

the liberator

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Recapture Regiment to Redistribute Revenue

LUCI GARZA | news editor

In 1993, the Texas state legislature created the recapture program, a form of school financing that sends local taxpayer funding to the state in order to equalize school funding. Recapture, also known as Robinhood, first only affected wealthier districts in the state, but has since grown to almost every district in the state according to the Texas School Coalition. Data collected from the Texas Education Alliance reported that the Austin Independent School District (AISD) paid more than \$710 million in the 2020-21 school year.



According to AISD Chief Financial Officer Eduardo Ramos, the district is projected to pay \$799 million to the state of Texas next year. Ramos says that is enough funding to buy two professional football stadiums in the span of one year, and multiple studies have continued to show that Austin pays more in recapture fees than any other district in the state.

"Austin ISD is made up of 52% economically disadvantaged students, and yet we send over 53% of local tax collections back to the state and are having to reduce the number of

employees in the district to be able to pay our recapture payment to the state," Ramos said. "The state should invest in public education by allocating more funding to public education. That is the real fix."

The Texas School Coalition is an organization of school districts that pay recapture and work together to promote sustainable investments for Texas students. The organization's executive director, Christy Rome, said that with the upward growth that recapture has faced, many districts are now facing a strain in their budget.

"There is a point in time where you could cut fat for a budget, but we are at a point where we are about to cut into the bone," Rome said. "Many districts are now seeing so many dollars being sent away from their communities when they have great needs across their own district communities, and it is becoming a tougher pill to swallow as you're sending millions of dollars to the state of Texas."

The Texas School Coalition also reported that in the last five years, the amount of money sent to the state has nearly doubled. However, Rome said that recapture is founded in the principles of equity where districts could see the visible effects of their help.

"At one time, recapture was structured so that there were partnerships between districts," Rome said. "Even though money was leaving your local community, you could still see the good that it was doing in another community. Now, in the system that we have, there are not the partnerships that there once were, and it's more efficient, but schools are sending money directly to the

state of Texas, and you don't get that feel-good of, 'I'm helping someone else.'"

Chandra Villanueva, Director of Every Texan Economic Opportunity, emphasized that the issues with recapture stem from their lack of adequacy, not equity. Villanueva primarily believes that recapture is one of the best parts of Texas' school financing system, and does help level the playing field for many districts.

"The problem is that we don't have adequate funding," Villanueva said. "So if a recapture district is struggling, that means that all districts across the state are struggling."

In 2019, the Texas legislature passed House Bill 3 (HB3), a tax-cut bill centered around school financing. Within it, there were changes to the calculations to recapture, which were previously dollar-for-dollar amounts of money circulating between districts and the state, according to Villanueva.

"House Bill 3 did not affect recapture directly, but what it did do was that it broke that revenue between equal revenue and equal taxation," Villanueva said. "It used to be that every district taxed at a dollar per hundred dollars of property value, and then the state was the one that everyone got relatively equal levels of funding. What HB3 did, because it is actually a tax cut bill and not a school finance bill, is it now lets districts reduce their tax rates individually if they see that property value above the statewide average."

see **RECAPTURE** page 7



graphics by Emma McBride

Waller Creek Jumps the Rails



ELLA LILLY | staff writer

Along Lady Bird Lake's popular hike and bike trail, Austinites can take advantage of the many activities to partake in. At the Waller Creek Boathouse, lines of locals carry paddles and life jackets to the lake, rowers train for competition, and tourists rent colorful vintage motor boats to enjoy the scenery out at the water.

The Waller Creek Boathouse is home to the Austin Rowing Club (ARC), which has occupied the space since it was built and bid on in 2012. Other businesses that operate out of the boathouse, like Alta's Cafe and Retro Boat Rentals, are subcontracted under ARC's agreement with the City of Austin. However, plans for the new blue line MetroRail as part of Project Connect are about to halt business at the boathouse. ARC director Kevin Reinis is currently in discussions with the Austin Parks Department, Austin Transit System, and CapMetro about the future of the boathouse.

"I think Project Connect is a wonderful thing for the city of Austin," Reinis said. "As a long-term Austin resident, I think improving our mass transit connectivity across the city is a very positive step for Austin. Unfortunately, the blue line, which is one of two light rail lines developed by the overall Project Connect plan, will totally obliterate the boathouse. And that's to create a bridge over the lake and right where the boathouse sits. That bridge will end the hillside and go into a tunnel, creating an underground

station for the light rail system that then connects underground to the Austin Convention Center."

While the plans for taking down the boathouse have been circulating for a couple of years, the outcome of CapMetro's proposal has resulted in the plans developing more quickly. While it's not final, CapMetro is now conducting environmental studies to make sure the blue line will not be harmful to the environment. As meetings about the future of the boathouse continue, it's clear to Rental Operations Manager Aubrea Rudder that the boathouse needing to be torn down is almost a done deal.

"CapMetro still has to go through several permitting processes where they have to make sure that they can build on the lake," Rudder said. "So that's kind of what's going on right now. They're going through and doing environmental studies to make sure it doesn't impact the wildlife of Ladybird Lake, considering we're so close to the Congress bat bridge. And if it passes that, it'll be almost like a done deal that they'll take over the boathouse."

see **AUSTIN ROWING CLUB** page 17



RAIDERS OF THE LOST A.R.C. Austin Rowing Center customers out on the water on a sunny Friday afternoon. Capmetro is currently in the permitting process to ensure they can build on the lake once they take over the boathouse. photo by Emma McBride

AVP Film Passes UIL Round One

AMELIA COLEMAN | staff writer

"Think of the greatest movie you've ever seen and that's the plot," senior Mateo Selvera said of "everyone must sit on a donkey."

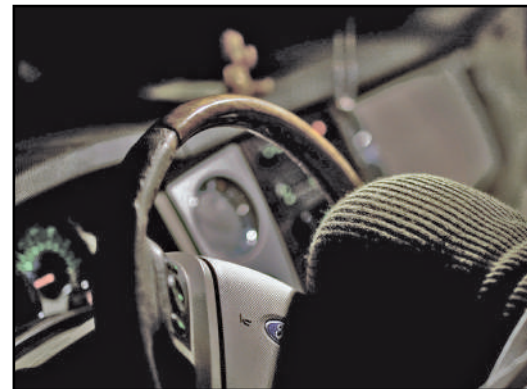
"everyone must sit on a donkey" was written, produced, filmed, and edited by LASA Audio Video Production (AVP) students. The film was entered into the University Interscholastic League (UIL) film category, where it passed the first round of judging but not the second. Senior Andres Hernandez was the film's main screenwriter. He wrote the script for a separate assignment.

One aspect of AVP is table reads, where a group of students read a script to give feedback. According to Selvera, who was part of the team that made the film, the rest of the team thought the script had promise.

"We read his [script] and everyone thought it was funny," Selvera said. "It was so funny that we thought we should make it into an actual film."

The script underwent editing before filming as part of pre-production. According to junior and editor of the film Asa Shepard, location scouting ended up being tricky.

"We did like two location scouting trips," Shepard said. "The first one went pretty okay, we didn't find our actual location, but we found one that looks promising. But then on a second one, we went to a park where we actually saw the scenery and we thought it was nicer since there



GETTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD Senior Charlotte Barnes in the AVP film "everyone must sit on a donkey." The film's script was originally meant for a script-writing assignment but, according to senior Mateo Selvera, was later made filmed due to the students' unanimous love for it. photo courtesy of Vanessa Mokry

were not many people there then. It was called Decker Lake."

Junior Gavin Ratcliff was in charge of lighting for the film. According to him, part of location scouting involved making sure the location had the right atmosphere for the film.

"We decided we wanted to be more mysterious and separate from everything," Ratcliff said. "I'd say we really took advantage of that location and got a lot of the ambience and our expectations expressed a lot of our vision."

see **UIL STUDENT FILM** page 10

what's news



photo by Kayla Le

Liberator in the wild! Edith Holmsten, one of our Student Life editors, joins dance for a day.

see **RAPTOR RUNDOWN** page 17

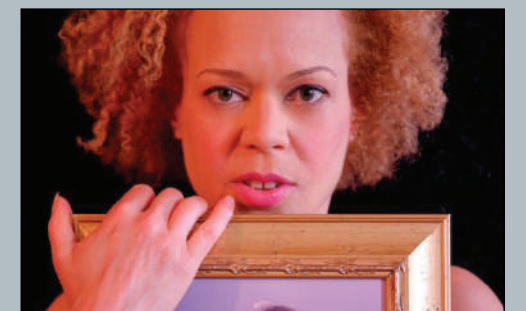


photo courtesy of Christina Wheeler

Hear firsthand about the live music scene in Austin from SXSW artists.

see **MUSIC IN THE WATER** page 13



photo by Madeleine Van Slyke

LASA track reflects on the past season and looks forward to the next school year.

see **TRACK** page 16

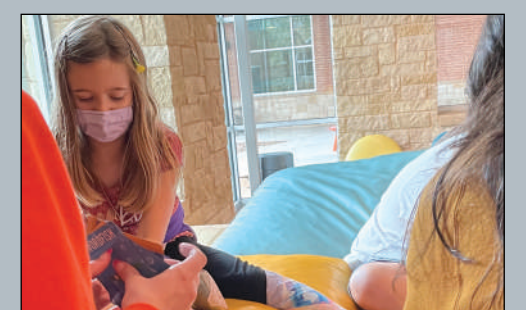


photo by Luci Garza

Interested in PALS? Read about what their elementary school visits looks like.

see **PALS** page 11



graphic by Kayla Le

Turn to page 3 to see this year's senior -30s-



editorial Hypocrisy of the Carbon Footprint

Comparing Individual and Corporate Climate Responsibility

Staff Stance: Every grading period The Liberator staff present their opinion on an important current issue in the form of an editorial written by the Commentary editors. The opinions in the piece below represent those of the staff as a collective, not of each individual member.

Turn off your lights when you're not using them. Remember to reduce, reuse, recycle. Try to purchase products without excessive packaging. Sentiments surrounding the individual consumer such as these have circulated in every form of media that tries to inform the public on climate change. These individual-centered proposals have long served as our generic default solutions for the climate crisis. However, flooding of coastal areas, the tragic loss of biodiversity, and increasingly extreme weather conditions such as the Texas snow storm in 2020 are not consequences that should be taken lightly. Thus, it's important to consider if individual-centered proposals are really the most effective ways of tackling climate change. While individuals taking responsibility for their personal carbon footprints certainly couldn't hurt, there's still only so much we as individuals can do when, according to The Guardian, 100 companies alone are responsible for 71% of global carbon emissions.

The term "carbon footprint" was ironically first coined by British Petroleum (BP), the world's second-largest non-state-owned oil company in the world. According to The Guardian, BP used a public relations scheme to promote the narrative of individual climate responsibility, and thus scapegoat consumers as opposed to oil giants for the impacts of climate change. In 2004, BP even created a carbon footprint calculator for individuals to assess their personal day-to-day emissions. Since then, the idea of reducing individual carbon footprints has been popularized globally. Yet BP clearly has no intention to reduce theirs, seeing as they still produce 3.8 million barrels of oil every day and have invested negligible amounts of their budget in renewable energy sources. The production of oil is a major source of toxic air pollutants and risks oil spills which could be caused by pipeline, storage, or transport oil leakages. In fact, in 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill caused by the explosion of a BP oil rig is considered to be the largest marine oil spill in history. The oil spill killed thousands of marine creatures by contaminating their habitats, and continues to cause Gulf of Mexico residents to suffer various health disorders to this day.

This hypocritical tone isn't unique to BP. Similarly, Coca-Cola advertises themselves as eco-friendly, claiming to be mitigating water wastage while simultaneously operating bottling factories in vulnerable areas of India, exacerbating groundwater issues and

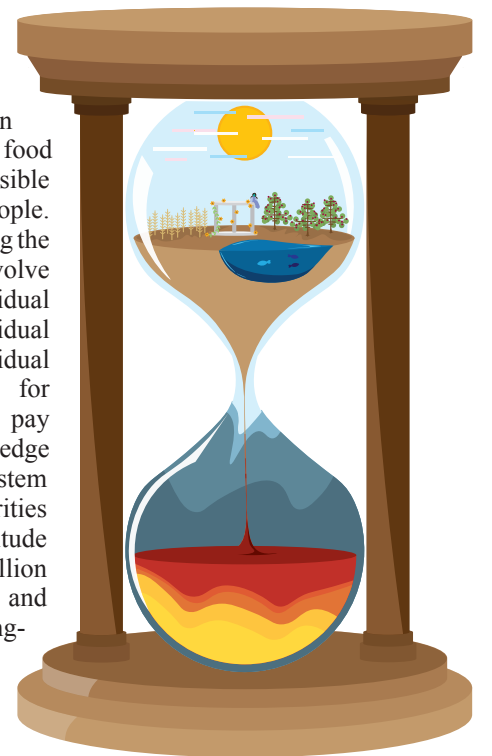
droughts. Not only does this strategy allow corporations to deflect blame away from themselves, but it guilt-trips their consumers, many of whom do not have the means to significantly reduce their carbon footprints. While some consumers do have the privilege and resources to purchase eco-friendly, expensive products or electric cars, for the vast majority of the global population, there's only so much they can commit. On the other hand, wealthy corporations do have the resources and funds to significantly reduce global emissions. For example, they have the means to invest in renewable energy and cleaner ways to produce products, as well as to avoid further destroying areas already vulnerable to climate change.

Ultimately, the people experiencing the firsthand effects of the climate crisis are not the CEOs of multi-million corporations, but normal people: people in developing countries in vulnerable areas with less infrastructure or government stability to deal with the ramifications of climate change. This means there is hardly any incentive for corporations to make substantial differences in their practices, as they aren't experiencing the immediate consequences of their actions. Companies can make emission-cutting climate pledges all they want, but unless enforced by laws or government agencies, corporate climate pledges are just that: pledges and empty promises.

The plausible way to limit corporate emissions is pushing for government agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to have more influence on corporation's climate-related practices. West Virginia v. EPA is, at the time of this writing, a currently pending Supreme Court case which will resolve whether the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the ability to delegate the EPA broad regulatory powers in regard to corporate greenhouse gas emissions. The result of this case could significantly set the tone of how much say the EPA has in corporate practices. Setting quotas on corporate emissions—as well as fighting for legal repercussions or taxes on corporations that don't meet these quotas—would be a truly effective way of combating the climate crisis. On an individual level, this means voting for truly climate-conscious representatives and continuously pressing and lobbying for corporations and governments to do better. Individuals, if in the position to do so, can put pressure on corporations to adopt environmentally-conscious policies by

choosing to support companies that have been proven to be more eco-friendly, not just advertised to appear that way. When more people purchase products produced by truly ethical companies, and boycott high-emitting companies, this can incentivize more companies to adopt more of these policies.

Ultimately, this isn't to say that individual actions don't matter, and that the idea of the carbon footprint is obsolete. If individuals are in the position to do so, it's still important to make environmentally-conscious decisions. However, if they can't afford to go vegan or bike to school due to any number of factors, then their hands are obviously tied. Instead of blaming these consumers, understand why it's so difficult to be climate-conscious within the system that we live in. We should look towards strategies that will better enable individuals to make eco-friendly choices, such as making public transportation and sustainable food options more accessible to working-class people. Ultimately, confronting the climate crisis does involve individualism: individual activism, individual voters, and individual change-makers, but for this individualism to pay off, it must acknowledge that we live in a system that contains disparities between the magnitude of change a multi-million corporation can make and the change a working-class individual can make.



graphic by Amelia Coleman



In your opinion, what are the most effective ways of mitigating climate change?



Aurelie Sulter
Freshman

"Recycling waste so that you use less plastic as well as being conscious of what companies you support are important ways of mitigating climate change. For example, you can boycott fast fashion companies such as Shein or Target."



Lucy Pigford
Sophomore

"Lots of factories and industrial machines release a lot of emissions, so I think that as a society, we need to put more pressure on businesses with higher emissions."



T Wolf
Junior

"Renewable energy sources are great ways. Especially on a high government scale, to make climate change better. We won't be able to get rid of using fossil fuels immediately, but using more renewable energy sources would be a step in the right direction."



Alia Arya
Senior

"I think the best way to mitigate climate change is to switch to renewable energy sources, and do the small things in your life like recycling and composting. Also, you can reduce your consumption of wasteful materials like non-reusable plastics."

- Advisor** Kevin Garcia
 - Editors-in-Chief** Sophia Chau, Max Domel
 - Managing** Emma McBride
 - Copy** Zoe Klein
 - Finance** Delia Rune
 - Commentary** Beck Williams, LiLi Xiong
 - News** Luci Garza, Malvika Pradhan
 - Student Life** Ava De Leon, Edith Holmsten
 - Entertainment** Susan Ballesteros, Katie Busby
 - Sports** Annabel Andre, Sanwi Sarode
 - Web** Nevin Hall, Norah Hussaini
 - Photo/Social Media** JC Ramirez Delgadillo, Madeleine Van Slyke
 - Graphics** Kayla Le, Grace Woodruff
 - Staff Writers** Amelia Coleman, Sarah Garrett, Lana Giles, Sydney Jones, Fiona Kleeman, Nayan Kondapalli, Ella Lilly, Jake Smuts, Ava Spurgeon
 - Club Contributors** Kira Auby, Mairin Bachschmid, Sofia Francis, Zia Harvey, Maya Linville, Aurna Mukherjee, Alexandra Valencia-Serrano
- If you are interested in writing for the paper and becoming a club contributor then be sure to stop by Room 701 to find out more!**

the liberator

Editorial Policy

Responsibilities of a free student press: Serving as 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 strive 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 manner with the utmost regard for integrity.

Editorial Content:

1. The students on The Liberator staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain the most complete available information.
2. The information will be presented in a truthful and fair manner.
3. 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.
4. All commentary will be clearly labeled as such.
5. 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 composed of the following individuals: lead editors and commentary editors.

The Editorial Board will:

1. Determine the content of the publication (with input from other staff members)
2. Stress the editorial policy
3. Ensure the accuracy of the publication
4. Address inappropriate behavior on the part of the staff
5. Dispense disciplinary action to staff members
6. Change or add policy as necessary

Viewpoints:

Printed material which contains the opinion 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 majority viewpoint of the staff.
Commentary: Commentary articles represent the viewpoint of one member of the staff, and are signed as such. These articles do not represent the opinions of the entire staff.

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 will be published 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. No letters which are obscene or libelous will be published.

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.

Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of substantial 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 will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

Congratulations, class of 2022!
Good luck on finals and APs, everyone!



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 or DM us @lasaliberator.

-30-

30s are a Liberator tradition wherein graduating seniors write one last story. This is an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences at LASA and with The Liberator that have impacted and will continue to influence them as they continue their journeys after high school. They may share fun, interesting, or moving anecdotes or lessons from their time here, and look back on the mark they left on the paper and the mark it left on them. The LASA Liberator congratulates its graduating seniors and is excited to see them move on to bigger and better things.

NEWSPAPER KIDS

SOPHIE CHAU

When I first stepped into the old newspaper room, my first thought was, "What a mess." And it was a mess. Papers were piled high on tables strewn across the tiny portable, the ground seemed to be replaced by plaster and bright linoleum, and any sounds of outside life faded behind the thin wooden walls. But then we all gathered round into a disorganized circle of people to review the summer issue, and it all made sense.

Actually, that's a lie, no it didn't.

None of it made sense. I sat there as people shot one comment after another, giving input and suggestions about the edition, some of which seemed impossible to comprehend. "The stroke is too large," one of them said. A stroke? That sounds serious. "The outline here is formatted wrong," said another. It felt like an alien language.

And in some ways, it was an alien language. As the years flew by and I gained more knowledge, though, it just became language. You know, learning, and all that. With it, newspaper became more than newspaper, it became a part of me: a pain in my ass...but in the way that all loved things are difficult. Not a single paper gets printed without the hard work of over two dozen people, and as is often said, trauma has a way of bonding people together.

As cheesy and cliché as it sounds (because it is cheesy and cliché), newspaper became a family to me. They're who I say hi to in the halls, and the people who I've suffered countless late nights with, staying up sometimes until 11 p.m. just to make print deadline.

We humans tend to organize ourselves into groups. In high school, there are the "band kids," the "theater kids," the "yearbook kids," the "football kids." I do not know who I will be as an adult, but I do know that I was, and to some extent always will be, a newspaper kid.

graphics by Kayla Le



LOVE LETTER TO THE LIBERATOR

MAX DOMEL

Before I came to LASA, I had only attended small, private schools, so I was nervous about what to expect in a much larger environment. On my first day of high school, the first place I went was Mr. Garcia's portable back on the LBJ campus. I didn't know it then, but at that moment, I'd be stepping into my future home: The Liberator.

From my experience, The Liberator has meant many different things. Psychologically, being a staff writer, entertainment editor, or Lead Ed, and physically, being in that portable on the old campus, my bedroom at home, or room 701 at our new campus. Across all of these different spaces and changes, though, The Liberator has given me so many wonderful opportunities that I'm incredibly grateful for.

Journalism-wise, I've been able to interview people like Mayor Adler and one of my personal heroes, Roger Bennett, an English-American soccer journalist and co-host of "The Men in Blazers Show." I've gotten to write articles on topics from the local Blues on the Green music festival and researching racism in European soccer to LASA students organizing their own TEDx event, and reviews on everything from the movie "Booksmart" and TV show "Ramy" to the music video for "Compensating" by Aminé and documentary "Too Funny to Fail."

On a personal level, newspaper has truly helped me discover multiple new sides of myself that I don't think would have developed in other settings. It has unleashed hidden forms of my creativity and given me purpose and confidence. I started out as a kid who sat off in the corner to do work and got anxious before phone calls, but thanks to The Liberator, I'm leaving as a much more collaborative, vocal, and mature young man who strives to positively impact the lives of those around him and connect people through storytelling.

I feel at peace at The Liberator (when we're not cramming for an issue). It's been the place that's warmly embraced me in a way nothing else quite could. It's where I've felt the strongest sense of belonging throughout high school, and most importantly, where I've found some of the coolest, smartest, most creative, and most supportive people I've ever met. People who debate both seriously and for fun with the same passion and allow each other to openly share their life stories. People who (mostly) put up with my stupid, unnecessarily complicated jokes and puns, can always make dull days entertaining, and uplift one another under stress and exhaustion. The atmosphere in the newspaper room is one-of-a-kind, and one I'll greatly miss.

Coming to LASA has been one of the best decisions of my life, and joining newspaper even more so. The Liberator will always have a special place in my heart. I'm so happy that I've been able to go on this fulfilling path with everyone over these past four years, and I wish all future staffers and editors the best of luck. Thank you all so much. Max out.



C A R L B E R N S T E I N
I S N O T A L L E R G I C
T O T H E L I B E R A T O R

ZOE KLEIN

I joined The Liberator because I legitimately believed I could become Carl Bernstein. I imagined myself sneaking around in too-luxurious hotels dressed in all black with a camera around my neck. But when I walked into the newspaper room, my fantasy was quickly dispelled. The ceiling of the dark portable was stained with water damage. The mold in the walls was the only form of insulation other than the century-old asbestos.

I legitimately believed I was allergic to The Liberator. Every time I walked into portable 5A, my nose ceased its duties as a source of oxygen, my throat closed, and my eyes began to water. Sneezes emanated from the chair I had chosen as my own in the corner of the room. I got told “bless you” so many times that I probably have automatic admission to heaven.

I wasn't allergic to The Liberator. I was allergic to the mold. Despite my unfortunate affliction, I remained intent on saving my Carl Bernstein dreams. The raccoons became my anonymous sources and the principal became my Nixon. I was a woman on a mission.

While I briskly roamed the halls of the school and sat hunched at my school-issued chromebook, the other members of The Liberator became my Bob Woodward. The girl in the corner drawing a scarily realistic shoe taught me how to keep a steady hand while I drew. The tall boy in the soccer jersey laughed at my jokes even when the only laughable thing about them was how bad they were. The girl with glasses as thick as the ice at a skating rink taught me that it is okay to want to throw your computer across the room and type 300 words a minute at the same time.

And that's why my favorite parts about The Liberator are the simple ones. Thermoses that won't open, pizza bagels only warm enough for Grace, Thursday night delirium and eyes watering from eyes too close to dusty, million-year-old desktop computers. I am my own Carl Bernstein, and the newspaper room is my Watergate Hotel. It's nice here.



F A K E N E W S

EMMA MCBRIDE

The first time I encountered The Liberator was before I attended LASA as an eighth grader at Kealing. I had gone to an elective fair LASA was holding for incoming freshmen and promised my mom I would give every table a chance. So, I started out with the first one closest to the door. Mr. Garcia gave us his spiel and then encouraged us to take from the array of newspapers spread across the table. I blindly grabbed one and moved onto the next table.

Later, in the car, I leafed through the paper I had picked up and was immediately perplexed by it. The stories were so strange. Did a food review that critiqued restaurants purely based on whether they had dino nuggets on the menu really deserve a full page spread? Was it really in good journalistic integrity to have a gossip column quoting teachers gossiping about other teachers? Why was the editorial policy just the “Bee Movie” script? Oh wait.

Although I should have been able to tell much, much earlier from the bold text reading “April Fools Edition...Fake News” bordering every page, this was actually the joke issue, The Litigator. Either way, for some reason or another, I loved it. If I could be a part of any group that could come up with something that funny and creative, I was sure I would enjoy it. And I have. Otherwise why would I have stayed for four years? Definitely not a legally binding contract I signed with my own blood during the yearly Liberator staff initiation. Nope.

I ' M Q U I T T I N G
N E W S P A P E R

GRACE WOODRUFF

I wish I could tell you why I joined the newspaper. I wish I could tell some grand story about journalistic integrity and love for print or something like that. You've got the wrong person. Sorry, try again later.

What I can tell you is why I've stayed with the newspaper for three of my four years at LASA. It's kind of remarkable that I've made it this long. Anyone who knows me very well knows that I am excellent at quitting things. I've quit elementary school soccer, middle school band, several clubs, countless hobbies; you name it, I've quit it.

So what made newspaper stick? By most metrics, I wasn't even very good at it. Deadlines were never exactly my “thing,” and my stories were just above average. Hardly a remarkable reporter.

It was the people. All of these wonderful, wisecracking, wisdom-filled people. People who form a group chat called “airing of grievances” (all lowercase, regardless of AP style). People who make graphics folders with 15 emojis in the name and text each other via Zoom private chats (love you Andrew <3). People who call you on your bullshit and make fun of your grammatical errors and are the sweetest people ever, just so long as they go to bed by 10 p.m. Everyone else in between, people who you aren't as close to but who you can always complain about classes to, who know exactly what it means when an InDesign file has a missing link, and know how to fix it (or at the very least know who to ask for help from around a mouthful of mint Oreos). These people are the reason why I'm still in newspaper.

Well, that and the fact that it's the only class that requires two years to get a tech credit.





A 1 9 4 0 S

P R I M E M I N I S T E R

Nevin Hall

There goes the old saying, “no state in which eccentricity is a matter of reproach can be a wholesome state,” and I, for one, wholly agree with that saying. Eccentricity is one of those items of man that defy categorization and regulation, and its foremost proving ground is the public school and the shame or succor of one’s peers.

It’s with this background in mind, this fomenting morass of personality known only as eccentricity, that I have to examine my time at LASA and The Liberator. I’ll be the first to admit, I’ve got a couple of quirks, my old-time orange jacket and respect for Winston Churchill first among them. But it is at this memorable and venerable establishment, LASA, that quirks can be subsumed, that like and unlike can come together and create magical things, even if only for a moment, which is an experience unlike any other which I have ever experienced and which, for me, was priceless.

Within this galaxy of oddity and, at times, crudity, there lies a microcosm that could scarcely be more emblematic of LASA than The Liberator. Full of people with different views, dissenting ideas, and plenty of backbone to spout them, The Liberator takes LASA writ large, and I like to think I too, contributed to this majestic cacophony. From arguments with my editors about the use of the word “trireme” (meaning a Greek boat of antiquity) to reasoned debate on political issues, the absurd and the logical become close bedmates, and I very much enjoyed the tension.

It is with this at the fore that I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed, and wish I could continue both my LASA and Liberator experience.

T H E

L I B E R A T O R D I S P A T C H

Susan Ballesteros

I’ve been told I can write complete and utter nonsense for this, and I would, except I feel like it ruins the spirit of it a little. I also don’t fancy reading this back twenty years from now and cringing away in embarrassment. I probably will anyway no matter what I write, that’s how it is with getting older, but I might as well do my utmost to prevent it.

This year has been completely typical and yet absolutely unguessable. I’m glad we came back to in-person for my last year, no matter how hard it was at the beginning to deal with the constant need to wash my hands (although to be fair, that’s always been around). I’m glad because I actually got to make memories. I’m not good at memories; I always end up forgetting them by the time Monday comes around, but I hope I can remember what The Liberator was like. I hope I remember the trials and tribulations of Bagel Bite microwaving, even if that means remembering the total and debilitating torture of not being able to get final story edits right. I hope I can remember the people, the fun, and, yes, even the occasional bouts of interview-induced terror that newspaper introduced me to. I want to remember the deranged rattling of the heater/cooler?, those first few weeks we suffered through a brand new old building, the mouse in the ceiling that was actually a chair we had to banish, and the unstoppable chaos of running around downtown Austin armed only with a press badge and camera (which proved themselves to be free passes to quite a bit) during SXSW. I want to remember being recruited along with Katie to become interior decorators and make the newsroom ours (I’m still very proud of our poster wall), and there may not have been much going on during the Zoom year, but I also want to remember the kindness of the previous editors while I found my footing during my first year on The Liberator. Basically, I hope I remember everything, the good, the bad, and the InDesign shortcuts.



Raptor Chatter

Senior Edition

What is your favorite memory from your time at the Liberator?

Grace Woodruff

Every time Andrew and I (former graphics editors unite!) would private message each other on Zoom and then try to keep our faces straight. Many different types of mlms.

Emma McBride

One time I was in charge of writing and designing a winter-themed crossword. I wrote all the clues and made a separate list of the answers. Somewhere along the line, the lists were randomized and no longer matched up, which no one caught until post print so the crossword made no sense. Several people approached me about it, and my fellow editors and I still joke about it to this day.

Susan Ballesteros

There was a strange squeaking sound coming from somewhere and obviously the only logical solution was to blame it on a ceiling mouse, so a good chunk of the editorial board stood confused staring up at the ceiling. It ended up being a chair.

Sophie Chau

Malvika had a thermos that nobody could open. Then, Grace, under Ava’s brilliant advice, decided to initiate a sneak attack. “A thermos? What thermos?” she said, slammed her palm onto the top of the thermos, and yanked open the lid.

Nevin Hall

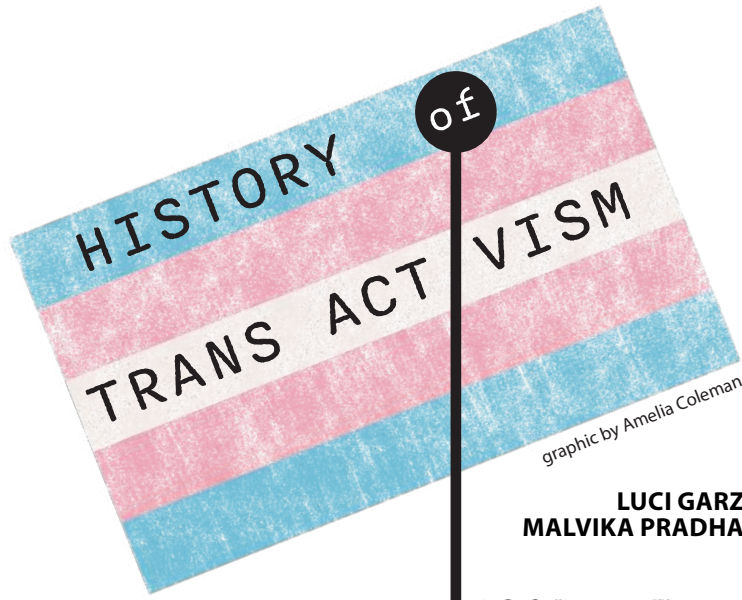
Probably the moments when, sitting at my desk editing transcripts of interviews, I finally found that quote that should end the article on the just perfect note—a truly inimitable feeling.

Zoe Klein

One issue we had an especially controversial article. The lead editors have a tradition of going to get dinner for the group on the last night of late nights, and this issue I was driving. We got so absorbed in the conversation that we were driving in the wrong direction until 15 minutes into the drive. We were about to cross city limits.

Max Domel

Being bullied (in an endearing way of course) by a few co-editors for having a brain blip and not realizing who ABBA was and that they made “Dancing Queen,” and then being dared to sing some of the lyrics in the car. As the music ramped up to the chorus, I got ready, and then sung the two famous words at the top of my lungs, which was met with an eruption of laughter.



LUCI GARZA
MALVIKA PRADHAN | news editors

WOMEN'S healthcare spotlight

graphic by Kayla Le

MALVIKA PRADHAN | news editor

1965 : Term is used

Psychiatrist John F. Oliven first coins the term transgender, referenced in his work "Sexual Hygiene and Pathology." Before this, German physician Mangus Hitchfield had used the word "transexual," which he referenced in a journal article called "The Intersex Constitution." In modern usage, the two terms are not synonymous, however. Transgender is an umbrella term for people who do not identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, and transexual is used by medical professionals to discuss trans people undergoing medical transition.

The Stonewall Riot begins on June 28, 1969, in the Greenwich village neighborhood of New York City. After several police raids of the Stonewall Inn, a gay club, members of the LGBT+ community take action and resist police efforts, which can now be noted at the start of the modern fight for LGBT+ rights, according to CNN. The riots last for 5 days, starting with Marsha P. Johnson, who throws the first brick as a form of resistance against law enforcement.

1969 : Stonewall Riots

In *M.T. v. J.T.*, the Superior Court of New Jersey ruled that a trans person can marry on the basis of gender identity, rather than of the gender they were assigned at birth. Although other laws in other states, as well as recent legislation, do not all support this, the decision of the *M.T. v. J.T.* case creates a landmark notion that validated marriages between transgender individuals, according to ThoughtCo.

1976 : M.T. v J.T.

Monica Helms, a transgender United States Navy Veteran, creates the transgender pride flag. The flag features five horizontal stripes, a light blue, then light pink stripe at the top and bottom, with a white stripe across the center. Helms says the light blue represents the traditional color for baby boys, the light pink the traditional color for baby girls, and white for intersex babies. According to Medium, Helms purposely designed the flag to be flown in any orientation or direction, to symbolize people always finding correctness in their lives, no matter their gender.

1979 : TD0V is created

International Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV) is created in 2009 by transgender woman Rachel Crandall-Crocker. According to PBS, Crandall-Crocker created the holiday because the only other day that the transgender community had was the Transgender Day of Remembrance, which honored the murder of Rita Hester, a Black transgender woman. Crandall-Crocker created the day as a celebration of transgender people. TDOV is celebrated on March 31.

2009 : TD0V is created

According to Facing History and Ourselves, the United States has seen an unprecedented amount of anti-trans legislation, especially targeted towards transgender youth, since the start of 2021. Bills like these aim to prevent trans children and teens from competing on sports teams, or receive gender-affirming care. One particularly notable bill, according to Them.us, is the "Don't Say Gay" bill passed in Florida which prevents teachers from educating kids about LGBT+ identities up to third grade, which critics say is harmful to LGBT+ youth.

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood is a national organization that originated as a single birth control clinic in the Brooklyn borough of New York City in 1916. Today, there are now about 600 locations across the United States, including 39 in Austin, according to The Dallas Morning News. Planned Parenthoods across the country now work to accomplish a variety of tasks revolving around reproductive rights, according to the spokesperson for Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas, Sarah Wheat.

"Planned Parenthood of Greater Texas operates three health centers in Austin," Wheat said, "They provide birth control, STI testing and treatment, HIV tests, and PrEP and PEP to prevent HIV transmission, breast and cervical cancer screenings, treatment for urinary tract and other infections, preventive healthcare exams and as permissible under state law, abortions are provided at our South Austin health center. Planned Parenthood also provides professional sex education programs and advocates on behalf of our patients." Planned Parenthood offers all health education services free of charge, and bases the cost of healthcare services on a patient's income. Any person is eligible for these services. "Patients can call 1-800-230-PLAN or visit ppgreatertx.org to make an appointment," Wheat said. "All patients are welcome regardless of income, insurance or documentation status, where you live or who you love."

According to Wheat, one of the most pressing healthcare issues facing women today is access to abortions. This issue especially affects women of color and low-income women.

"Access to legal abortion is significantly limited in Texas and could be banned in the months ahead," Wheat said. "Bans on abortion disproportionately impact low-income women, women of color, and women who can't take time off work, access childcare, transportation, and the resources needed if they are forced to leave the state to access an abortion in a healthcare setting."

According to Texas is Ready, a coalition that focuses on teaching young people sexual education, Texas is only one of five states in the United States that requires parents to opt their children into sexual education, and doesn't require that schools teach it to students. Wheat said this lack of education is an important issue facing young people in Texas today.

"Texas schools aren't required to teach about sex education, and patients come to our health center who don't know how their menstrual cycle works, how to prevent an unintended pregnancy or STI, the importance of consent, the importance of routine testing and screenings, and this information is essential for making informed decisions to protect one's health," Wheat said.

Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition

The Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition (TWHC) is an advocacy group that focuses on providing preventive healthcare, or healthcare services that prevent unplanned pregnancies, to women. The group works by monitoring and responding to Texas' Women's Health Programs, Healthy Texas Women (HTW) and the Family Planning Program (FPP). Leah Joiner is the advocacy and policy associate for TWHC, and said that the kind of work that TWHC provides is necessary in the Texas community.

"Based on 2019 Census data, 5.2 million, or 18.4%, of Texans are uninsured, three out of ten women have low incomes, and one in five lack insurance coverage," Joiner said. "HTW and FPP provide limited but important preventive services that: reduce unintended pregnancies and allow for healthy birth spacing, reduce maternal and infant complication risks, and result in better maternal and infant health outcomes."

Joiner believes the most pressing healthcare issue facing women today is receiving access to healthcare. Additionally, she thinks that women are one of the most overlooked groups in terms of being able to access health services.

"Because Texas has not expanded Medicaid, or agreed upon a Texas-specific solution for broad healthcare coverage, many still do not have an affordable option for insurance," Joiner said. "For women who are over the age of 19, able-bodied, not receiving coverage through an employer or the marketplace, and not pregnant, there is no other option for accessing comprehensive healthcare."

Specifically, TWHC hosts meetings to raise community awareness, which are open to the public. People can visit the TWHC website to read advocacy materials, legislative reports, and see their newsletters.

"TWHC doesn't offer membership to individuals, but our coalition meetings are open to the public, and anyone is able to sign up for our e-newsletters through our website, texaswhc.org," Joiner said. "The e-newsletters are the best way to stay updated on educational or advocacy opportunities."

Joiner said that even young people in high school are affected by healthcare disparities. She said that the healthcare system in general is complicated, and even more so for young people.

"Navigating the healthcare system can be an overwhelming task for anyone, and for young Texans who do not have access to a consistent form of healthcare coverage, it can be even more difficult," Joiner said. "Access to preventive health and family planning services can help young Texans plan their futures by allowing them to focus on their education or building their careers."

HOSA

Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) is a club geared towards giving experience to students who want to work in medical or health-related fields. Students can choose from a wide variety of topics to compete in, from forensic science to dental terminology. Texas has the largest number of HOSA members in the country. Junior Geetika Polavarapu is one of the club's four captains. Polavarapu said that she thinks it is beneficial that more women are occupying healthcare-related professions.

"I've heard that over 50% of the healthcare professions are currently held by women," Polavarapu said. "Despite the lack of support women get in STEM fields, I find it encouraging to see so many entering the medical field."

However, Polavarapu still believes that women have to work harder than their male counterparts in healthcare professions. She said that she believes women still have less access to healthcare professions than males.

"Even though the number of women in healthcare professions is increasing, I still have heard that women feel like they have to continuously prove themselves in the workplace in comparison to their male coworkers," Polavarapu said. "As patients, women have stated they feel as though their doctors are undermining their symptoms."

Additionally, Polavarapu thinks that women patients can be dismissed in healthcare settings. She said some doctors believe that women have lower pain tolerance than men, and therefore don't always treat their symptoms as real.

"I do think that many of those active in the medical field have a subconscious idea that women are more sensitive to pain and therefore 'over-exaggerate' their symptoms," Polavarapu said. "This subconscious idea is harmful and hinders patient care."

Another issue Polavarapu feels women face, especially young women, is body image. According to the Polaris Teen Center, 69% of females between ages ten to eighteen say that photos of celebrities and models in the media have motivated their "ideal" body shape.

"I know many who have suffered from eating disorders due to external pressure," Polavarapu said. "Eating disorders have long-lasting impacts that are very hard to recover from later on in life."

Polavarapu likes discussing these issues but she looks forward to making a career in the healthcare field in the future and getting more hands-on experience. Polavarapu says that her decision to join HOSA in freshman year is one she doesn't regret.

"I was initially curious about medicine in ninth grade and felt like freshman year would be a great time to try out a new interest," Polavarapu said. "I was excited for the competitive events, but after joining, the service projects have also been extremely interesting and fun to engage in."

Recapture

from page 1

After HB3 was passed, Villanueva said that many districts were hopeful for their rates of recapture to decrease. Wealthier districts such as Austin were less likely to see their rates of recapture decrease, due to the fact that the bill was centered on a certain amount of growth, according to Villanueva.

"A lot of districts, including Austin, thought that this was going to reduce their rates of recapture significantly, but it really didn't because when you're in a high-wealth area it can be hard to get that level of growth," Villanueva said. "It was actually some of our non-metropolitan small growth areas that really benefited the most from the tax compression in HB3. It was about growth, not wealth, and we are a very wealthy district here in Austin."

AISD saw a lull in recapture fees for one year, according to Ramos. However, the district is now projecting a continued growth in recapture fees to the state that could potentially reach \$1 billion.

"In 2020 our recapture payment dropped to \$640 million from \$665 million the year before in 2019," Ramos said. "This current school year, we will send \$761 million back to the state and next school year we are projecting that payment to be \$799 million. Within the next four years, our recapture payment will balloon to over \$1 billion."

Rome believes that the biggest reason the legislature finds it difficult to better calculate recapture for districts like AISD, is because of the amount of profit their funds bring. Rome related the \$3 billion profit the state makes a year to the Texas lottery, which recapture fees outnumber.

"When you reach that point of bringing in such a large amount of revenue, it is hard for the state to say, 'OK, we can work with you to reduce that,' because they rely on those dollars, and I think that is where it comes from, and how recapture has gotten to this point of being larger than it was ever intended to be," Rome said. "It is not just a point of equalization, it is now a source of funding, a source of \$3 billion for the state."

Currently, the calculations of recapture, as well as school funding, are centered around attendance rather than enrollment. In 2020, when schools across the country shifted from in-person to distance learning, Texas districts saw a shift in their funding as well, according to Villanueva.

"We don't even know how much funding was lost based on the inability to adequately or accurately track attendance during that period," Villanueva said. "That will also make your wealth per student go up because it makes you look like you have less students overall. This is something called average daily attendance, when your attendance is down but your wealth is still there, which would definitely increase your recapture, or at least have an impact on it as well."

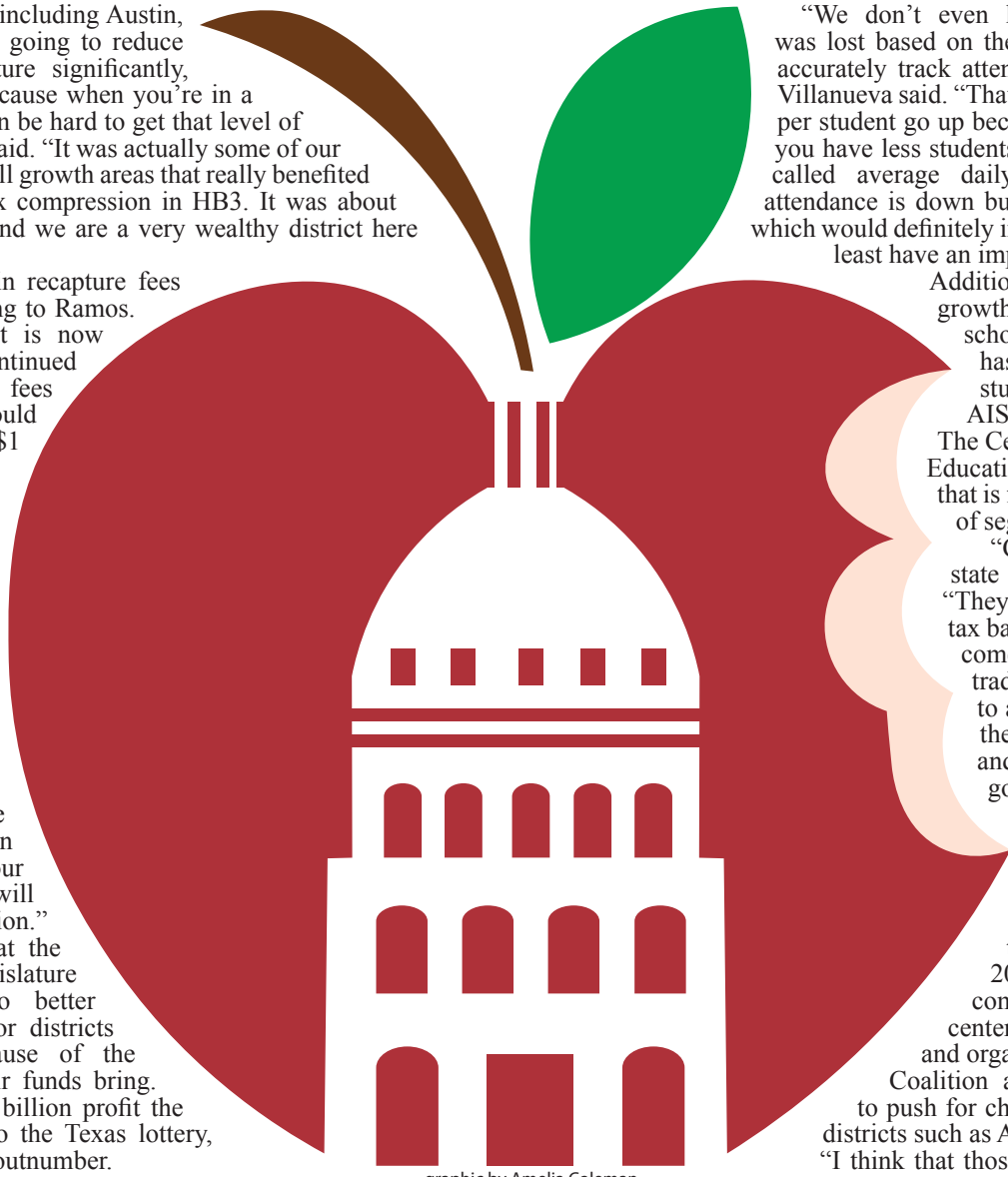
Additionally, Villanueva notes the growth of state-funded charter schools in Texas and Austin has seen a steep increase in students moving from public AISD schools to charter schools.

The Center for Reinventing Public Education notes this as a pattern that is found in cities with histories of segregation and gentrification.

"Charter schools are 100% state funded," Villanueva said. "They don't have a local property tax base to tax. All of their money comes from the state. When a traditional ISD loses a student to a charter school, that makes their wealth per student go up, and that makes their recapture go up as well, if they are a recapture district."

Even after HB3 has passed, there is still motivation for the recapture system to change. In fact, in 2019, research was done to complete a study at the Bush center at Texas A&M University, and organizations like Texas School Coalition and Every Texan continue to push for changes at the capitol to help districts such as AISD.

"I think that those who are paying the taxes need to know where their taxes are going," Rome said. "Half of that payment is going to Austin ISD, and half of that payment is now going to the state of Texas. I think that people misdirect their anger or frustrations to local leaders because that is who is closest to them, and who they see setting the budget cuts or setting the tax rates, but a lot of that is done by the state. We need people to know to talk to their state leaders."



graphic by Amelia Coleman

Austinites Adopt New Normal

AVA SPURGEON | staff writer

March 2020 was a turning point when COVID-19 closed schools across the country, and many adapted to adjust their lives by operating virtually making sure to keep a cautious distance. LASA students adapted by starting personal gardens and attending virtual school, while celebrities began to livestream their daily activities across social media. The "New Normal" is a phrase coined to discuss the uncertain future of our lives in regards to COVID-19 and how individuals and communities will continue to adapt. UT Austin public health professor Marilyn Felkner studies the way health and disease impact our communities.

"Time only moves forward, so it is more helpful to think in

"Time only moves forward, so it is more helpful to think in terms of progress than returning to a 'normal' from the past."

-UT Austin professor Marilyn Felkner

terms of progress than returning to a 'normal' from the past," Felkner said. "Our U.S. society has learned from and adapted to many challenges—wars, economic downturns and recoveries, and both improvements and setbacks in health issues. We have to live with COVID. The virus is highly unlikely to disappear."

Countries such as Norway and Denmark have taken a "Live with COVID" approach and lifted all restrictions despite high case numbers, according to The New York Times. They have resources that allow them to do this like health infrastructure, high vaccination rates, and readily available testing. In terms of Austin taking this same approach, chief of Division of Infectious Diseases at Dell Medical School Kristin Mondy believes Austin might not have the capabilities to do what certain Nordic countries have been able to do.

"We can expect such countries to have more success in just living with COVID compared to our country for a number of reasons," Mondy said. "Much higher vaccination rates, better preventive health care and outpatient healthcare infrastructure, especially compared to Texas, where our uninsured rate is double that of the U.S. overall, and fewer patients at high risk for severe COVID disease. We have much higher rates of diseases like obesity and diabetes, in part due to our health infrastructure problems."

In the future, Mondy believes that, although COVID-19 won't completely disappear, the dangers of COVID-19 will significantly decrease. She also says that with a decrease in danger, restrictions most likely wouldn't return to how they were in earlier days of the pandemic.

"If we start to have future variants that are no deadlier than seasonal influenza or are even milder like the common cold, then we can expect huge numbers of people to get infected yearly, but we shouldn't have to go back to the types of restrictions seen in the past when we had much higher attributable mortality due to earlier COVID strains," Mondy said.

Mondy believes that with a decrease in mortality rates as the pandemic progresses, it's looking like Austinites are beginning to see more of the "new normal." For the most part, many will be able to return to their pre-pandemic lives, but will add certain aspects of life during the pandemic to them as well.

"I think the new normal will eventually look similar to the 'old normal' for a number of places, such as schools, where we have learned that in-person instruction and interaction is very important," Mondy said. "However, for many businesses the pandemic has shown that working remotely can be a success and can improve costs and efficiency."

Mondy also believes that we'll have a shift in outlooks on public health and restrictions for COVID-19. This change in outlook would occur with individuals and be reflected in future metrics and restrictions, according to Mondy.

"Going forward we will probably see much fewer mask mandates and more emphasis on viewing COVID like seasonal influenza where we have more emphasis on booster shots and early outpatient therapies," Mondy said. "Many people now have some degree of natural and/or vaccination immunity, so as long as we don't have new variants that are significantly deadlier than previous ones, public health guidance for counties will shift away from using metrics such as overall case counts to metrics that take into account disease severity more."

Currently, cases in Austin are at the lowest they've been since the very early days of the pandemic, coming down from a spike in January. On March 23, the citywide mask mandate was lifted.

"Currently, there is no downside to lifting the mask mandate," Felkner said. "Both Travis County and Texas have case numbers, deaths, and hospitalizations that are as low as they were in the earliest days of the pandemic. Looking at states within the U.S. and countries around the world, locations that had strict mandates do not consistently have lower case or death rates. Mandates do not guarantee that people comply with the recommended behaviors, sometimes they have the opposite effect."

Other public health experts share this same opinion. Mondy believes the lifting of the mask mandate is a step in the right direction.

"I think it's good that we have lifted many restrictions in Austin," Mondy said. "Currently we have very high hospital capacity, vaccination rates are reasonably high, certainly higher than other parts of the state, and overall prevalence is low. In this setting and with Omicron, using masks will not help much. The main negative consequence I could see is a higher exposure risk for immunocompromised persons who might not have had a good response to the vaccine."

With the removal of the mask mandate, Austinites have begun to look ahead to a "new normal," living without masks in their daily lives. Even without masks, the future of COVID-19 is nebulous and still changing, and we must continue to monitor changing conditions, according to Felkner.

"We need to continue to promote vaccination," Felkner said. "We need to continue surveillance for variants and assess the effectiveness of the vaccine against variants. We might need to recommend resuming protective measures such as masks and social isolation if local conditions change."

Public Information Specialist for Austin Public Health Sydney Benter says that although the possibility of returning to pre-pandemic life is exciting, it's a process that won't happen immediately, and Austin's citizens should remain cautious. Benter also believes our progress should be celebrated, but that doesn't mean COVID-19 should be ignored.

"While Austin-Travis County's COVID-19 infection and hospitalization numbers are among the lowest we've seen, it's too soon to let our guards down entirely," Benter said. "There are ongoing outbreaks abroad and there could be additional variants and sub-variants for which we should be prepared. Exercise caution depending on your personal risk factors. If you're not at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and are up to date with vaccines, enjoy the progress we've made, but keep in mind we're not totally out of the woods just yet."

THE SKINNY

Some of these stories may have changed by press time.

Global News

April

Due to a drought in Somalia and South Sudan, the area is under a famine alert. According to the United Nations (UN), six million people in Somalia will soon face acute food insecurity unless the drought ends. In South Sudan, about 7.5 million people will face hunger between May and July, according to a representative from the Food and Agriculture Organization. According to the UN, the recent civil war in South Sudan was likely a contributing factor in the food instability that exists now.

April

Sepp Blatter, former Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) president, and Michel Platini, a former president of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) are facing corruption charges in Switzerland and will go on trial in June. Both FIFA and UEFA are international soccer organizations. According to ESPN, the Swiss government is citing a two million dollar payment that Blatter allegedly made to Platini fraudulently.

February - cont.

On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine, according to Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera also reported that as of March 23, 10 million Ukrainians have been displaced because of the war. Several countries and organizations, including the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Japan, and Australia have put sanctions on Russia in response to their invasion.

National News

April 12

On April 12 Oklahoma governor Kevin Stitt signed into law a bill that makes every abortion in the state illegal, except for in cases where the mother's health is at risk. There are no exceptions in the bill for victims of rape or incest. Specifically, the bill makes it illegal to perform an abortion, and violators can receive up to ten years in prison. According to the Associated Press, the bill also makes it illegal for doctors to provide abortion medication to women, which made up about 64% of abortions in Oklahoma in 2020.

April 12

President Biden introduced plans to increase the availability of ethanol and other biofuel blends of gas during the summer. This would counteract rising gas prices in the United States and give consumers a cheaper alternative. The bill would allow people to continue to buy a 15% blend of ethanol and 85% gasoline (called E15) during the summer. E15 is roughly 10 cents cheaper than typical unleaded blends of gasoline, according to Motorsport.com. However, E15 does have less energy overall, and reduces fuel efficiency by about 2%, according to AAA Colorado.

April 7

On Feb. 25 President Joe Biden nominated Judge Kentanji Brown Jackson to serve as the 116th Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. After former Justice Stephen Breyer announced his retirement on Jan. 27, Biden had been in search of a new nominee, according to the White House. Jackson had previously been a district judge for the United States District Court of Columbia, and was officially confirmed by a bi-partisan Senate with a vote of 57-43 for her position on April 7.

State News

April 12

Commercial traffic at a U.S.-Mexico land entry point was "halted temporarily," caused by Mexican protesters slowing southbound movements, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The protests at the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge are a consequence of efforts made by Texas Governor Greg Abbott that enforce safety inspections at state border ports. According to ABC57, Mexican trade groups see the inspections as redundant, and the mayor of Reynosa, Mexico, Carlos Pena Ortiz, has also declined to bring protests to a halt.

Local News

April 11

The World Champion Race for Motorcycle Racing, also known as the MotoGP, was held at the Center of the Americas just outside of Austin on April 12. Racers came from all across the globe, competing to get the fastest times across 20 laps, according to MotoGP. Italian racer Enea Bastianini took home his second world-championship title, finishing in 41 minutes and 23 seconds.

April 11

According to the Major League Soccer (MLS) website, Austin FC began their 2021 season slowly, scoring the least amount of goals recorded at just 35. However, various MLS journalists say they have since made a comeback in their 2022 season, being tied with Los Angeles FC for most goals scored so far at 14 in six games. In the last game before this was written, the team won a game against Minnesota United FC on April 11. Austin FC scored their first and only goal in the 58th minute of the game, which allowed them to beat their opponent. In the league standings, the team is currently in a playoff spot, in which this win helps boost their credentials for staying there come the end of the season.

Facing Diversity at LASA

EDITH HOLMSTEN
AVA DE LEON | student life editors

In a small town in Minnesota in 1970, four schools with special focuses were founded with the intent of gathering students from all over greater Minneapolis into a learning environment that defied the socioeconomic bounds of traditional school systems. With that, the concept of a “magnet school” was born.

Fifty years later, millions of students in the United States are enrolled in magnet schools—magnet schools like LASA. But these schools are not entirely void of bias. To combat this, students at LASA have created a variety of organizations and clubs dedicated to increasing awareness of diversity amongst the student body.

Some of the clubs that are focused on welcoming diversity at LASA are the Black and Latinx Student Union (BLSU), Minorities in Math (MIM) and Women in Computer Science club (WiCS+). In particular, BLSU hosts weekly meetings where students come to participate in a variety of culturally and socially centered events such as karaoke, potlucks, and game days. While the BLSU partakes in social events, students can also find academic events for minorities in the MIM and WiCS+ clubs. MIM meetings consist of playing math-oriented board games, and WiCS+ meetings include presentations on computer science.

According to senior and BLSU president Naiya Vasquez-Castaneda, the organizations are important to create a more unified community for students of every identity. She said BLSU has provided her with the opportunity to meet more people who share cultural backgrounds and experiences similar to her own.

“I didn’t really have a space where I had a lot of Black or Latino friends,” Vasquez-Castaneda said. “Finding a place where I could meet new people, but also develop really close relationships, was really important to me.”

The MIM and WiCS+ clubs are trying to welcome underrepresented groups at LASA who have struggled to find their place in the math and science community. Senior and WiCS+ president Luisa Mao explained their mission.

“We’re building a supportive community and environment in which people can explore computer science and make a difference—no matter how small—in overturning the lack of representation in STEM,” Mao said.

According to senior and MIM president Emilie Baillo, there is stigma around the STEM community for students who come from low-income families, which puts pressure on them to be exceptional. She said that low-income students often feel like high-level education is unattainable, further discouraging them from pursuing programs with the same level of competitiveness as LASA.

“They’re here because their opinions, their voices are valued, so that is why they were accepted into this school and program,” Baillo said.

Baillo also mentioned how important connection to opportunities is for students. During club meetings, Baillo works to provide other club members with guidance about competitions like *intEGIRLS* Houston, a math competition for female and non-binary students.

“One of the biggest resources we provide and talk about during our Friday lunch meetings is this big list of scholarships and summer programs for underrepresented communities, like free coding or engineering camps at universities,” Baillo said. “We really encourage our members to take advantage of these opportunities that are often not so readily accessible.”

Mao agreed that having connections to opportunities and role models is vital in fostering diversity in academics. In the WiCS+ club, Mao has organized many speakers, like LASA graduates Danika Luo and Hannah Saquing, who are majoring in computer science (CS) in college and can help high schoolers learn about computer science careers.

“I think it’s important to have a role model that you can relate to and see yourself in,” Mao said. “I hope that, in the future, we will see more diversity not just in CS leadership roles, but in all leadership.”

Not only are the clubs paving the way for future generations of diverse students at LASA, but they are also creating change today. Senior and BLSU member Journee Coleman talked about her experience with BLSU and other diversity organizations within the school.

“It’s always important for all kinds of people to have their own space,” Coleman said. “We have the pride club and the diversity council, but we don’t really have anything specifically for Black and brown students. So we are providing a space for people to talk about experiences that aren’t necessarily the

most positive and be able to relate to each other.”

BLSU previously invited all students regardless of their ethnicity, but the club is aiming to create an environment for Black and Latinx students specifically to connect and share experiences. This year, according to Vasquez-Castaneda, BLSU was proud to be able to reach all grade levels and include many different ethnicities and friend groups.

“It’s just nice to be able to not only relate to people about backgrounds or shared experiences, but also shared interests,” Vasquez-Castaneda said. “So finding people that fit both of those things, I think it’s just really awesome.”

Although there are some occasions in which BLSU engages in serious conversations or shares personal experiences, the club prides itself on their ability to have fun with each other, according to BLSU junior member Pierre Odom. He talked about the fun parties and events that the club has hosted.

“We can sit down and have serious conversations when we need to, but like, when it’s time to get fun and party, we go crazy,” Odom said.

The positivity these organizations are spreading has done a lot of good for the LASA community, according to Odom, but Baillo believes there is more change to come. She explained that there are still many challenges for minorities to overcome, especially at high education institutions such as LASA.

“One of the challenges that marginalized communities face in trying to break into the STEM and math field,” Baillo said, “is that it feels so advanced, and almost elitist in a sense.”

Particularly in the STEM field, Mao thinks starting to introduce ethnic students to those fields early will help with the future diversification of LASA. She talked about the importance of implementing STEM programs for students earlier on in their school career.

“Minority representation in STEM fields is important, and I believe that encouragement for underrepresented people to join STEM should start early, so why not in high schools and middle schools?” Mao said. “Lack of diversity is not a problem we can retroactively solve.”

In order to continue the growth of diversity at LASA, Mao and Baillo agreed that having conversations about representation and diversity will help minority students feel heard. The clubs help promote searching for ways to include underrepresented groups and making a more socially friendly environment.

“Retention is making sure that we maintain the level of diversity in our school, and retain our minorities,” Baillo said. “It also looks like having community events so that students don’t feel isolated and alone in their classes. They don’t feel misunderstood. They feel like their background is respected.”

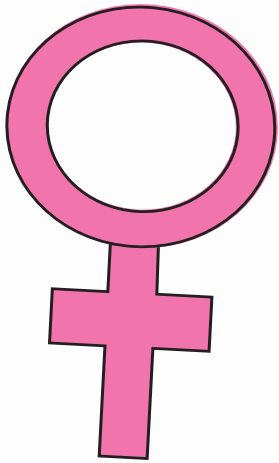
Odom said that he hoped BLSU will be able to grow in the future and unite students. He said it was important for students to feel like they had a community of understanding peers who would be able to share advice and support them throughout their high school career.

“[The future] looks like creating a more inclusive and diverse community at LASA, because LASA definitely has a reputation in history of not having a lot of diversity,” Odom said. “This club, and this student union is just one of those things that allows us to come together and have these shared experiences and be able to talk about it collaboratively.”

There are still many clubs and organizations at LASA who are looking to expand their diverse communities and reach more of the student body. Vasquez-Castaneda shared how important and grateful she was to find a group of people that she was able to connect with and relate to.

“It’s just been like such an awesome experience,” Vasquez-Castaneda said. “And something that will just help you in life and you can create these friendships that could last possibly throughout the rest of your time at school. I just really love it.”

Women’s
Rights Club



We meet during
lunch on Fridays in
room 308

Women In
COMPUTER
Science

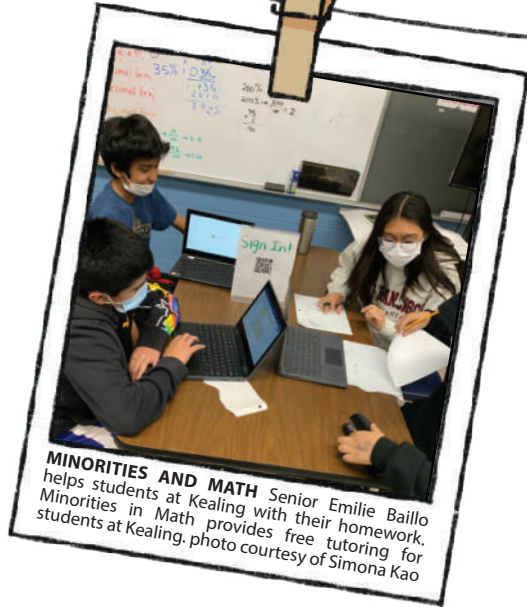
Fridays @ lunch in Room 505





The Raptor Bulletin

graphics by Kayla Le



MINORITIES AND MATH Senior Emilie Baillo helps students at Kealing with their homework. Minorities in Math provides free tutoring for students at Kealing. photo courtesy of Simona Kao



PASSIONATE PRESENTING Google software engineer Sheldon Sandbekkhaug presents for the computer science club. The club hosts a variety of speakers throughout the semester. photo courtesy of Luisa Mao



EGGTASTIC Junior Luci Garza and senior Naiya Vasquez-Castaneda have fun with cascarones. The BLSU hosts numerous culturally inspired events throughout the year. photo by Luci Garza



PIZZA AND PREP Minorities in Math club meets to discuss upcoming events. The club meets regularly to play fun math games. photo courtesy of Luisa Mao

Join BLSU

WHERE: Room 301

WHEN: Thursdays during Lunch



L P A

LASA Pride Alliance

- Room 108
- Thursdays during lunch
- Everyone is welcome



Minorities in Math Featuring: Young Scientists



In addition to helping create a community at LASA, clubs also reach out to the local community to make more students feel welcome and supported at the school. The Minorities in Math (MIM) club organized tutoring sessions at Kealing Middle School to help underprivileged students with academic work, particularly math. Student volunteers with the club go to Kealing after school.

Junior Simona Kao volunteers with the program to help students with their academic work one-on-one. Kao said most of the students are currently working on geometry problems, but they also occasionally have questions on English papers or other classes.

"A lot of them get math sheets from their classes," Kao said. "Sometimes they struggle with those, so what we will do is help them work through any really challenging problems they have and double check any previous problems they have done to understand where they are at right now and what things they do or don't get."

In addition to providing help with math problems or recommendations for class projects, senior and MIM president Emilie Baillo said the program also focuses on providing emotional support for the students. To tutor the students, Baillo said it is important to know how they learn best.

"It is the academic tutoring, making sure that they're passing all their classes and submitting all of their late work," Baillo said. "That's what we really focus on, but even between those moments we can still get to talk to them and connect. One of the successful things to being a successful tutor is making sure you have a personal and individualized connection with your tutee or your mentee."

Kao thinks the personalized aspect of tutoring is very helpful for the students. Kao has seen how it is hard for students to ask questions in a large class of 20-30 students, so Kao hopes the program can

make sure all students are supported.

"Their family income often is at the level where their parents can't afford tutoring or any special extracurricular classes like a lot of their wealthier families can, so they miss out on a lot of the one-on-one work that might help them have the most growth," Kao said. "By doing [the tutoring], we are really able to focus on the students' specific needs."

Along with providing academic support, Baillo said the tutoring also provides middle school students with role models to look up to. Since many of the volunteers graduated from the Young Scientist program themselves, Baillo hopes the middle school students are empowered to believe they can have the same success in high school. Baillo said outreach to underprivileged communities is an important part of diversifying LASA.

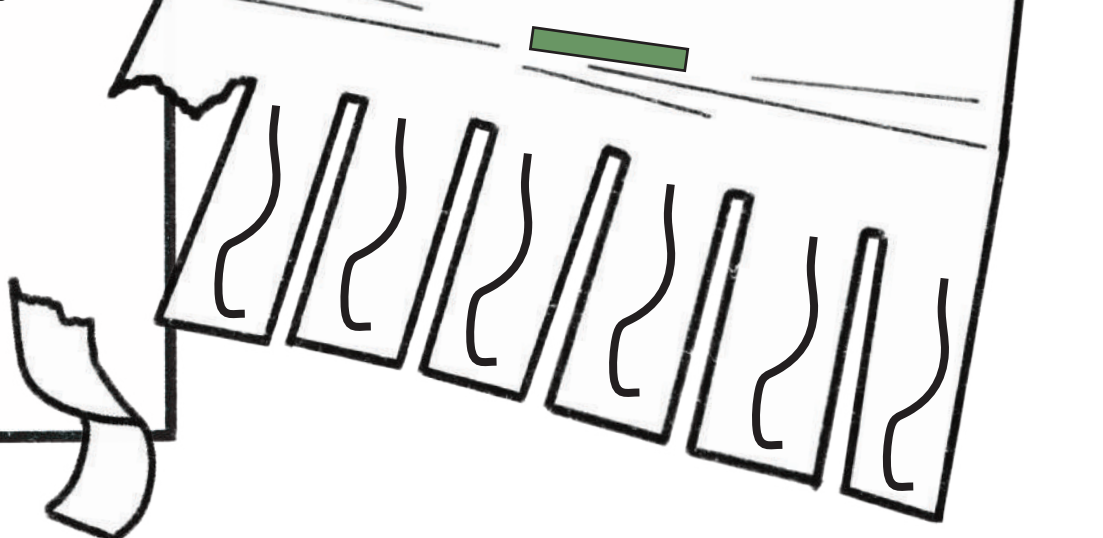
"[Recruitment] looks like reaching out to these title one middle schools [and] having programs where LASA students are interacting with lower income and underrepresented middle schoolers so that they're aware of their options," Baillo said. "Even if they don't come to LASA, they have the resources to feel like coming to LASA is an achievable and accessible task and goal."



MINORITIES IN MATH



FRIDAYS
T201b during
lunch



An Analysis of AI How Algorithms Affect Teens

AURNA MUKHERJEE | club contributor

Artificial intelligence (AI), or the simulation of human intelligence processed by machines, is used in many aspects of students' life, including their communication with friends and social platforms. AI algorithms are heavily utilized in the domain of social media, and the algorithms' filtering of material can change how students view themselves, their peers and world events. There are several efforts to increase awareness about the challenges that algorithms pose and prevent the software from harming students.

One main issue when designing algorithms is the threat of algorithmic bias, or repeated errors resulting in unethical outcomes. LASA class of 2021 graduate Lily Yeazell is majoring in Computer Science at MIT, and she said she has noticed that the problem stems from existing cultural and social trends from the data fed into the algorithm. Because it has no moral conscience, Yeazell said algorithms can have extreme effects, from widening the partisan divide to facilitating online hate speech.

"[Algorithms] might be correct for 95% of the time, but the other 5% of the time, it just gets ignored, and it can have bad effects," Yeazell said. "In general, applying statistical calculations to people is never good because people aren't numbers."

In order to increase retention, Yeazell said social media is reliant on algorithms that create targeted media to influence users. Algorithms in TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are a perfect example of this, according to Yeazell. In these applications, algorithms are used to serve targeted advertisements to users to increase their click rate, according to Yeazell. This in turn maximizes profits for these companies.

"There's an algorithm in TikTok that tries to find what you like and give you more of that," Yeazell said. "It also gives you advertisements to try to buy more things. This is something that is very geared towards youth and generates this addiction to screens that we have."

On average, teenagers engage in more than 6.5 hours of screen time every day, according to Common Sense Media. Sophomore Gideon Witchel said teenagers screen time usage is due in part to algorithms that are designed to be addictive. He believes that while AI can be useful, the software's impact on social media users is potentially damaging.

"[Algorithms] care a lot about you interacting with them for as long as physically possible, and they don't care about how that affects you, and they don't really care about you being a good person or an ethical person, or even a healthy person," Witchel said. "They just care about you interacting with their platform as much as possible. I think algorithms are making that much more efficient and easy to do, and that's probably a bad thing."



graphic by JC Ramirez Delgadillo

According to Witchel, increased interaction with algorithms designed to be engaging can have several negative effects. For example, Brigham Young University found there is a clear correlation with the increase of social media usage and teen self-harm, as users can fall into a cycle of comparing themselves with others, leading them into a state of depression. Witchel criticizes social media companies' lack of response to the issue.

"We are in a world where companies only care about making money," Witchel said. "They will take as many steps as possible to achieve that goal, even if it means destroying the mental health of youth."

Computer Science teacher James Shockey understands how social media platforms such as Facebook have dealt with some of these issues. He is especially concerned with the private data that corporations have access to for individual users.

"Facebook is trying to work through freedom of speech while eliminating hate speech, so there are some concerns there," Shockey said. "I think that in general, I would be concerned by the collection of large sets of data by corporate entities, because we now have tools for data mining that never existed before."

In order to address these issues, there is a call for transparency from larger technology corporations that are financially incentivized to design such algorithms. Shockey said it is necessary to understand how personal information provided to these corporations are used, and how it affects us. Sophomore Emily Lucas is also concerned about a lack of transparency about the extent to which algorithms shape what students see each day.

"A lot of companies aren't very open about what they are doing," Lucas said, "so this might be concerning because [people] do not know what is going on."

This exact issue is why there is a need for regulations to control how algorithms are used, according to Lucas. There are already efforts in place to increase regulation on algorithmic bias. For example, the Filter Bubble Transparency Act requires social media companies to offer a feature that allows users to turn off data input that generates algorithmic recommendations, according to PetaPixel, a photography company.

In addition to this, President Joe Biden has proposed efforts to secure the privacy of social media users, prevent targeted advertisements specifically towards children, and ban social media companies from collecting private data on children, according to The Hill, a newspaper in Washington, D.C. These efforts are meant to better the mental health of children who are affected by these algorithms. Yeazell said that these are promising steps towards a journey for greater controls over algorithmic bias. Yeazell also said individuals can work to solve the problems by being more conscious of the role of algorithms on their experiences on social media.

"Algorithms are essentially just being used to make their product more addictive," Yeazell said. "Creating more awareness on this is generally good."

Ready, Set, Release the Robots Robotics Team's First Competitions Since March 2020

AVA SPURGEON | staff writer

Purple Haze, LASA's resident robotics team, attended their first competitions since 2020 this spring. Their first one was in Channelview on March 12 and 13, followed by a competition in Amarillo the weekend of April 1.

Senior and robotics team member Eddie Vane was inspired to join the robotics team after attending a LASA showcase while in middle school and seeing their impressive robots. Once Vane joined the team, he learned there were more steps to the robotics process than he initially thought. The team received their challenge instructions in January and then began the long process of creating the competition robot.

"We look through the handout and the rules to come up with all of the stuff we could possibly do," Vane said. "Then we split off into groups and do brainstorming of possible things we could build to accomplish the challenge."

"Competition is honestly so much fun. Being able to build something and watch something you built win is amazing."

- Senior Larissa Borg

According to Vane, the entire robotics team works in smaller groups that specialize in different aspects of creating the robot. Senior Larissa Borg, for example, works with the electronics team on wiring the robot.

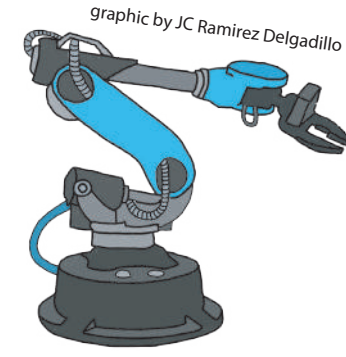
"There are a lot of different roles," Borg said. "I do electronics, so I do anything that involves wiring the robot. There's also build, who is anyone who comes up with the concept of the robot, and then there's programming."

Once the team decides on their roles and on their robot model, the team begins construction. Vane works on the build team to design parts.

"We do prototypes then vote on which prototype we want to go with," Vane said. "Then [we] split off into teams and build everything, assemble it all together, then give it to electronics and code to let them make everything move."

While the students have a procedure for building their robot, the format of the competition is more unknown. The judges' requirements for the robots change every season.

"We get a game each year that we have to accomplish a goal to," Borg said. "This year, we have to shoot a ball into two separate goals, one goal which is much higher up, which gives more points. We also have to do vertically ascending monkey bars where we have to make our robot climb to the very last one."



graphic by JC Ramirez Delgadillo

Vane was thankful for the three weeks between the competitions. The team had an opportunity to learn from mistakes in March and re-evaluate in time for April.

"We were using it as a shakedown to see everything that was going to work on our robot, and getting to actually stress test everything in a real competitive environment was really fun," Vane said. "This time we're actually going to

get to show off everything our robot can do after we got to see everything that would break at the last one."

After their first competition, the team reassessed their plan to better prepare for their next one in Amarillo. The team said the Amarillo competition is particularly important because teams that do well in Amarillo progress to the state championship.

"We work out kinks in the robot, so we look at footage from past competitions, and we see what we can improve on," Borg said. "Last competition we did not do so well, so we knew what improvements we had to make, and we were able to improve those."

According to junior Mason Tateosian, the team wasn't quite as prepared for their first competition in Channelview as they wished they could have been. Tateosian is the driver of the robot at the competitions they attend.

"Because LASA moved schools this year we didn't have a lot of time because we still had to set up the entire new shop, and so we were really pressed for time to get our robot finished," Tateosian said. "We realized that our time management skills were not very present for the first competition, so we did a lot of planning and redoing and reformatted our process of how we did things."

Despite the challenges they faced with the first competition, the team felt more confident about their competition in April, according to Vane. After reviewing their performance, the team reworked their robot to fix certain problems.

"For our next one, I would say we've got cautious optimism," Vane said. "There are a couple of kinks we've still got to work out, but compared to where we were before we went to Channelview, I would say we're in a pretty good spot."

After the adjustments on their robot, the team placed sixth in the Amarillo competition and advanced to the State Championships, which took place the first week of April. The team unfortunately did not advance to the World Championships, but Borg is glad to be on the team regardless. Borg likes the chance to compete.

"Competition is honestly so much fun," Borg said. "Personally, I'm not very athletic, so being able to build something and watch something you built win is amazing. It didn't happen last time, but my first year in 2020, we ended up winning our competition and that was a core memory for me. It's ingrained in my life, that feeling of winning."



graphic by Amelia Coleman

See page 18 for photos and more information

Senior Reflections on the Year

NAYAN KONDAPALLI | staff writer

The LASA Class of 2022 seniors had a different four years in high school than they expected. Their sophomore and junior year were both affected by COVID-19, which meant many juniors missed many academic and social experiences in high school. On top of that, seniors had to adjust to a brand new building for their last year in high school. With those changes, many seniors find themselves in a unique situation as they reflect on their high school years.

Senior William Ward was surprised by his loose schedule and more free time during his junior year. Ward said he expected his junior year to be the hardest year at LASA because that is when most students take two physics classes, multiple AP classes, and the SAT or ACT. However, COVID-19 altered these quintessential experiences, and Ward relaxed more compared to his busy schedule before the pandemic.

"I always kept a tight schedule to make sure I stayed on top of my classes," Ward said. "[I was] not sleeping relatively late, waking up generally early, but during online classes that pretty much flipped. [I was] sleeping really late and waking up 2 minutes before class."

Ward said the schedule change combined with the less strict environment of online school led him to put less effort into his classes. As he reflected on high school, Ward questioned the amount of time he put into his school work freshman year.

"It wasn't like I didn't care about school or was doing worse," Ward said. "My grades were actually better, but with how much easier a lot of classes got with Zoom, even the infamously harder ones, there was no need to put in as much work when I was getting better results."

Senior Abdullah Sharif has also shared Ward's experiences of lower academic challenges during his junior year than he expected. He said he particularly noticed a change once he returned to in-person school for senior year.

"A lot of the teachers last year didn't really require students to attend all the classes or attend for only a portion of the class and then made most assignments asynchronous," Sharif said. "Because of that, I didn't really find myself forcing to maintain a tight schedule so that I don't fall behind, and it made it such that I didn't have anything most days, so I definitely got a lot lazier."

In addition to having his expectations changed due to COVID-19, Sharif said he did not guess during his freshman year that his senior year would be at a new campus. Moving to a new school building was an initial struggle, according to Sharif.

"It was genuinely tough trying to adjust to normal school life again," Sharif said. "Having a new school building made the first week that much harder with having to constantly thinking about where my classes are and trying to figure out a new morning routine so that I can arrive to school on time."

Even though the experiences of Ward and Sharif can apply to a lot of the seniors at LASA, not everyone had the same experience. Senior Hamzah Rasool reflected that COVID-19 affected him less due to his teacher's continued structure and assignments even during online school.

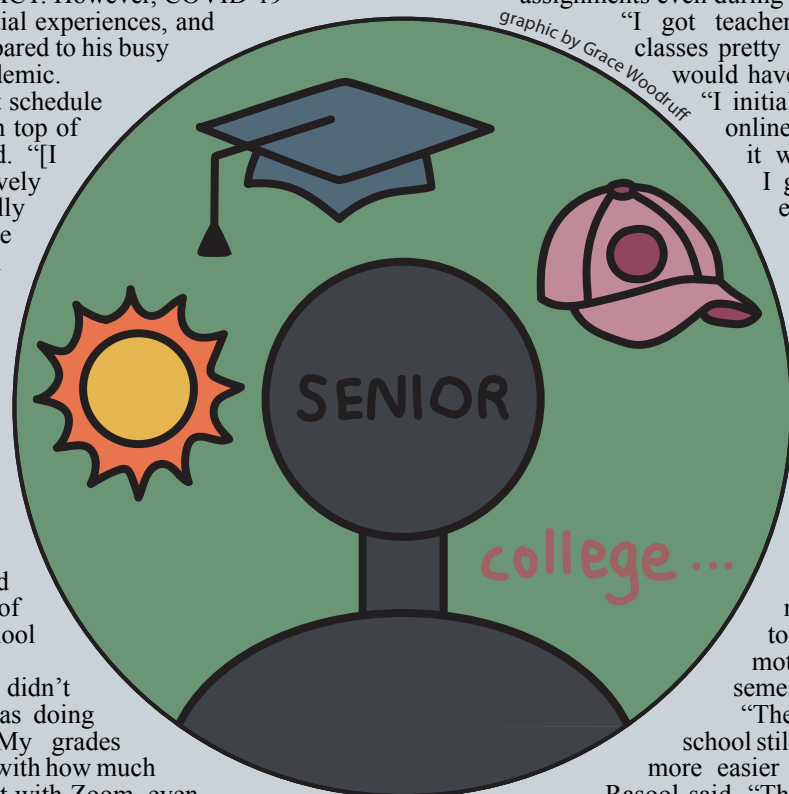
"I got teachers that maintained their classes pretty much the same way they would have in-person," Rasool said. "I initially thought it sucked that online school wasn't as easy as it was for some others, but I guess I was lucky that it ended up helping me with adjusting back to normal school even with the new campus."

Once they were in their last semester though, Ward, Sharif, and Rasool all experienced less pressure to maintain their grades or do well on AP tests. Rasool said since he already received college decisions and only needs to pass his classes to graduate, he feels less motivated during the second semester.

"There was no doubt online school still made junior year so much more easier compared to in-person," Rasool said. "There will now always be a part of me that will try to do less work if I can, and this last semester is the perfect opportunity."

As the seniors look ahead to senior salute on May 31, and graduation on June 1, they are feeling relaxed about the end of the year. Ward said his expectations for senior year are different than he expected, but he is happy about how his senior year is ending.

"I am definitely much more relaxed than I thought I would be around the second semester," Ward said. "I always assumed that I would have a decent amount of willpower to complete school work, but knowing how little work I have to do due to online school, I am definitely in the same position [as online school]."



graphic by Grace Woodruff

Students Apply for Study Abroads Across the Globe

SARAH GARRETT | staff writer

Many students participate in studying abroad as a way to immerse themselves in a new culture. After two years of travel being limited due to COVID-19, some students are going on study abroad programs this year to learn about the culture of the language they are learning and immerse themselves in other traditions.

Through the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) and other study abroad programs, students have the opportunity to live with a host family in a foreign country. Sophomore Elizabeth Duarte is going on a study abroad program for four weeks in Berlin, Germany, over the summer.

"I've always wanted to travel, and I've never gotten to travel overseas, and also [because I'm] taking German, this is my best opportunity to really get into German," Duarte said. "I also thought it was a great opportunity, since it seems like a really safe program, and I've heard really good things about it."

Although Duarte is excited about the program, she has to be accepted into the CIEE program first, which involves multiple essays and a teacher recommendation. According to senior Kollin Clarke, though, most of the application process is applying for scholarship money.

"Applying for the program itself is not that difficult," Clarke said. "Most of the application process was in applying for scholarships. There's a merit scholarship that I applied for, and that required you to write three essays."

German teacher Christopher Parks understands that writing essays or asking for recommendations can be intimidating for some students, but he believes studying abroad is a great way for students to learn about other cultures. Parks encourages German students to apply to the programs.

"I've just really tried to be an advocate for [study abroad programs]," Parks said. "Any year I would, but particularly since we don't get to go this year as a group, so there are some students who are juniors, and after their senior year, they're not going to be able to go on the exchange, so I wanted them to have something to experience."

Along with the application process, managing how to travel safely amid the pandemic has been a challenge. Normally, students in the German language department would have the opportunity to travel as a whole class to Berlin, Germany, instead of students traveling individually.

"The German department goes to Berlin every second year, but because of the pandemic, we've delayed it two summers," Parks said. "Our plan is to go next summer, 2023, and then after we go in the summer, the Germans come visit us that same fall, fall of 2023. We're there for three weeks. They're here for about three weeks. We only do it every other year, so that every class theoretically would get an option to do it during their four years at LASA."

"I've always been interested somewhat in the German language and culture, and it's just nice to finally have direct exposure to that by going right to the source."

- Sophomore Miguel Lathrop

Clarke's study abroad plans were also impacted by COVID-19, but he is still committed to learn a language in a foreign country before his time in high school ends. His original plan was to study abroad in Shanghai.

"Chinese specifically has so many dialectical differences depending on where you are, and it's so deeply entrenched," Clarke said. "The culture affects the language so much, and so that's why I set up the Chinese one."

However, Clarke learned that the program to China was canceled, so Clarke looked into other programs with a similar focus on culture. Clarke now plans to go to Prague.

"I found the studio arts one and that allows me to study art and have still been in a country where I can learn a new language and experience how the culture interacts," Clarke said.

Despite travel challenges, sophomore Miguel Lathrop was able to join an abroad program with CIEE for one month in Berlin. Lathrop is also looking forward to experiencing a new culture.

"It'll be my first time going out of the country, which is obviously thrilling," Lathrop said. "I've always been interested somewhat in the German language and culture, and it's just nice to finally have direct exposure to that by going right to the source."

Lathrop was inspired to apply to a study abroad program because of his teacher, Parks. On the other hand, sophomore Jared Reyes was inspired to apply because of his friend's interest in CIEE programs.

"It was basically my friend who talked to me about [the program]," Reyes said. "They were going to apply for a summer abroad program. And then I [thought I] should look into an abroad program. From there, I went on their website, made my account, and I looked into the different programs that were available. I chose the one that I thought would be most interesting."

Reyes will be doing the advanced Spanish language and culture summer program in Madrid. One of the things he is most looking forward to is exploring the city.

"In the program, they say they have a lot of activities, like where you bike around, or they show you tours around the city," Reyes said. "You would also be able to live with a family while you're staying in Madrid. I thought that would be a cool experience because you get to talk Spanish the entire month, and it'll be more natural because you're talking to native speakers."

Whether students are going to Germany, Spain, or elsewhere, many are interested in traveling to other countries. Studying abroad is a unique way for students to improve their language skills and explore a new city, according to Parks.

"It just is a great process of opening your mind to different cultural perspectives beyond those four walls that surround each of us individually or here, as a local central Texan, and the experiences that we have, and how different those can be from the different kinds of perspectives about all kinds of daily topics," Parks said.



graphic by Grace Woodruff

PALS Upperclassmen Volunteer at Elementary Schools

LANA GILES | staff writer

Twice a week, upperclassmen go to elementary schools during third period and organize activities with younger students. Their trips are coordinated with the Peer Assistance, Leadership, and Service (PALS) elective class at LASA open to juniors and seniors. The goal of the program is to help elementary students develop their communication skills and confidence by playing games.

Junior Rhea Moran originally heard of PALS through friends. She signed up for the class initially not knowing a lot about what students do in the class, but she realized that she enjoyed working with younger kids in the class.

"During the application process, I learned more about the class and realized that it seemed like something I'd really like to do," Moran said. "I have two younger siblings, and because of that, the class had a more personal aspect for me."

For others, PALS is an opportunity to help their community. Sophomore Roman Edwards applied to PALS for next school year because Edwards feels strongly about making a beneficial impact on others in the ways PALS provides.

"I was interested because I wanted to help younger kids with their education and teach them new things," Edwards said. "I also wanted to make a difference by helping out."

Basketball coach Joseph Pendell is the sponsor for PALS at LASA. Pendell said that the start of the school year has less interaction with the elementary school students and more focus on building relationships between students in PALS so that the upperclassmen know how to work together.

"At the start of the year, we spend about the first six weeks learning the expectations of the program and getting to know one another by exploring topics in our society, personal biases, and how we interact with each other," Pendell said.

Following this learning portion of the school year, PALS moves on to mentoring elementary students. Once students are prepared, Moran said the students pair up with their PALees, who are students at Govalle and Overton Elementary Schools, and spend class time connecting with the students.



COMING PREPARED Senior Megha Siddapureddy and Junior Xue Rojas-Tang pull out games to play with elementary schoolers at Govalle. Upperclassmen design activities to help younger kids socialize and make new friends. photo by Luci Garza

"We check in with the front office before going to pick up our kids from their classes," Moran said. "We play games with them or solve puzzles. On the days that we aren't meeting up with our PALS, we stay at LASA and have flex days or make cards for our kids."

Pendell said the days where students go to the elementary schools are very rewarding. The beginning of the year lessons on leadership and group communication help the upperclassmen organize a variety of activities with the students, according to Pendell.

"We visit each school weekly during the class period and provide a one-hour session working with the elementary school kids on academics, social skills, and creating a positive bond," Pendell said. "Depending on the day, the PALS interact in a one-on-one or small group setting with their PALee. The focus is always to foster and maintain both a rapport and strong relationship built on trust and empathy."

According to Pendell, PALS has produced excellent mentors. It is only his second year heading the program, but Pendell said the success of the collaboration with elementary schools is a credit to the PALS program.

"The students in the class do such a good job working with their PALees," Pendell said. "I always get reports from our partnering schools on how much the younger kids enjoy working with their PALS and look forward to the meetings."

Being in PALS is a different experience for each person. Moran said that it's sometimes a struggle to engage the younger kids.

"It's sometimes really hard to connect with the kids because they're so young and have moments where they don't want to cooperate," Moran said. "I think it's important for us to remember that we can fall back on Mr. Pendell or other PALS to ask for help because sometimes we don't have all the answers."

For prospective PALS, the idea of being in the class is exciting. Edwards is looking forward to potentially being a PALS mentor.

"I am most excited to travel to other schools and meet the kids that we help," Edwards said. "I want to learn how to become a better mentor, as well as meet new people while volunteering."

From PALS, Pendell said that students have gained the ability to create lasting impacts and hopefully have an enjoyable, rewarding experience. Pendell recommends the class to students hoping to gain leadership experience.

"For LASA students that work well with younger kids, enjoy the mentoring process, and are looking to create a positive impact on others, I would absolutely recommend the class," Pendell said. "I do understand that sometimes conflicts in scheduling occur, but PALS is a great way for high school students to give back to the community."

Moran said that PALS has been a great learning experience for her. She and her PALees have grown together, and being in PALS has fostered her skills.

"We have made an impact on the kids because I personally have been able to watch my PALS get more confident and expressive throughout the school year," Moran said. "One of my kids was really shy at first and didn't like speaking in English, but now she's the one to initiate games or talk about her weekend unprompted. At the very least, we've helped them create a bond with older kids who will encourage their growth."



COLORING IN THE SUN Junior Norah Kelly colors pages with her PALee. Besides working on art projects, Kelly also leads students in group activities twice a week. photo by Luci Garza



GROUP COLLABORATION PALS students gather at Govalle Elementary School to play games. LASA students spent a few weeks during the first semester practicing activities and leadership skills, so they are ready to lead the children. photo by Luci Garza



FISHING FOR A GOOD TIME LASA students play Go Fish and other games with elementary school students. The students meet twice a week during third period to provide the elementary schoolers with mentors. photo by Luci Garza



graphic by Susan Ballesteros

Liberator's Picks Feature Movies from SXSW



AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION Director Colin West conducts the audience as they sing the words "above and beyond." He attended SXSW for the premiere of his space-themed movie "Linoleum." photo by Susan Ballesteros

"Linoleum" - Colin West

SUSAN BALLESTEROS | entertainment editor

"Linoleum" thrives on being confusing. It invites viewers to a hazy, zigzagging rocket ship ride that starts with a red car falling from the sky, only to reveal the answer was there all along in a burst of rocket fire. The film follows a fracturing suburban family after a satellite crashes into their backyard. Forced to relocate into a relative's house as their own home becomes a government crime scene, their problems only evolve from there. Issues range from new neighbors moving in across their old house to the astronomy-obsessed dad, Cameron Edwin, deciding the only logical conclusion to their problems is to build his own rocketship from the resulting satellite scraps in an attempt to live through a childhood dream of being an astronaut. Weird but captivating to the end, "Linoleum" gives the viewer insight into the wonders of life and the potential that comes from following one's dreams.

"The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent" - Tom Gormican

KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editor

"The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent" is an enthralling, hilarious, and touching film that blends reality and absurdity into a perfect mix. Centered around the protagonist, Nick Cage, played by actor Nick Cage, the film has a fast-paced action movie type plot peppered with throwbacks to movies and the toll of the movie industry. Cage is a burnt-out, aging actor dealing with the life he has made for himself who suddenly gets swept up into an adventure that he didn't sign up for that helps return his passion to him. The film features lavish scenery while also dealing with the complications of friendship. A love letter to Nick Cage's career, the twists and turns of the story keep it engaging, and the excitement and emotion add depth to the story. Overall the movie brings together action, comedy, family, and Nick Cage into one great thing.

"Apollo 10 1/2: A Space Age Adventure" - Richard Linklater

NORAH HUSSAINI | web editor

A ten-year-old child blowing chunks in a lunar module isn't necessarily what I expect to see in the first ten minutes of a movie, but "Apollo 10 1/2" proved to be an outlier of the norm in many aspects. Following a young Stan throughout the 1960s, the movie traverses skillfully through the decade, weaving nostalgia, mesmerizing and life-like animation, and real-world issues such as the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. The entirety of the film, which was shown this year at SXSW, contains reminders of the preface, in which Stan is chosen to pilot a lunar module that NASA has built slightly smaller than intended. He aspires to become an astronaut and work at the shiny, brand new, state-of-the-art NASA facility that lies outside of his little Houston suburb, which leaves the watcher wondering if this dream is simply wishful thinking. The ability to interpret the film any which way is one of the most enjoyable things about it, but what is truly extraordinary is that the film can wholly transport one to a time period, regardless of whether or not they were in-person to experience it.



TO THE MOVIES The marquee in front of the Paramount Theatre in downtown Austin has the title of the movie "The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent." The film premiered during SXSW as part of the headliner lineup. photo by Susan Ballesteros

EDU Innovation Rocks SXSW

**SARAH GARRETT
ELLA LILLY** | staff writers

While the second week of SXSW is packed with live music, film, new technology, and business adventures, the first week of SXSW has its own lineup. Focused on the youth and how they'll change the world, SXSW Education (SXSW EDU) allows administrators, teachers, and startups to collaborate and be exposed to ideas to take back to the classroom.

Located at the Austin Convention Center, the SXSW EDU lineup this year consisted of mentor sessions, a student startup competition, and sessions led by speakers from around the world. An exposition open throughout the day showcases innovative technology and businesses that enrich students' learning experiences while considering the issues, systemic and otherwise, the education system faces.

Senior Director of Education for Firia Labs Alexis Harry is one of the entrepreneurs who came to SXSW EDU to advertise their company. Firia Labs makes coding and engineering kits with the goal of educating students about coding in a fun way.

"We wanted to get the name out there to get more brand recognition," Harry said. "We wanted to share our invention and educational style with the world. And we were originally supposed to come out here a couple of years ago, when, everyone knows, that nasty thing called corona stopped everyone from doing

anything. So once they decided to open it back up, we still had our slot, so we just had to come out here and tell our story."

Harry is not the only person who has been drawn to SXSW EDU after the pandemic. Hari Kunduru, the founder of Zoptiks, a company that specializes in virtual field trips and Zoom apps, attended SXSW EDU as a startup company.

"This is one of the first bigger education conferences after COVID," Kunduru said. "This is the place to be for any new tech startup in the education space."

Similar to Kunduru, it was also Mitchell LeGrand's first conference since the pandemic started. LeGrand and his partner, Yura Fora, work at H2O For Life, a nonprofit that educates students about the global water crisis.

"It's the first conference that we've been to since the pandemic started, we're very excited about that," LeGrand said. "We know that this is where teachers come for innovative ideas, cool ways to approach problems in their classrooms, and new resources for their classrooms, so we hope to talk to teachers and educators."

Greg Norwood came to SXSW EDU to learn about startup companies as well as attend lectures. Norwood enjoyed the opportunity to learn about higher education institutions.

"I've been intentional about the opportunities that were present—I'm really looking at race, diversity, equity, and inclusion," Norwood said. "I've also been having conversations around

whiteness, and having a conversation around cancel culture and what that means and organizing what that means in youth engagement."

Learning about new innovative programs and ideas to improve businesses is one of the main draws of SXSW EDU, according to Chief Technology Officer of Magma Math Ludvig Brisby Jeppsson. Jeppsson finds it easier to meet potential clients at events such as this one.

"Last year, during COVID, teachers and schools were very busy, and they have been working really, really hard to keep the education system going," Jeppsson said. "You don't want to bother them in their daily work, so it can be really hard for a company to get in contact with schools and districts. It's better to go to a conference and meet them here."

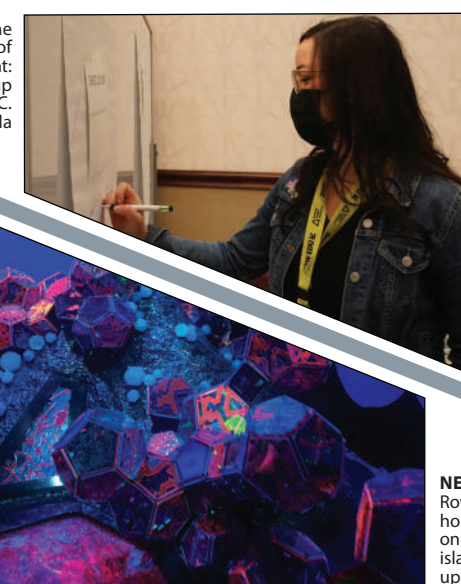
Magma Math is a digital math platform for students in K-12. The company was founded in Sweden, expanded in Europe, and is now trying to make its way to America.

"We just want to come to conferences to meet potential customers, partners, and investors," Jeppsson said. "We try to figure out what we need to tweak or change in order to be successful in this market."

SXSW EDU allows teachers, educators, customers, and entrepreneurs alike the opportunity to learn new things and teach others about their ideas. From math-based learning to robotics lessons, to virtual field trips, SXSW EDU can be the place for a number of new and innovative ideas.



EDUCATORS LEARN Left: A participant at the interactive "Free Speech in the Age of Cancel Culture" seminar. Right: Representatives of startup Accordia Power, LLC. photos by Ella Lilly



NEON UNIVERSE Left: Rows of miniature, neon houses sit on a crafted hill within one of many islands. Right: A different island contains a similar neon landscape made up of geometric shapes. photos by Delia Rune

The Meow Wolf Experience

DELIA RUNE | finance director

A display of fantastical "islands" with windows that allowed visitors to peer inside and see the magic-themed scenes displayed within. That was the exhibit that the organization Meow Wolf showcased at this year's SXSW.

Meow Wolf is an arts organization that creates large installations and digital pieces. They have permanent exhibitions in Santa Fe, Las Vegas, and Denver. During SXSW, Meow Wolf opened a pop-up exhibition on Third Street in Austin. Marley Zollman, a Meow Wolf representative at the pop up, explained what the exhibit represented.

"Sometimes ideas get lost over time—they kind of transform," Zollman said. "They happen in different worlds. So this is Meow Wolf's attempt at overcoming scarcity and the ideas of failure with collective consciousness and creativity."

Many visitors came to look at the Meow Wolf pop-up. One of these visitors, Blake Hunter, was from Savannah, Georgia, and spent a lot of time learning about Meow Wolf before coming to visit the pop-up.

"We had a whole day learning about Meow Wolf in my experimental film and installation class," Hunter said. "They always have lots of great images and cool lighting effects."

Some visitors were Meow Wolf

veterans and came to the pop-up because they enjoyed the permanent exhibits they had seen in places like Santa Fe or Denver. One such visitor, Amy Jacobowitz, thought the new experience was interesting because it was so different from traditional Meow Wolf exhibits.

"Obviously, it's very different from the Santa Fe one," Jacobowitz said. "But it's like you really step into another world. This is amazing. And to be right in downtown Austin and step into this alternative universe is fun."

One aspect of the exhibit were the QR codes posted around the art pieces to scan for more background on the people in the piece. Visitors got to go deeper into the fictional world of the installation through both the windows in the exhibits and these QR codes.

"Each island is part of a greater narrative that, if you scan the QR, is interactive," Zollman said. "This one particular piece has field notes and there are all of these artifacts that are attached to each section in the exhibition."

Visitors got the opportunity to dive deeper into each storyline. Jacobowitz felt like this was a nice similarity between other Meow Wolf pieces he'd seen.

"It's cool," Jacobowitz said. "I feel like, as with the very best of Meow Wolf things, you can take it in from here and then you can walk a step deeper and there are other stories to tell."

Zollman thought SXSW was a natural location for a Meow Wolf exhibit such as this one. It is a place where many people can experience whatever is being offered.

"Well, I think SXSW is a meeting of minds across film and tech, and Austin is a really big city coming up in the tech world," Zollman said. "So I think that it only makes sense that Meow Wolf would come. It's also in the region—the southwest region—so it makes sense since they're based out of Santa Fe."

Zollman explained that the interactive window elements of this art piece allowed it to be whatever visitors wanted it to be. Attendees got to choose how much they wanted to learn about each island.

"You'll go on a deep dive, or as deep as you want to dive into the stream, and learn a bit about the creative process of these islands," Zollman said. "This pop-up gives you the chance to learn more about what the greater story is about, rather than a single plotline."



WORM PEAK A window shows a sad worm sitting at a table, which is part of an exhibit. photo by Delia Rune



photos by Susan Ballesteros, Katie Busby, JC Ramirez Delgado, Sarah Garrett, Kayla Le, Ella Lilly, and Delia Rune

Indie's Where It's At in Austin

KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editor
LILI XIONG | commentary editor

For one week, SXSW takes over Austin's music scene with an endless number of live concerts showcasing bands from around the world. Of course, there are many genres of music featured, but one genre they have a lot of is smaller indie bands who come to play and gain recognition at the big festival. Indie started as more of a word to describe how music was produced, but today has branched out to describe a genre of music that encompasses many styles.

The SXSW music festival hosts bands from various parts of the world, including various indie bands. Among them is an indie dream pop band called ViVii who came from Sweden to play the show. The band's members are Emil and Caroline Jonsson and Anders Eckborn. Caroline Jonsson said they were going to play three shows in total, and this was their first time at the festival.

"This is our first time here and we love it so we want to come back very soon," Jonsson said. "We missed playing in person so much, it's been crazy and this is like a dream come true. We're so happy and it's been really amazing."

Flipturn, a five-piece indie rock band, originated in Florida. The lead singer, Dillon Basse, said they greatly enjoy playing in Austin and SXSW was fun for them.

"This was our first time at SXSW, and even though we were only there for a day, it 100% lived up to its reputation," Basse

said. "We definitely fit the stereotype of an artist at SXSW, rolling amp cases through crowded streets rushing from one show to the next."

SXSW is a very unique experience, according to Flipturn's lead guitarist Tristan Duncan. He also said they were very happy to be playing live again.

"It's certainly different from any other festival we've played," Duncan said. "At this point, we honestly haven't played too many of the bigger festivals to provide an accurate take on it, but the whole thing being in downtown Austin with a thousand other bands, and even more industry and concertgoers, is definitely not like the others. The closest I'd say is Treefort in Boise, Idaho—it being spread around a downtown area totally reminded me of SXSW. In regards to the speed of things, other festivals are definitely very fast around the clock, but SXSW was probably the quickest in-and-out succession of shows I've been a part of, and it was so fun."

Both Flipturn and ViVii categorize themselves as indie artists along with their own individual genres. According to ViVii members, they have a bigger following in Europe, but they have toured in the United States before.

"It's difficult to describe our music, but people have described it as like indie dream pop, and I think that that is kind of accurate and it sums it up," Jonsson said. "We love to feel something, and it's just like dreaming."

According to Basse, Flipturn's

music style is cinematic indie rock because they draw strong influences from movie soundtracks. They define themselves as indie, but believe that the term is complicated.

"There's definitely an overlap of the 'indie' genre and the 'indie' approach to the music industry," Duncan said. "We grew up hearing the horror stories of bands under record labels, so we naturally felt inclined to our share of skepticism. In turn, we've been slowly building a team of like-minded individuals who share our passion, and frankly have given us so many incredible opportunities with our best interests in mind. It feels as if we are all supporting each other's aspirations with the platform of the band."



ALT-POP PINK Singer Sarah Kinsley performs a set for SXSW. She ended the night with "The King," which is her current most-streamed song on Spotify. photo by Katie Busby



FROM AROUND THE WORLD Left: Constant Followers member Stephen McCall sits in the Scottish countryside. Middle: Melissa Brooks, lead singer of The Aquadolls, stands in front of various posters. Right: Musical artist Christina Wheeler stands in front of a black backdrop. photos courtesy of Stephen McCall (left), Melissa Brooks (middle), and Christina Wheeler (right)



There's Music in the Water SXSW Artists and Austin's Gig Crown

EMMA MCBRIDE | managing editor

In the mid-80s, a member of a New York music industry convention suggested that the best way to measure how supportive a city is of its live music scene is by counting the number of different live music venues open on any given Monday night. Austin was highlighted as having over seventy live music venues available to the public on an average Monday night and thus was dubbed the title it is most often associated with today: "The Live Music Capital of the World."

However, now that SXSW is back in Austin, it may be time to re-evaluate this definition. SXSW in particular is known in the music community for supporting smaller artists rather than major headliners like ACL. One of these artists was Stephen McAll of the Constant Followers, a "soaring-ambient-dreampop-experimental-folk" band from Stirling, Scotland. McAll recalls his musical upbringing fondly, remaining appreciative of Scotland's strong musical heritage.

As McAll explains, where Stirling lacks in venues per capita, it more than makes up for it in value to the community and a generally encouraging atmosphere.

"In a city of just 50,000 people, it's hardly surprising that there aren't gigs every night of the week, but there certainly is a culture of love and support for music—between the bands, and between band and

audience," McAll said. "For me, the most amazing places to play aren't just the big cities that have music every night, it's also those little towns and villages where it's a special thing when a band rolls into town."

McAll's point about Stirling and smaller cities in general prompts the question of whether small cities with prominent music scenes invalidate the basis on which Austin was deemed to be the "Live Music Capital of the World." However, another SXSW artist, Melissa Brooks of the rock band Aquadolls, offered a differing perspective to McAll as a resident of a similarly praised big city: Los Angeles.

"I'm lucky that I grew up around Los Angeles and Orange County," Brooks said. "There are so many artists down here making all styles of music, and it's really easy to make a lot of friends in the scene."

Rather than basing her definition of an environment that facilitates a successful live music scene on numbers of venues, Brooks defends Austin's reputation as the "Live Music Capital of the World" by noting the approachability of other live artists in the same location. Fellow Los Angeles resident Christina Wheeler is a composer, vocalist, multi-instrumental electronic musician, multimedia artist, and returning SXSW featured artist. She considers a third and final factor towards determining this same title through her experience touring in Italy.

"One of my favorite places to play was in Bari, Italy," Wheeler said. "The people there were so warm and welcoming, and when I casually met some locals pre-concert, and offered the couple that didn't have tickets guest list, and included their party for the after-show meet-and-greet, they were so happy that when I arrived at the venue in Naples the next day, I found a huge bouquet of thank you flowers in my dressing room. Their generosity and kindness so touched me. I remember it to this day."

The final factor to consider when assigning this title of "Live Music Capital of the World," according to Wheeler, is the hospitality and kindness of the residents of the given city. Keeping these factors in mind, these artists can attest to the fact that this live music capital debate reduces to one thing: music. The general consensus these artists came to was that, given that music is an artform and art is a subjective issue, there's no true way of proving any one place is the official live music capital of the world.

"If there is a 'Live Music Capital of the World,' then I certainly wouldn't be surprised if it was Austin," McAll said. "I'd love to come back when there isn't this influx of international visitors, and really see what the scene is like outside of SXSW. Looking from afar, I see so many fantastic bands emerge from [Austin], there must be something in the water."



ARTISTS ABOARD Indie rock band Girlpool, consisting of musical duo Avery Tucker (left) and Harmony Tividad, perform one of their songs. Right: Caroline Jonsson, lead singer of Swedish indie band ViVii performs on stage with her bandmates. photos by Katie Busby



CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EXPO

Name of the Will

"Video games are very much an art form. It's more than just a game or a hobby. It's an avenue for education and engagement and ultimately for activism."

-Sherry Jeng, Human Rights Foundation Rep

Name of the Will is a story-driven puzzle game developed by Zeitgeist, a group of exiled Hong Kongers, that portrays life in the region under a totalitarian regime. The project was supported by the Human Rights Foundation in hopes of advocating for Hong Kong to a wider audience.

graphic by Kayla Le

ZeZe Fashion

"ZeZe is a company that's an e-commerce platform, like the biggest one in Japan right now in fashion. We use Japanese traditional textiles to make all sorts of clothing, like kimonos."

-Sherry Jeng, Human Rights Foundation Rep

Established in 1998, ZoZo is a major Japanese corporation that offers many services that revolve around technology and fashion.

logo courtesy of ZoZo Technologies

Musical Range

"Musical Range is a virtual reality game where you shoot notes to create your own music. You can bend, distort and basically move everything to change the pitch, the volume and create your own music."

-Rita Castellano, Rockhopper Studios marketing

photo courtesy of Musical Range

Rockhopper Studios is a creative studio specialized in technology, based in Mexico. Their mission is to help clients innovate using mixed and virtual reality.

Urban Venture

"We are Polish game developers and we are working on our second title called Urban Venture based in the beautiful city of Barcelona. It is created to a one-to-one scale. We've developed our own technology called traffic AI which we use in real vehicles. We took that and we implemented it in our video game. What that translates to is that you will be able to experience realistic traffic scenarios in real life."

- Maciej Litwiński, Senior Game Designer

photo courtesy of Simteract

Simteract is a polish software company that specializes in simulation games. The team is currently working on two titles: Urban Venture and Train Life - A Railway simulator.

infographic by Kayla Le, JC Ramirez Delgado, and Lili Xiong

Austin's Cool Sweet Treats

Spotlight on Amy's Ice Cream, A City Original

SYDNEY JONES | staff writer

Amy's Ice Creams was established in 1984 by Amy Simmons with the first location on 3500 Guadalupe St., but since then they have expanded 16 locations all around Texas in Austin, San Antonio, and Houston.

Many people come to Amy's not just for the treats, but for the tricks. Amy's is known for their ice cream scooping and tossing skills that make getting ice cream even more enjoyable, according to employee Harriett Fraser.

"I've had really good memories of how friendly everyone here was and doing the tricks and the crushes were really fun to watch," Fraser said. "So, when I first was starting to apply for a job, this was the first place I considered."

Amy's is also known for their incorporation of toppings into their ice creams. Evie Plante is an avid customer at the ice cream shop.

"The ice cream is good," Plante said, "and the variety of flavors and toppings is great."

Amy's is an important part of Austin and likable for even those who haven't been here their whole life, according to Carli Cuthbertson. Cuthbertson is not a native Austinite and just recently went to Amy's Ice Creams for the first time.

"It was just very, very good ice cream," Cuthbertson said. "I felt like it was a good amount for the price I paid and I liked how they mixed in like other toppings with the ice cream."

Simmons said to the Austin Business Journal that she would not like to rapidly expand the business and she likes what she has now. That mindset has been immersed into the ice cream company's culture.

"It's kind of trying to stay away from the corporate kind of thing," Fraser said. "It's not a business. It's kind of a community sort of thing. So, you know, trying not to just to make money. 'Make people's days' is kind of our slogan. That's what we focus on serving people."



ICE CREAM D'LA CREAM The Amy's Manor Road location basks in the afternoon sun. The first store belonging to the chain opened up on Guadalupe street in 1984, and Amy's now has over 13 locations throughout the Austin area, in addition to ones in Houston and San Antonio. photo by Madeleine Van Slyke



THE INSIDE SCOOP Everything from waffle cones to topping jars to colorful menu boards on full display inside Amy's. According to the website, there were eight standard flavors curated for April, in addition to a small selection of specialty flavors varying by store, such as Dreamsicle. photo by Madeleine Van Slyke

UIL STUDENT FILM

from page 1

Once actual filming was finished, the crew moved on to post-production editing. The film was passed around a bit before it became what it is today, according to Hernandez.

"What you got to understand is when we made this movie, it sucked," Hernandez said. "When we edited it together, it sucked. When me and Ian edited it, it sucked, then we gave everything to Asa, and he made it work."

The plot of the movie itself is, as AVP teacher Vanessa Mokry said, appealing to some and confusing to others. According to Hernandez, it mainly follows two guys.

"There are two dudes: Broken Bottle, and Wooden Stick," Hernandez said. "They are in a car. Broken Bottle gives Wooden Stick a gun. They exit the car. A girl is in the back of the car.

Wooden Stick then goes back into the car and then he dies. A girl then gets out of the car and Broken Bottle, he dies. Girl walks away. That's the end of the movie. Somehow they thought it was a great movie."

Although the film passed the first round of UIL judging, it did not pass the second. According to Selvera, the second judges did not fully understand the movie

"So basically, the whole thing was a joke," Selvera said. "Like a big joke. And then we submitted it to UIL, and people fell for the joke. We thought it was funny, we submitted some dumb stuff. And then the judges were like, 'This is perfect! And then the next round came around and they did not like it.'"

Wordle: the spinoffs

graphic by Fiona Kleeman

Fun Facts

blurb by Sophie Chau

Wordle was invented by 38-year-old software engineer Josh Wardle

Wordle's word bank only encompasses around 2,000 of English's 12,000 five-letter words

At its peak, Wordle garnered around 2 million players

Now there are potentially as many as 40 Wordle spinoff games

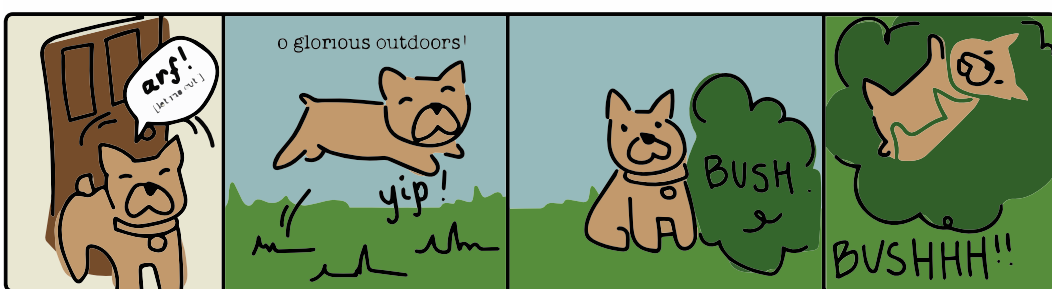
Sources: The Guardian, National World, Deseret News

COMICS

TOP: SOFIA FRANCIS | club contributor

BOTTOM: SUSAN BALLESTEROS | entertainment editor

the darwin chronicles.

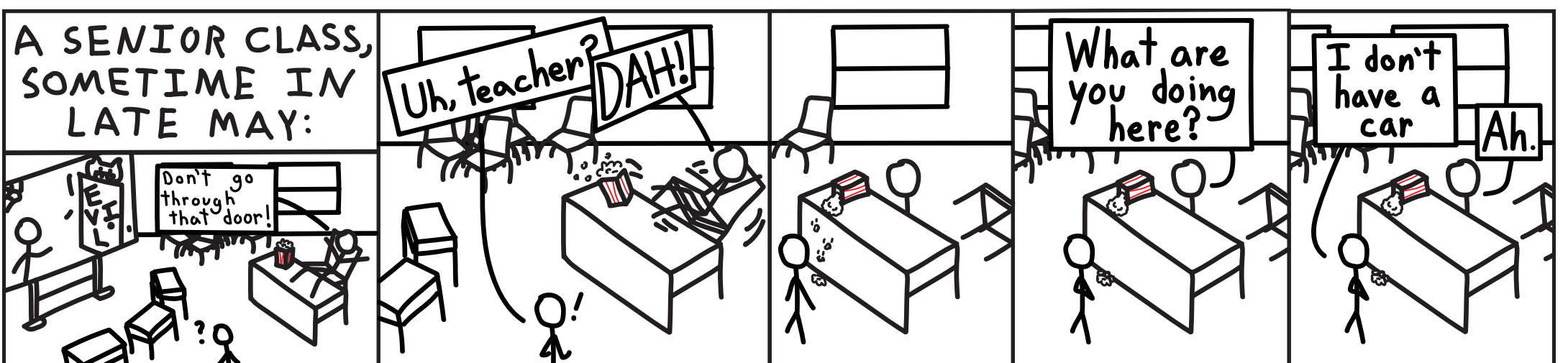


vol 1. the bush.

the darwin chronicles.



vol 2. the intruder.



editorial

RUSSIAN ATHLETES BANNED ACROSS THE WORLD

ANNABEL ANDRE | sports editors
SANWI SARODE

On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin initiated the invasion of Ukraine. Russian troops had been hovering around Ukraine for two months before the invasion, but it still came as a surprise when Russia crossed the line between making a threat and following through with it. Millions of Ukrainian citizens have already fled the country, and thousands of Ukrainians have been killed or injured in the conflict so far.

As a response to the attack, many countries have taken steps to prevent Russia's invasion by hurting their economy without direct military involvement. A variety of companies worldwide put a hiatus on their activities connected with Russia to show their objection to the war. Athletics organizations are no different. In order to show disapproval of Russia's actions, they are using a variety of methods, including banning Russian athletes from participating in several global sport events.

Many organizations have already banned Russia, including the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), who plans the World Cup and is the highest governing body of soccer worldwide. The invasion started just weeks after the Winter Olympics in Beijing, so Russia had also been banned from participating in the 2022 Paralympics. In other events, such as tennis, Russian athletes are banned from team competitions and are only allowed to compete individually if they abandon their flag, stripping Russia of any representation. The reasoning behind these enforcements is to use the symbolic power of sports as leverage against Russia to get them to reconsider the attack. This concept is called "soft power," where governments and organizations attempt to persuade an opposing group of something without using military force, or "hard power," which is much more direct. Soft power often appeals to cultural interests like sports because it is a source of pride and patriotism for citizens. Hopefully, these regulations will send the message to Russia that they are no longer a part of the global community after their actions in Ukraine.

These tactics have been used many times before, often at the Olympics, a highly anticipated and heavily politicized event, as it allows countries to compete directly against each other. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), for example, had banned Russia from competing because of a doping scandal, although this still didn't prevent another scandal from occurring at the most recent Olympics, the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. The scandal centered around a fifteen-year-old Russian figure skater who tested positive for a banned substance weeks before the Olympics. However, because of her age she couldn't be held responsible for this incident. A more successful example of this method was during the 1964 Summer Olympics in Tokyo when the IOC banned South Africa from attending that year's Olympics due to their system of apartheid and the fact that their athletic teams were divided by race. This ban lasted through the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul and relayed a strong message of political protest.

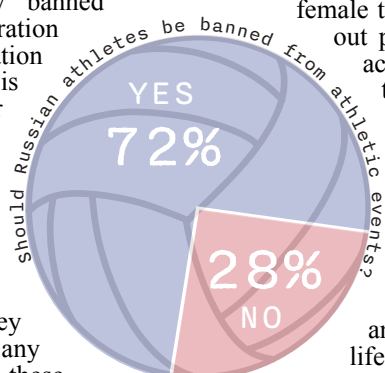
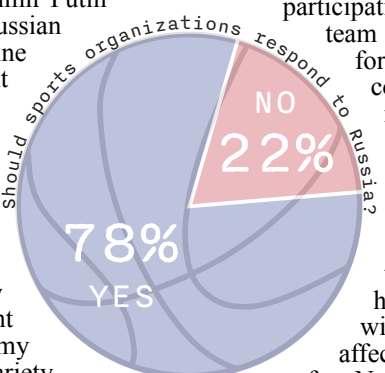
The director of the Center for Sports Communication and Media at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) Michael Butterworth gave some insight on the impact of these organization's actions in the political world.

"Organizations like FIFA and the IOC are not governments, obviously, but they have significant influence," Butterworth said. "The World Cup is the biggest single-event sporting event in the world, and the Olympics are the largest and most televised sporting event of any kind in the world. Not being able to play is embarrassing and disappointing."

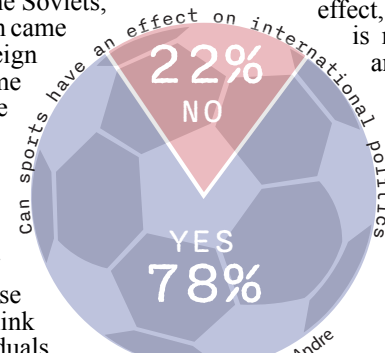
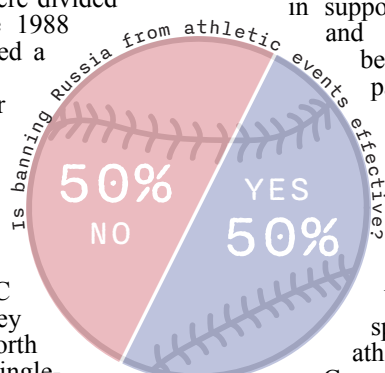
Athletics also have the potential to soothe a country during a conflict or crisis. In 1980, the United States Men's Olympic hockey team defeated the Soviets, dubbed the "Miracle on Ice" game, which came at a moment of several domestic and foreign crises. Another example of this came after the shock of 9/11, where multiple sports gave people a communal site for mourning and healing in the aftermath of the terrorist attack. However, this does not always have a lasting impact.

"We have a tendency to talk too romantically about how much of an influence sports can have in these moments," Butterworth said. "I think sports can be good for us as individuals, communities, and nations, but only to a point."

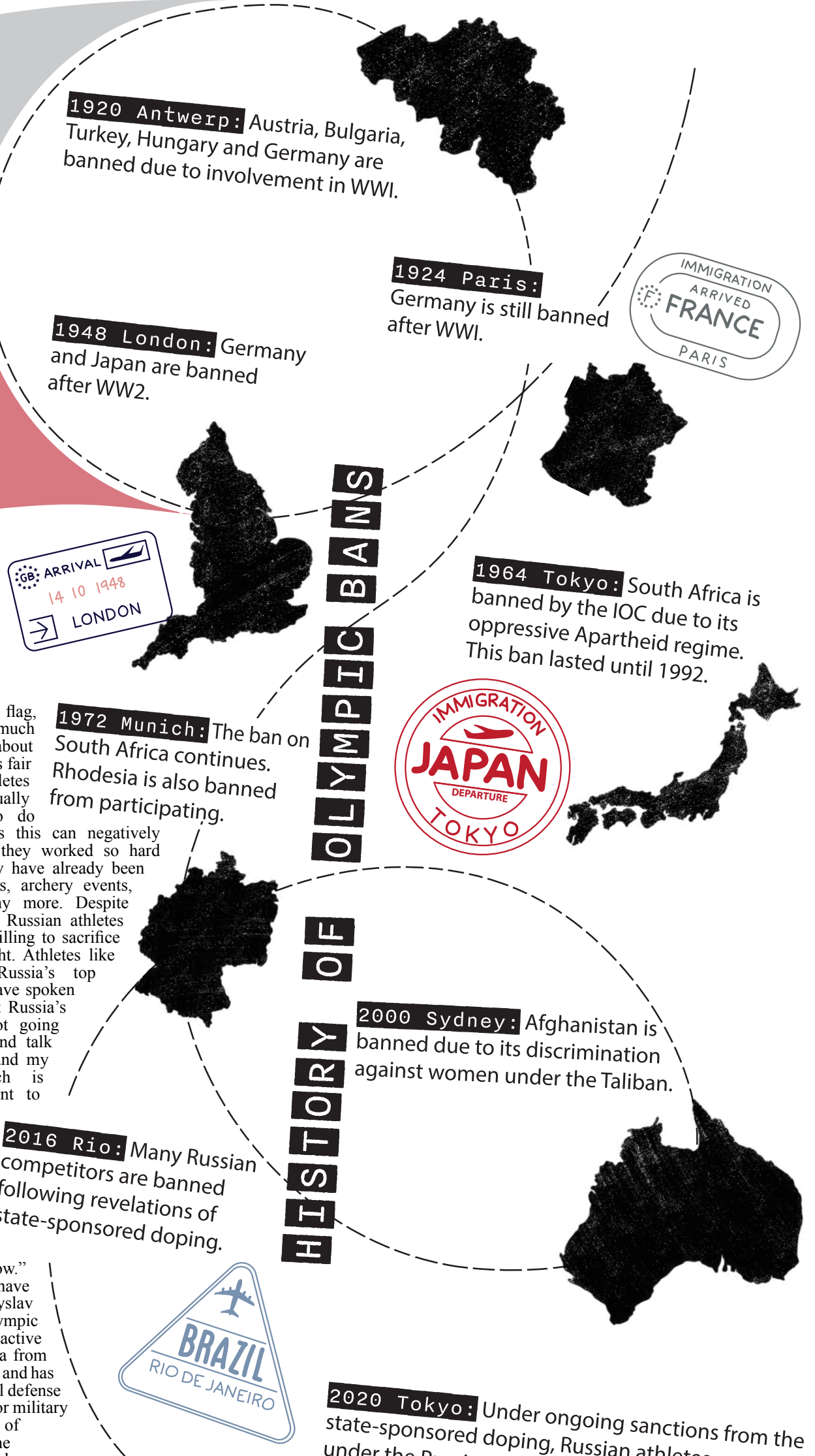
While many people are on board with the idea of banning Russia from participating in team events, or for athletes to compete but not under the Russian flag, there is still much debate about whether this is fair to those athletes who individually had nothing to do with the war, as this can negatively affect the careers they worked so hard for. Nevertheless, they have already been banned from all triathlons, archery events, skiing competitions, and many more. Despite the arguments against banning Russian athletes altogether, many athletes are willing to sacrifice their careers to do what is right. Athletes like Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, Russia's top female tennis player, have spoken out publicly against Russia's actions. "I'm not going to be selfish and talk about sports and my career, which is very important to me, but I think right now it's more about our future and our life, really," Pavlyuchenkova told CNN. "It's more than a sport right now."



LASA SPEAKS UP



Graphics by Annabel Andre



- Olympics. Paralympics. World Cup. FIFA.
- UEFA. Formula One. Archery. Badminton.
- Baseball. Softball. Basketball.
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graphics by Kayla Le

Losing a Major Competitor District Realignment Makes Serious Changes

SYDENY JONES | staff writer

High school athletics in Texas are governed by the University Interscholastic League (UIL). High schools are placed into 1A through 6A divisions based on school size. 5A schools have student bodies ranging from 1060 to 2099, which means LASA is a 5A school.

Within the class sizes, schools are divided into regions, sometimes areas, and then districts. Every two years, UIL realigns the districts. This year, that means Lockhart High School and Anderson will be moving out of LASA's district, and LBJ and Eastside Memorial High School will be moving in.

With Lockhart moving out of LASA's district, it will only be Austin Independent School District (AISD) schools in district competitions. While Lockhart is moving out of the district for transportation purposes, Anderson is moving out due to its large school size. According to LASA's athletic director Bryan Crews, this change will make transportation easier for athletes.

"Lockhart [is] in our district as well, which is a great school, good athletic program, all those things, but it's a bit of a drive, and it's caused some transportation issues," Crews said. "So our district this year will be more local and should help us with transportation. We're losing Anderson because they're moving up from 5A to 6A, and Anderson is almost double the size of LASA and all the other schools that they competed against when they were in 5A."

Due to Anderson's large school size, they had lots of enrollment to choose from when it came to teams. LASA doesn't have the advantage of this, according to girl's soccer coach Choe Cardinale.

"Anderson didn't lose a game," Pendell said. "So that helps us, but LBJ comes in, who historically has been the best team in that district for a long time. And Lockhart was a team [in the basketball playoffs], and they're going out and Eastside is coming in."

This new realignment could change the outcome for certain sports going forward. Though some sports might not be that affected, others have a better chance of winning more in the future.

"It will give us the opportunity to finish higher in district and in a lot of our other sports that have already

been dominant," Crews said. "We'll have more playoff teams next year than we've had [this year]."

Crews believes that although Anderson's move opens up new opportunities for LASA athletics, it's always beneficial to have a school that offers harder competition to keep athletes on their toes. Luckily, the realignment also brought in new schools into the 5A division to make up for this, according to Crews.

"I think the competition will be similar because most of the teams are the same," Crews said. "There are some sports, like swimming and tennis, where our main competition was Anderson. So those sports are losing an opponent that probably pushed them more, was a little tougher. But then some sports like basketball and football are gaining LBJ, which is a traditional power in this area."

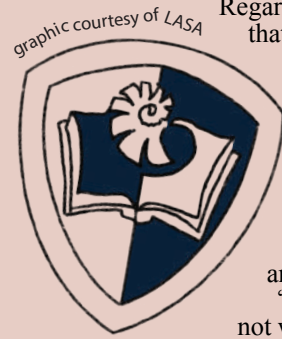
Although the realignment might yield better results for LASA athletics, it also means it'll be harder for them to improve without fresh competition, according to Cardinale. Cardinale said that this means that some sports might struggle if the level of competition suddenly gets higher.

"You always have your top schools and your bottom schools, and there's not a lot of variation because of the way the zoning is in AISD," Cardinale said. "So it's fine to be at the top of your division. But once you get out of your division and go to the playoffs, it's not fun to get run over. I think long term it's actually going to hurt us."

Regardless, Pendell believes that no matter what changes are made to district divisions, the main focus for him is to make sure his team is improving. Pendell believes it is best to focus on the positives this realignment brings and on working hard.

"The impetus to me is not who's in our district, it's that we have to get better," Pendell said. "Being at the infancy of our program, we have a ways to go in terms of coming together and making sure we have all three levels, and just improving. I'm not really worried about who we're going to play against other than what we can control."

Nevertheless, Crews and Cardinale believe that these new divisions will mix up LASA athletics for better or for worse. These new realignments for LASA will go into effect for all sports in the 2022-23 school year.



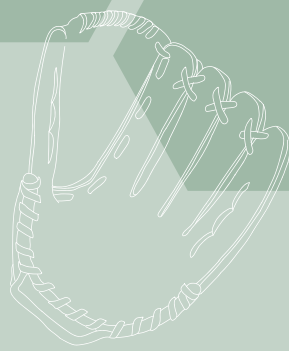
LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES



LASA	VISITOR
5	5
boys soccer	



LASA	VISITOR
5	6
softball	



LASA	VISITOR
10	4
baseball	



track and field	
10	gold medals
14	silver medals
21	bronze medals

Ain't Nothin' Gonna Break My Stride Looking Back on Track and Field's Season

FIONA KLEEMAN | staff writer

LASA track takes place during the spring season after a full season of cross country. It's mainly an individual sport, although the team sometimes competes as a group in UIL competitions. With about 90 members on the team, different coaches are needed to maintain the various events and specialties present. There are a total of six track coaches. German teacher Christopher Parks specializes in coaching the hurdler, long, and triple jump events.

"I told Principal Crescenzi that I'd love to do anything to be involved with any extracurriculars," Parks said. "I was in swim team and on track in high school, and so I just wanted to be a part of that again."

There are many possible motivations for wanting to join track, from needing P.E. credits to bettering one's physical fitness. This is sophomore Cosmo Courtois' first year in track. Courtois joined to try and better his running abilities so he could excel at ultimate, the other sport he participates in.

"I wanted to join LASA track because I had been playing ultimate frisbee, which is my other main sport," Courtois said. "And I felt like I wanted another sport that would first of all, give me my PE credit. And second of all, it would help me practice for ultimate frisbee in the running department."

There are a wide range of different categories of track events at LASA, which includes sprints, hurdles, relays, middle and long distance, jumps, and many more. Different runners have different specialties, so when picking an event, they try to coordinate it with what they excel in, according to junior Kepler Huntress, who has been doing track since middle school.

"I mainly run the 400 and 800, so just quarter mile, half mile," Huntress said. "And then I also run on the four by four relay, which is also called the six minute relay sometimes. I'm a mid distance runner, and the way I've been training, it's moving me up to the mile."

As athletes grow and change, so can their interests and abilities. Courtois runs the 300 hurdles, but has recently been interested in running the steeplechase, an event with hurdles with water added after each jump, as well as having big logs to work as hurdles in some areas.

"I was thinking of doing steeplechase, which they don't really offer here at



WARMING UP LASA track athletes walk across the football field doing stretches. These stretches can help them avoid injury when running or doing field events. photo by Madeleine Van Slyke



JUMPING TOWARDS SUCCESS A track athlete practices jumping hurdles at track and field practice. According to sophomore Cosmo Courtois, runners are encouraged to explore different events and find their specialties. photo by Madeleine Van Slyke



PEEDING TO THE FINISH LINE Two athletes practice one of their events at practice. Track offers a variety of running events such as sprints, relays, and hurdles. photo by Madeleine Van Slyke

LASA," Courtois said. "It's a very specialized event. Coach Parks was recommending that because I do hurdles, that steeplechase would be another good option."

This track season, LASA has frequently earned spots on the podium, especially the girls team. According to Parks, success can depend on how intense or big the track meet is.

"It depends a little on the track meet," Parks said. "When we go to a big track meet like the AISD Invitational, big 6A schools like Bowie tend to dominate. But even at the most difficult of meets we've been to, we've still had a lot of great successes with some of our relays getting medals."

According to Parks, coaches always have to remember how their attitude affects the students. He always tries to keep an optimistic coaching strategy and attitude to help kids feel positive.

"I think we all influence each other so much," Parks said. "If a student comes into my class with a gloomy attitude, it can easily affect me. Positivity has an immediate, instantaneous effect on how that practice is going to go. I've had those weak moments where maybe we have a deadline to submit a bunch of entries. If you approach the group with this carrying visually—showing that you're carrying this stress—it has a bad influence."

When coaching his team, Parks said he gets great pride when seeing them succeed. But for Parks, he is more proud that there is room for everyone in their team. Students can be looking for a chill environment to work out and make friends, or they could be very competitive, but he says everyone will always be part of the group.

"I think just, of course, the trophy that we already won so far this season, and the trophies we got last year, that's wonderful and success and medals are great, and I'm particularly proud of individuals who make those achievements," Parks said. "But really, for me personally, as a human being, I'm more proud of just the fact that we've maintained on both teams the ability to let really intense competitive athletes have a chance to shine and represent our school in a competitive way, but still keep a team culture where everybody feels welcome."

THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN

EDITH HOLMSTEN | student life editor

Every issue, The Liberator sends a reporter into the field to try a new sport and write about their experiences.

When I walked into the dance room to write this article for the Raptor Run Down, I was honestly a little nervous. I have been dancing ballet since I was four, and I have danced in pointe shoes since I was 13. However, the world of high school drill teams was completely foreign to me. I had not taken a jazz or hip hop class since middle school, and I didn't even know what type of dance the drill team would focus on. That is, until a few weeks ago.

In addition to feeling out of my element with the type of dance, I knew only two dancers on the team. I had seen the dance team at pep rallies before, but my knowledge about the team was otherwise very limited.

The moment I stepped into the dance room after school on Thursday, March 3, my apprehension disappeared. Ms. Edwards, the dance director, introduced me to two dance newbies, Lilah Bounds and Violet Mann. As more dancers filed into the room, they chatted with each other about school and passed around brownies and Sour Patch Kids. While the team laughed about inside jokes or asked about each other's weekends, I could tell the team was a close group.

We started practice by gathering as a team in a circle on the floor to discuss the team's goal for practice that day. Edwards explained that the team's spring show, which showcases dances for members' friends and family, was coming up on April 29. To be prepared for the show, Edwards hoped to finish choreographing two dances: one for the newbies on the team and one for the veteran members who had at least one year of experience on the team. After that, Edwards asked who wanted to lead the group warm-up and the rest of practice.

We started with group cardio exercises led by the captains of the team to get warmed up. We did jumping jacks, high knees, and kicks. Then we moved into stretching with lunges and splits. Thankfully, I had a lot of practice with flexibility in ballet, so the splits were not a problem for me, but I was impressed with the team's flexibility and coordination.

Next, we split into groups to finish choreographing dances. The 10 newbies were working on a jazz dance to "New Moon Rising" by Wolf Mother, and the five veteran dancers were working on a contemporary dance to "Earth" by Sleeping at Last. I practiced with the newbies, and we got right to work finalizing choreography for the last 30 seconds of the dance.

Freshman Lilah Bounds started playing music off of the dance room speakers, and the team marked, or practiced, the dance. Once the team got to the empty space in the music, they started collaborating on choreography. I was impressed that the choreography was made entirely by students. When I took dance classes in middle school, all of our choreography was created by teachers or guest choreographers, so it was neat to see the leadership and creativity that students showed, even when the dancers had not even completed a year with the team.

The newbies broke down the choreography into sections and started throwing out ideas. We listened to a section of the music, and anyone was allowed to suggest choreography. The dance team was even open to some of my ideas for the piece. Next, we practiced the dance multiple times with the new choreography to make sure everyone understood the tempo and exact arm positions. Admittedly, I found it hard to remember nearly 50 steps in the dance each with different timing and positions, but it was clear the team had practiced diligently to perfect the piece. The team also tried challenging steps like calypso jumps, which is a turning dance leap, and double pirouettes, a type of turn on one leg. After nearly 30 minutes, we finished less than one minute of the dance, but the attention to detail paid off.

Austin Rowing Club

from page 1

If this comes out as the final decision, the future of the boathouse and ARC will be uncertain, according to Rudder. Rudder said the new goal of the ARC community is to secure a new location for the future of ARC instead of letting it fall through the cracks.

"We flooded a CapMetro meeting back in January, where we all went to the CapMetro meeting, not just ARC employees, but people from the community letting them know that hey, the boathouse is important to us," Rudder said. "We don't want to see it just wiped away and be gone forever. A lot of people utilize this boathouse and not only for rentals. There's tons of community outreach, including the junior program and partnerships with other schools and programs."

According to Reinis, the CapMetro public input form had the largest participation from the broader Austin community to date. Reinis was flooded with the support of the ARC and boathouse community, which includes its partners with organizations such as the Veterans Affairs, a cancer survivor support group, a Boys and Girls Club, and more.

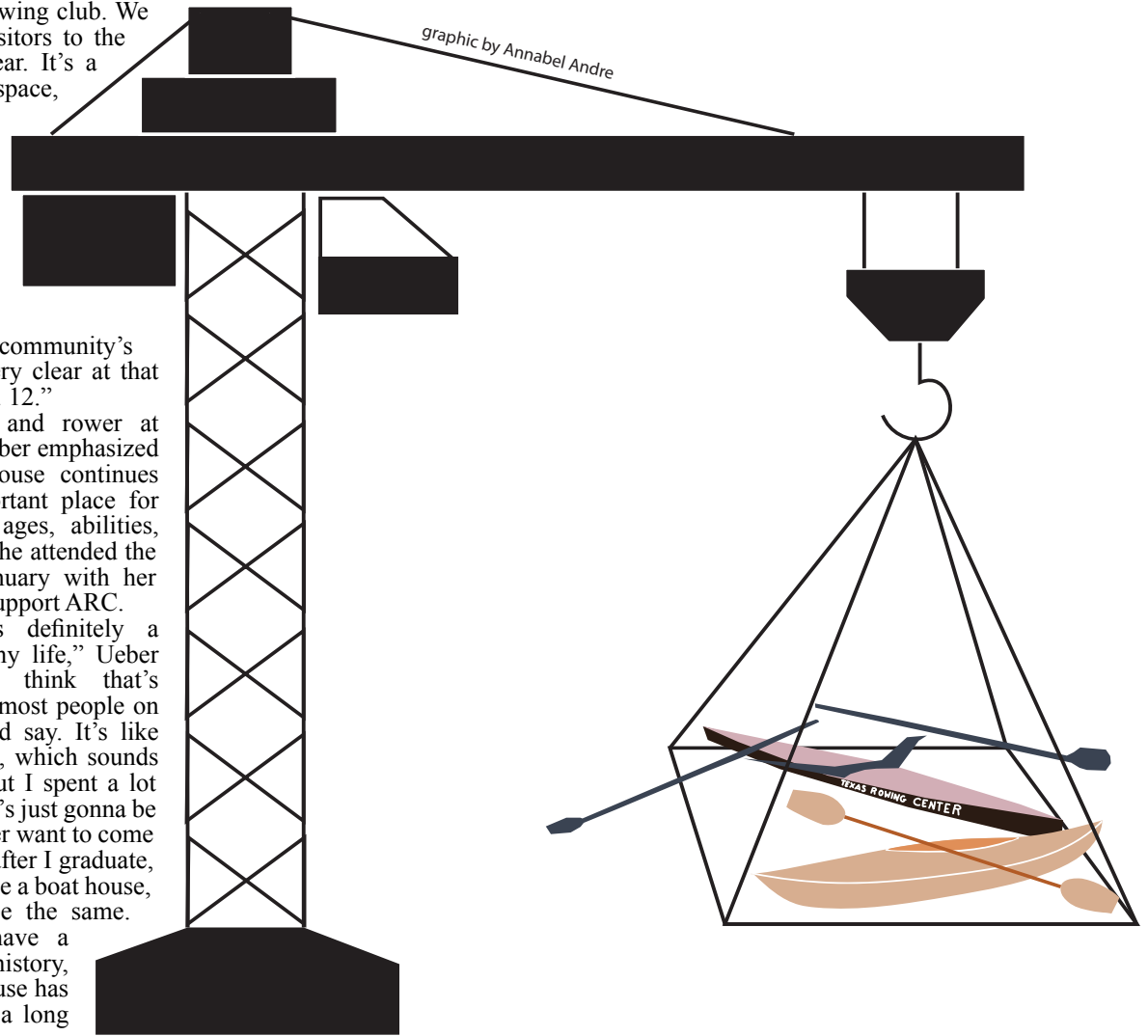
"I'm very humbled by the response of our community," Reinis said. "And when I say community, it's much broader than just the rowing club. We get 100,000 visitors to the boathouse a year. It's a very vibrant space, very much a part of the downtown vibe of things to do and a way to enjoy the outdoors and the beauty of Lady Bird Lake. And our community's support was very clear at that meeting on Jan. 12."

Sophomore and rower at ARC Isabel Ueber emphasized that the boathouse continues to be an important place for people of all ages, abilities, and interests. She attended the meeting in January with her teammates to support ARC. "Rowing is definitely a huge part of my life," Ueber said, "and I think that's probably what most people on my team would say. It's like a second home, which sounds really corny, but I spent a lot of time there. It's just gonna be sad. But if I ever want to come back and visit after I graduate, there will still be a boat house, but it won't be the same. And I also have a pretty long history, like the boathouse has been there for a long

time, and my mom even rode out of it in college. It'll be really sad just like having all that history kind of erased."

As the blue line plans move forward, Reinis said ARC's goal now is to continue to push for an agreement with the city so that ARC won't be wiped out completely. This includes looking for a new location and partnering with the Parks and Recreation Department, which the CapMetro meeting helped ARC bring to the table after realizing the extent to which ARC mattered to its community.

"I would say it is through the efforts of our community, on raising the visibility of the impacts," Reinis said. "Before the community raised the visibility, it was an extinction event. There was no response from CapMetro or Project Connect in the boathouse being destroyed. So I'm glad to say we've moved significantly from that point where now we're at the table with Capital Metro and Parks Department to work through this significant issue."



graphic by Annabel Andre



STRETCHING Student life editor Edith Holmsten gets ready for an intense dance practice with the Velocity dance team by stretching. Holmsten recalls being impressed by the flexibility of the dance team overall. photo by Kayla Le



GET YOUR GROVE ON Velocity dance team members practice their routine in front of mirrors in the dance room. Members of the dance team, even freshmen who have yet to complete a year with the team, assist with choreographing the dances. photo by Kayla Le



LET'S GET PHYSICAL After learning the dance from the Velocity dancers, Holmsten performs with them at the end of practice. The nearly thirty minutes spent on practicing accumulated to around one minute of the full choreography, according to Holmsten. photo by Kayla Le

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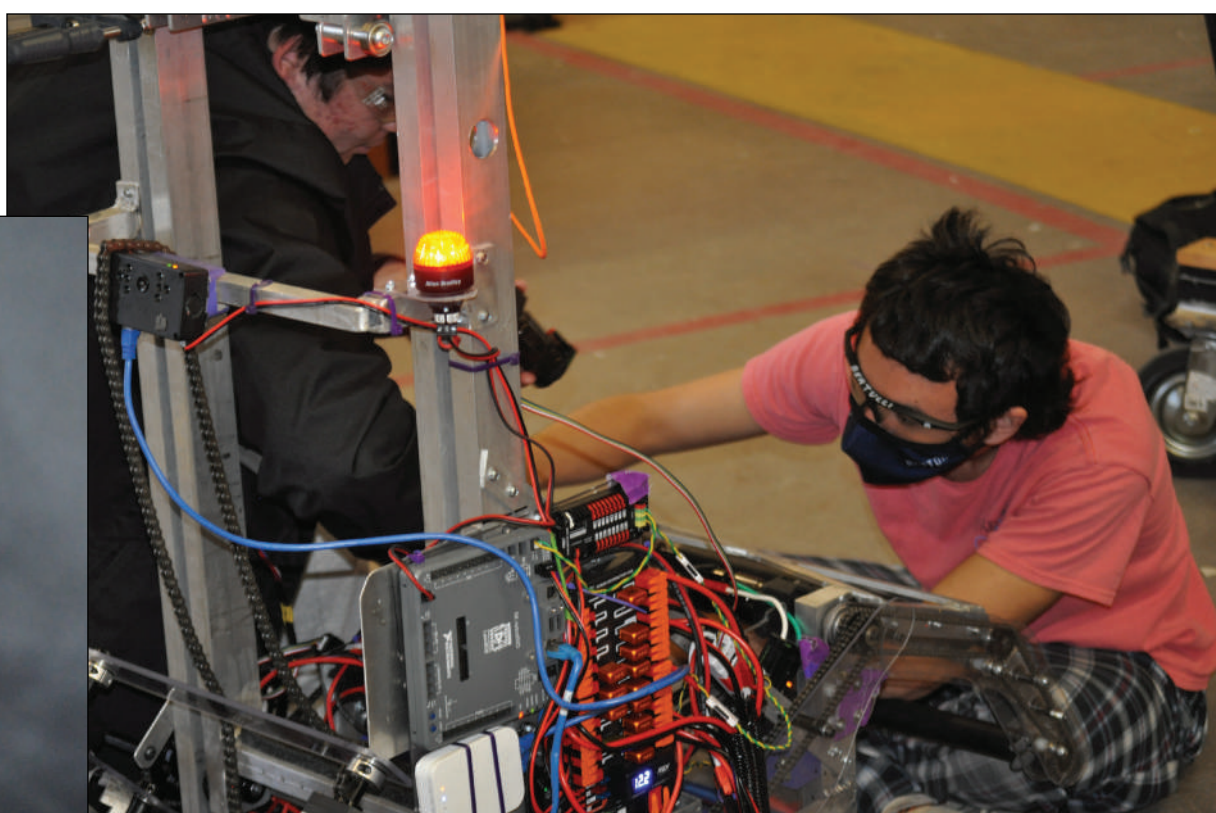
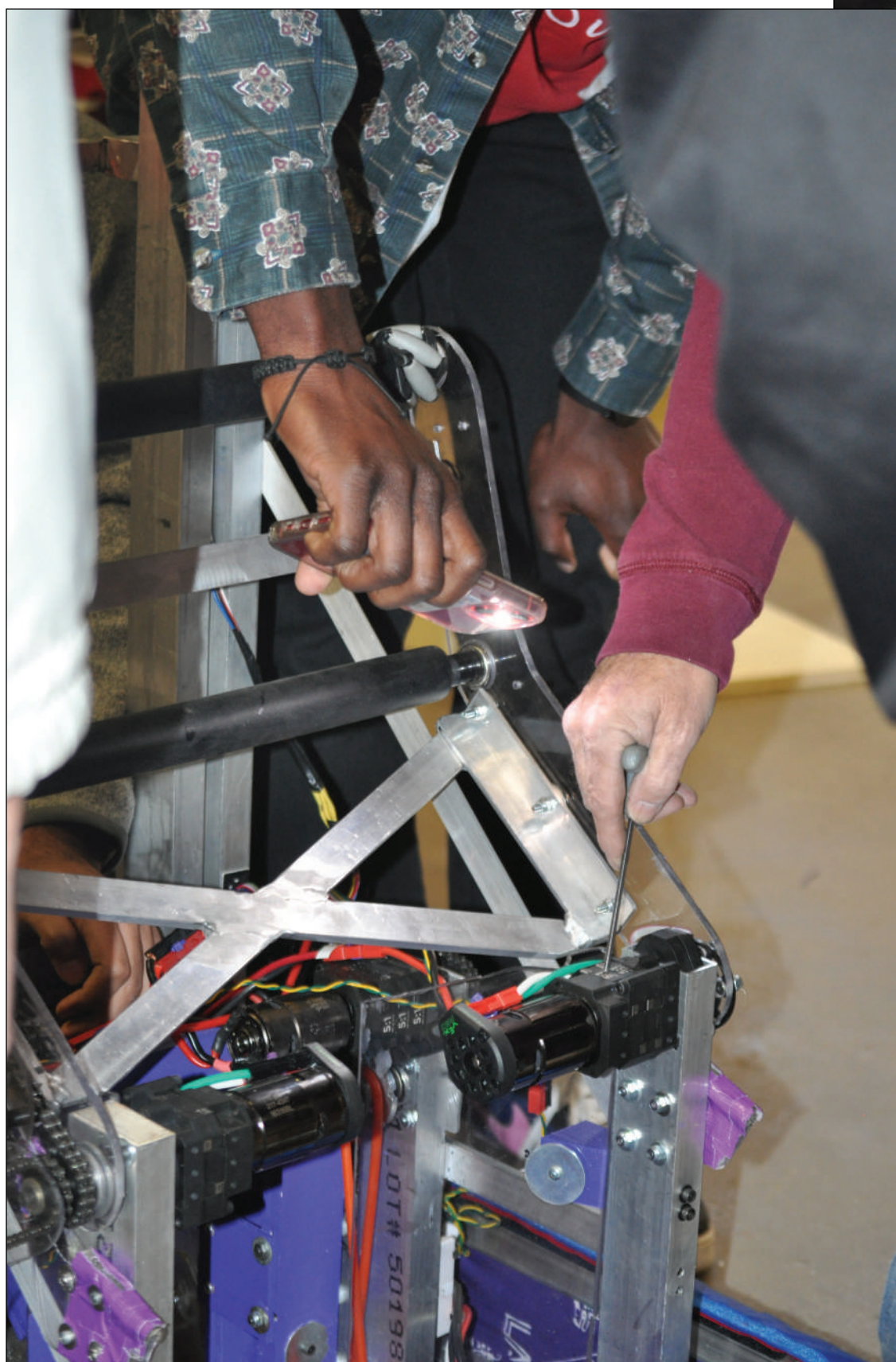
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photos by Madeleine Van Slyke



Purple Haze Amaze at State

JC RAMIREZ DELGADILLO | photo editor
ZIA HARVEY | club contributor

Two months worth of blood, sweat, tears—and soldering—and LASA Robotics was finally in Houston. The Texas state-level robotics competition was finally on, and LASA was right there in the middle. Purple Haze, LASA's robotic team, competed at state the weekend of April 8-10, and ended up placing 16 out of 40 teams. LASA's robotics team is looking for new team members for the 2022-2023 season. People interested in building, coding, electronics, or who have great communication skills are encouraged to join. No experience is necessary. Come talk to Mr. Bertucci in classroom 711-B on A Days.

Nevin Hall and Madeleine Van Slyke contributed to this article.

