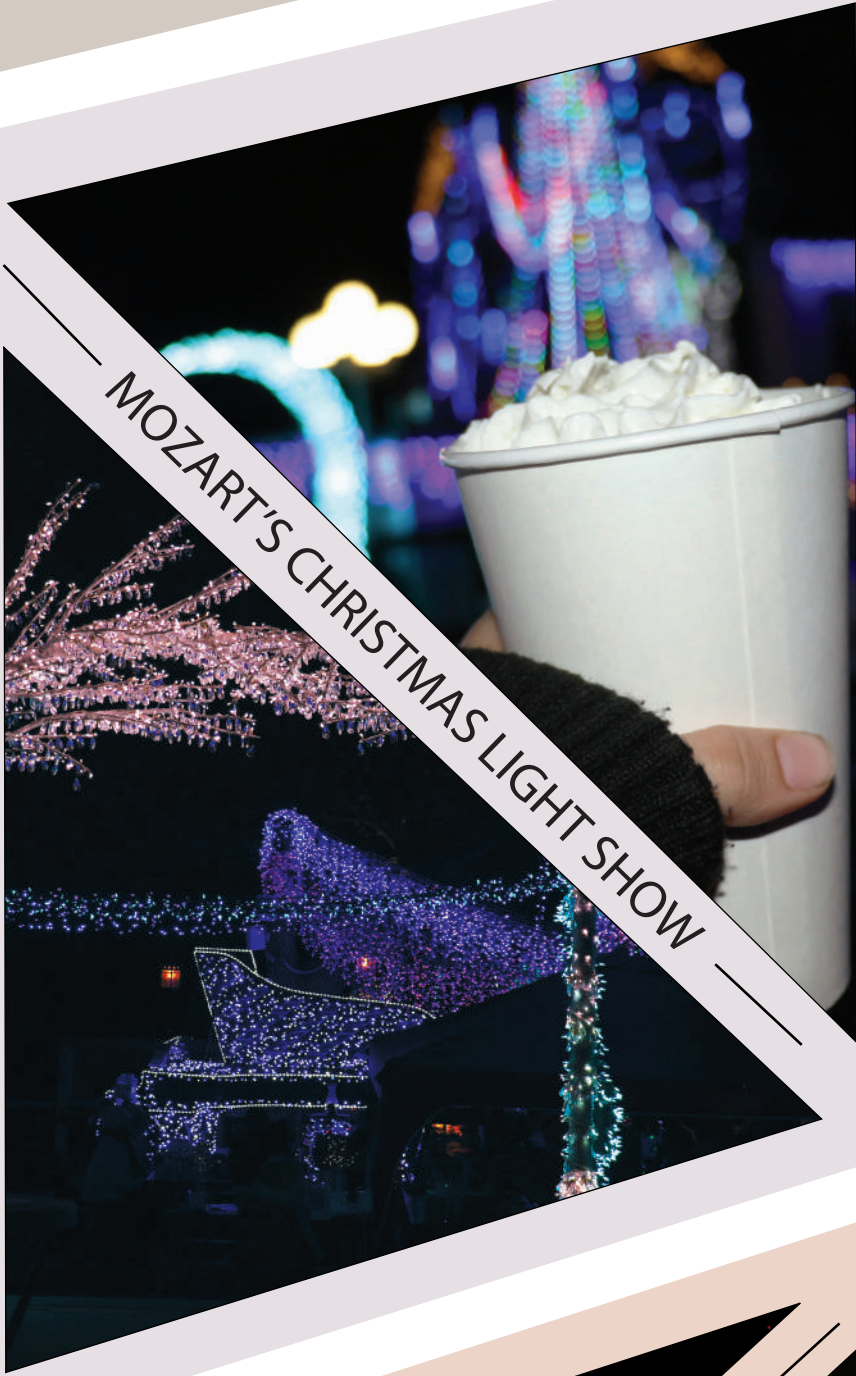
accommodations, and therefore is being held in the form of a drive-through with all the regular sights being viewed from the safety of your car. The Fun Run is also still being held, so register while you still can!

**Fortlandia at the Wildflower Center: Dec. 2nd- Jan. 31st**

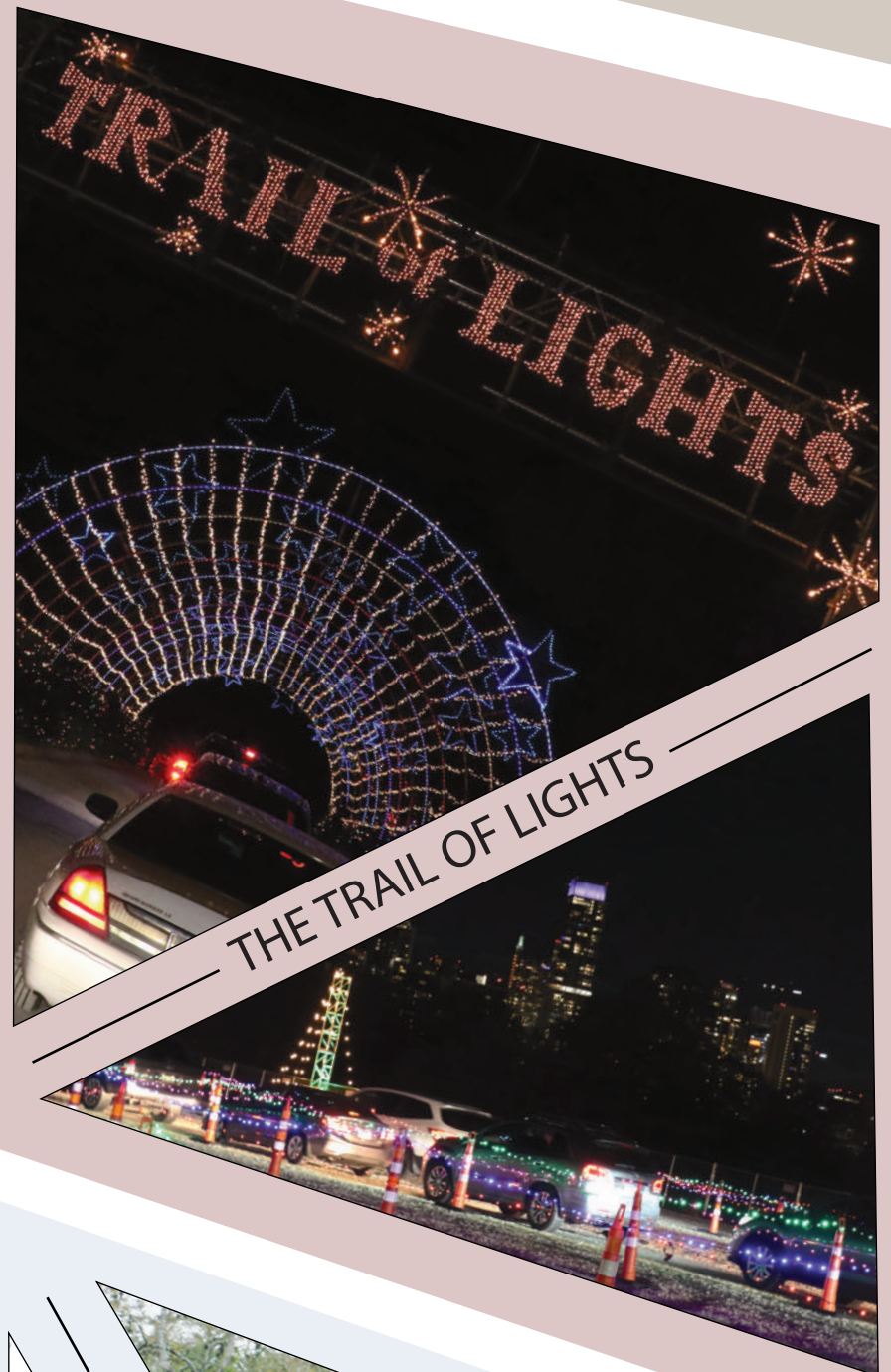
Fortlandia is a more underrated holiday event where artists design unique playscapes made from recyclable materials. The playscapes are regularly cleaned according to the Wildflower center's website, and their mask policy is heavily implemented. Usually it isn't necessary to book tickets ahead of time, so no need to rush like with the previous two events.

**Zilker Tree of Lights: Dec. 1st-Jan. 6th**

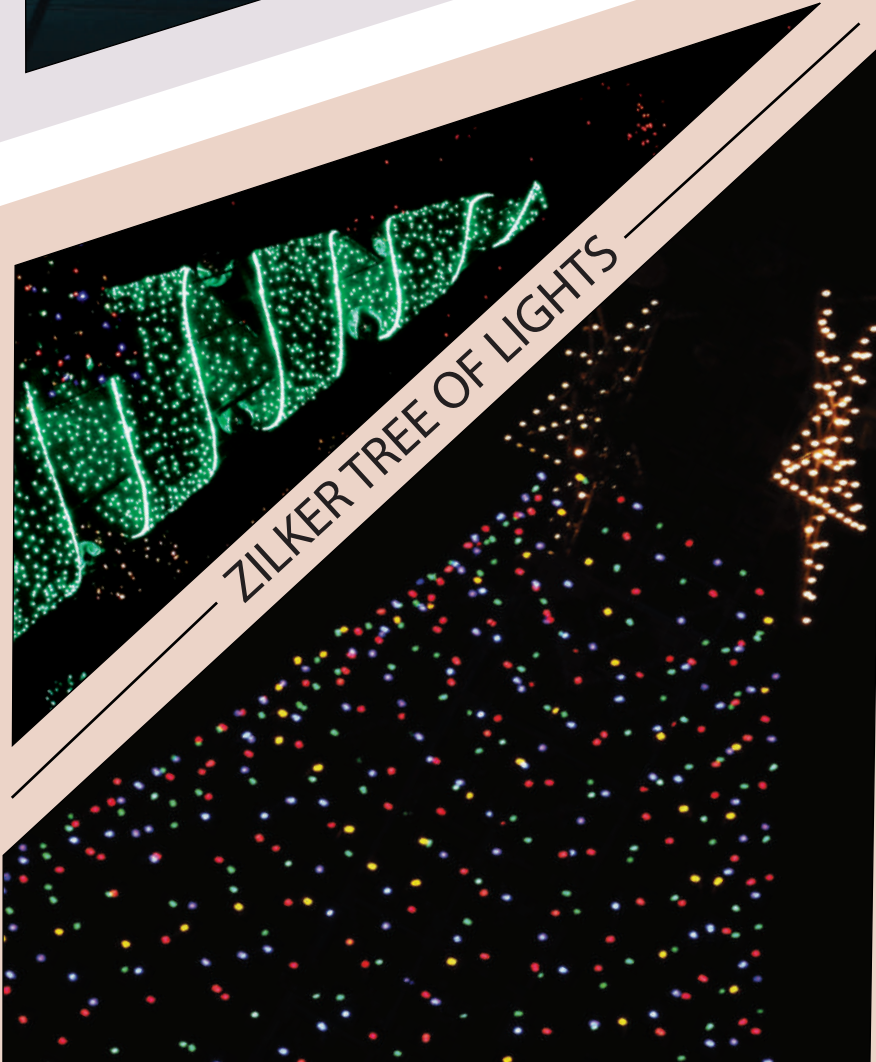
The Zilker Tree has the same conditions as the Trail of Lights does, meaning you have to enjoy it from the car rather than walk through it, but admission is free so don't worry about booking tickets.



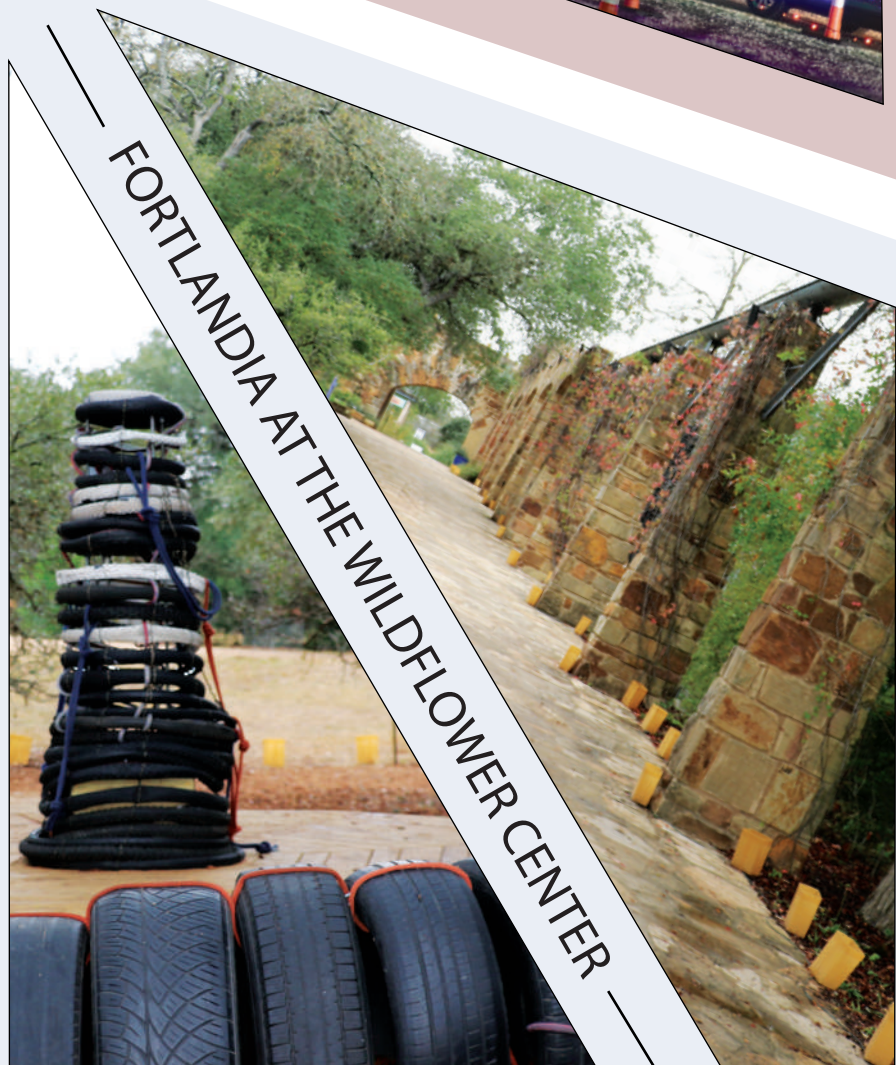
MOZART'S CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW



THE TRAIL OF LIGHTS



ZILKER TREE OF LIGHTS



FORTLANDIA AT THE WILDFLOWER CENTER